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CHANGING THE EU-SOUTH ASIA DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

ABSTRACT

The European Union (EU) has been one of the leading aid donors to South Asia, especially post-9/11 increased its engagement in the region, where security became a major concern. After the 1990s, South Asia experienced major events, especially given the threat posed by non-state actors such as terrorism, religious extremism, and insurgencies. The study aims to explore the changing development cooperation of the EU with South Asia in the context of regional stability and counter-terrorism. The central focus of this study is to provide a background of EU development policy and its changing priorities and attitude towards the South Asia region. What changes in policy are necessary, and how have the 9/11 attack in the United States and non-traditional security threats influenced and changed its overall South Asia strategy? How has Afghanistan become crucial for the EU's engagement in the region? The empirical study is the main framework of the study, and it is based on observation and measured phenomena by analysing the primary and secondary sources. The changing world, from stability to re-engaging in conflicts, pandemics, and the rise of populism, is making the EU's engagement in South Asia so complex. On the other hand, the Indo-Pacific regions and spreading dominance also make the effectiveness of the EU's development diplomacy worrisome.

KEYWORDS: *European Union, South Asia, regional stability, counterterrorism, development diplomacy*

INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING THE EU DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

The term 'underdeveloped' and initiation of development policy popularised by the former US president Harry S. Truman. He essentially marked that *we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profit – has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing* (Truman, 1967, p. 10). After that, the term 'underdeveloped' countries started being used very frequently by policymakers and academicians, which changed the meaning of 'development' in social science. The concept of development is referred to as social development

because it concerns the improved well-being of people. Meanwhile, social science has analysed development issues in undeveloped countries, especially economics. Sen defined poverty as ‘unfreedom’ that occurs in a society with a poor economy, tyranny, systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities, intolerance, etc. However, people need to enjoy freedom only when they have enough nutrition, adequate clothing, shelter, clean water, and sanitation facilities (Sen, 2000, p. 15-17). The New York United Nations (UN) Millennium Summit in September 2000 included these development issues in the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 2000-2015. In 2015, the MDGs terminated so the UN implemented Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted for 2015-2030.

It is recognised today that we have the technological, financial, and material resources to eliminate extreme poverty from our planet by 2030. There is no excuse not to do so. – The European Union (EU).

By explaining, the EU is an intergovernmental or supranational economic and political organisation that was initially known as the European Economic Community (EEC). This was established with aim achieve peace and ensuring through a process of development and economic advancement of the European countries. As a regional organisation, the EEC was not only aimed at the economic integration of its member states, but it was also integrated as a mutual aim at poverty reduction and reconstruction in developing countries. It is also considered one of the first common development policies of the EEC (Ginsberg, 1989; Commission of the European Communities, 2000; Frisch, 2008). The Maastricht Treaty was reshaped with the new name EU, which is presently known to have enhanced the European political and economic integration of 27 countries in Europe by creating a single market. The EU ensured unified foreign, trade, and security policies and common citizenship rights and also integrated via immigration, asylum, and judicial affairs (Gabel, 2022). The EU is one of the actors in creating free trade agreements and a champion in negotiations. The European economic integration defined the EU as an attractive soft power element of development, which itself set a model while unifying and enhancing the economies of the Central and Eastern European countries. Development cooperation has been a significant tool for establishing relations with developing countries. At the same time, the EU’s evolution and

enlargement process took shape as the most uniform regional organisation in the world. Likewise, this was the foundation of the EU's common development diplomacy as part of its external action programme.

The development cooperation policy is official name of the EU's development diplomacy which is generally known as the term 'development policy'. It is a part of the 'shared competencies' of the EU and its Member States. Generally, the term 'development policy' is characteristically related to 'foreign aid, development aid or development assistance'. Likewise, the existing literature describes and explains development policy. However, the aid donor institutions used to have their own definitions and explanations, for example EU document describes it as the 'development cooperation policy' for developing countries. Nevertheless, development assistance was initially called financial and technical cooperation. The contemporary understanding of the EU's development policy is used as the connotation of development assistance, which means the transfer of financial and technical resources to developing countries in order to maintain relations with the EU and its Member States. It also guarantees to maintain trade flows, exports of goods to developing countries, and imports of raw materials. The EU's development policy is an instrument of the 'External Action'^[1] programme, which fosters sustainable development and stability in developing countries. It has 'the ultimate goal' that focuses on 'eradicating extreme poverty' (European Commission, 2014; OHCHR, 2019; European Commission, 2020).

THE SUBJECT OF RESEARCH: FINDING SPACE OF SOUTH ASIA IN THE EU'S POLICY

Before going too deep into the EU's development policy, there is a need to understand its evolution and emergence terms development and its use in social sciences. Thus, this study aims to try to highlight the historical evaluation and emergence of the EU global development policy. Next, this is to characterise the EU's development assistance and its objectives and functionality in development policy. Over the last decade, the EU has emerged as the largest international aid donor, making it an actor in international relations.

This study also traces EU development diplomacy as well as how it has developed as an instrument of soft power. This study would be relevant to the area of development diplomacy as it focuses on government, international institutions, political organisations, and public administration (Bae & Lee, 2020). The analysis of the EU's development policy is part of the study of the external action of the EU, making it an essential topic for the study of international relations. Moreover, the EU is an influential actor in international relations that influences other regional institutions and economic entities.

The purpose of this study is to introduce South Asia as part of a case study to evaluate common development challenges and prospects where EU development policy would mitigate development issues. It is important to first understand 'what kind of challenges face South Asia? South Asia consists of eight countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Hasan (1964) and Zajackowski (2015) defined South Asia as a region from a regional analysis approach. For decades, policymakers and academicians in the West and elsewhere have been schooled to view the Indian subcontinent's countries as part of a cohesive region known as South Asia. The region, which is home to almost one-quarter of the world's population, is made up of eight countries (Jacob, 2024). The EU document 1994 (Towards a New Asia Strategy) recognised South Asia for the first time as a sub-region. South Asia will continue to have the single highest concentration of the world's poorest people; therefore, development cooperation will continue to serve as an instrument to support Asian nations' own poverty-reduction efforts (European Commission, 1994).

The Fact Sheets on the European Union imply that South Asia is the world's largest and most populous sub-continent on the continent of Asia.^[2] The EU defines South Asia as a sub-region, *It is of great geostrategic importance to the EU, which is forging closer ties with countries in South Asia as a strong economic player and major development and aid donor, working to foster institution-building, democracy, good governance, and human rights* (Soutullo, 2020). The region is also important for security reasons as the EU is concerned about the Kashmir conflict and security issues in Afghanistan (European Parliament, 2021). According to the European Commission, *development assistance is one of the pillars of EU external action, alongside foreign, security and trade*

policies. The EU and its member countries provide more than half of all global development aid. That makes us the world's leading donor, investing in peace and security around the world.[3] This is also a reason to provide development assistance to South Asia and yet another reason to analyse its impacts.

The research topic is relevant from the perspective of EU development diplomacy towards South Asia, backed by empirical data and analyses, making it a useful scientific contribution. The study of international relations can be regarded as a sub-branch of the scientific discipline of political science. The only few scientific articles demonstrates the influence of the EU's soft power in South Asia, where development policy is a key instrument for achieving policy outcomes. It is also of scientific and social relevance that the research covers a historical assessment of the EU's development policy in South Asia through EEC (European Economic Community) relations. The object of analysis focuses on the EU's development role in South Asia until 2020 and covers the most recent discussions in political science and international relations. Research implications are explained by explaining the importance of policy and its practice, considering theory while bridging the gap in existing scientific knowledge.

Likewise, the EU extended its development diplomacy to other regions, such as South Asia. The EU and its Member States are one of the top trading partners and aid donors to South Asia. During the literature reviews, the study found that this topic has not been much explored since 2007, mainly when the EU adopted Multi-Indicative Programmes for Asia based on regional strategy papers. Even simple Google searches on 'European Union development policy in South Asia' show or redirect results about EU-ASEAN (Mayr, 2020; Bharti, 2021). Similar trends are also found on famous researchers' digital platforms such as ResearchGate, Academia, and others. Therefore, due to the importance of the topic, there is a need to understand EU-South Asia development cooperation in the context of regional stability and counter-terrorism. Whether using the EU development policy as an instrument of development diplomacy as a measurement of the success or failure of counterterrorism and regional stability in South Asia. Therefore, the main goal of the study is to fulfil the dearth of literature in this research domain. In this regard, South Asia is one of the main beneficiaries of the EU's development policy, and the study explores its application in the region with treaties, agreements, and strategies.

There are various factors behind it, such as challenges, aid, diplomacy, dialogue, cooperation, purpose, and others, through theoretical approaches and methodological stagnation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Following the study, the central investigation is: how have Afghanistan and non-traditional security shaped its overall Asia strategy, and what has changed in policy that needs to be updated post-9/11? Empirical analysis is the analytical tool to analyse the EU-South Asia development cooperation. Empirical research is based on observed and measured occurrences, drawing knowledge from experience rather than theory or belief. This systematic approach provides specific observations, perspectives, and understandings of the experiences from the author's own past series of studies.

The concept of development diplomacy (i.e., diplomacy conducted through development aid) is a component of public diplomacy that achieves its objectives through soft power resources. Several theoretical sources are recalled and considered in order to get an opinion on the role of development diplomacy in public diplomacy. Development diplomacy begins when it is identified as a component of foreign policy within the context of public diplomacy and/or soft power (Zielińska, 2016). Development diplomacy is the top priority of the states and organisations in international relations. This is largely done through multilateral operations at the global and regional levels (DiploFoundation, 2024). Therefore, this study examines from the perspective of development diplomacy whether the EU is successful in bridging the gap between South Asian regional stability and counterterror measures while addressing development challenges. Because the European Commission emerged as the top donor in supplying development diplomacy for communication with developing countries.

For the social construction and realistic understanding of EU-South Asia relations, this study included primary sources from the EU's data centre, such as EUR-Lex: EU law, which provides access to the authentic Official Journal of the European Union, EU law, EU case-law, consolidated texts, summaries of legislation, and others. Likewise, Fact Sheets of the EU on South

Asia are accessed via the website of the European Parliament (e.g., <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/181/south-asia>), the European Commission's website, and 'DSAS: Delegation for Relations with the Countries of South Asia'.^[4] Other than this, the research websites and think tanks that work on EU-South Asia relations have also been accessed, e.g., the European Foundation for South Asian Studies (EFSAS), the European Policy Centre, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), the South Asian Democratic Forum (SADF), and others that can be found in the reference section. The secondary sources extensively used peer-reviewed articles, books, book chapters, and published reports. There is also a limitation in accessing the empirical articles in this study, so the author has used his PhD thesis and published peer-reviewed articles.

DETERMINING THE EU DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND DIPLOMACY

The European Commission defines the EU's development policy as *development assistance is one of the pillars of the EU's external action, alongside foreign, security, and trade policies. The EU and its member countries provide over half of all global development aid. That makes us the world's leading donor, investing in peace and security around the world* (European Commission, 2020). In this regard, development policy is a part of the 'general provisions on the Union's External Action'. It has been mentioned in part V of the Lisbon Treaty under articles 205 and 208 (the Union's development cooperation policy) (European Commission, 2012). Fundamental principles of the EU's development policy are maintained by 'European treaties, agreements, and strategies. The EU has an international objective to implement development policy in developing countries. The current EU's development policy helps to 'develop and commit to achieving' the United Nations (UN) '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (European Commission, 2020). The 17 goals of the SDGs are also reflected in the EU's new European Consensus on Development. The EU development cooperation is associated with its External Action towards South Asia as part of development diplomacy.

The EU is the world's leading donor of development assistance, which is 'one of the pillars of its external action together with foreign, security, and trade policies. Part Five and Title I of the Treaty of Lisbon have arranged provisions for the Union's 'external action', and Article 205 talks about its action on an international scale and pursuant to development activities. This is guided by 'principles, pursue the objectives, and be carried out in accordance with the general provisions'. Title III of the Treaty arranged 'Cooperation with Third Countries (considered poor and underdeveloped or developing states from third-world) and Humanitarian Aid', where Chapter 1 explains roles and responsibilities under 'Development Cooperation'. This is based on the fundamental principles of the EU laid out through external action. According to Article 208, the EU development cooperation policy sets out the primary objective of eradicating poverty on a long-term basis.^[5] Taking into account the implementation as the objective of development cooperation in the policies that are likely to be implemented in developing countries.

According to the Lisbon Treaty, the EU development policy includes development assistance and cooperation activities for third countries that promote democracy, good governance, and human and economic development. Presently, the EU development policy is focused on 'sustainable development and stability with the goal of alleviating poverty' in developing countries. The EU aims to bring peace and security to the world. The EU institutions, together with its member states, are the largest donors of development assistance and cooperation in the world. The EU's development policy is committed 'to fighting hunger and preserving natural resources' (Bharti, 2023). The EU and its member states signed 'a statement on the EU development policy' in 2017 that is called the 'European Consensus on Development' which provides a uniform vision for development diplomacy. The EU's shared competence provides an opportunity for its Member States to participate in and make decisions about EU development policy. It provides a greater opportunity to form the future of international development policy in order to persuade outcomes through the application of development cooperation in developing countries (European Commission, 2016).

The EU's development diplomacy gained significant vision when the Doha Development Round shaped its development policy to use smart power to bridge trade and development. The world's aid agencies and multilateral

institutions have been stimulating development and poverty alleviation in low-income countries. The multilateral Doha Development Round discussion of the WTO introduced negotiations between imperfect trade and aid institutions in the world's lowest-income countries. An accelerated and intense discourse has been brought to *Aid for Trade*, which has been defined as 'different things to different people.' This is the profound desirability of *policy coherence*, which is guided by the struggle against global poverty, trade, and aid. These have all always been closely connected to each other. The neoliberal era has brought the official discussion of 'Aid for Trade' in international relations, where this issue has been widely surrounded in the Doha Round discussion. Trade was never an easy problem for developing countries, especially in the context of low-income countries. After the Doha Round discussion, developing countries agreed to continue the requirement for official development assistance. Later on, external finance and technical cooperation should continue to tackle trading problems and possibilities related to developing countries. Trade and aid issues are highly complex in the context of commercial partnerships. The study has found most of the international assistance in trade discussions, that provides a significant tool for aid donor countries and aid recipient countries (Helleiner, 2008, p. xxv-xxvi; Latek, 2018).

According to Hugo Cameron and Dominique Njinkeu, *Trade has long played an important role in expanding people's horizons and choices. Integrating or mainstreaming trade into development planning can, therefore, have a positive impact on human development (Njinkeu & Cameron, 2008)*. UNDP reports on *Aid and Human Rights: A Practical Guide to Mainstreaming Trade* describe that mainstreaming trade can play a key role in addressing issues related to national development challenges. The report has been appreciated for its analysis of trade opportunities, strategic interventions, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and coordinated action as good practices for creating a smooth path of trade. These are critical to mainstreaming trade into development planning, policies, and activities, which provide a concept of coherence, inclusiveness, and strategy (United Nations, 2011, p. 1-4).

Trade liberalisation is considered an engine of economic growth, but duties and tariffs are considered a trade barrier. Hence, these trade barriers should be reduced and removed from smooth trade those required 'favourable

market access regimes' and low-income countries should deal with severe challenges that are problems for this, such as 'lack of human development, institutional, and production capacity, which are problems for their integration into the global economy. As a low-income country, it is tough to tackle those problems, so it must be supported by development aid that is targeted to transform growth and trade. Such aid must help to improve the competitiveness of developing countries, and its potency must meet standards in high-value export markets as well as its 'institutional capacity to engage in trade negotiation and implement the outcomes, which must take into 'account the potential negative effects stemming from trade liberalisation.' Building on Doha, Monterrey, and Johannesburg, we are given the 'importance of the relationship between development, trade, and integration of developing countries into the world economy' (Njinkeu & Cameron, 2008; United Nations, 2011). These approaches can be results-oriented with a clear vision for trade and development linkage, which can accomplish the goals, and the European Union is looking forward to South Asia.

DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND THE EU-SOUTH ASIA COOPERATION

The EU's development engagement in South Asia has two major reasons that it has updated its Asia Strategy, especially post-9/11. First, terrorism has plagued the region for decades. However, following 9/11, counter-terrorism became a priority on the global agenda. Though the United States has been able to combat terrorism since then, South Asia has not been as fortunate. Most South Asian countries are still dealing with terrorism, and in some cases, the situation has gotten worse. Nonetheless, some positive achievements have been observed on this front in the previous one or two years, putting South Asia in a critical position where additional cooperation can assist the region overcome this problem (Kumar, 2012). Second, despite having tremendous economic growth in the last two decades and trade opportunities for the EU in South Asia. In the region, there are two major interests for the EU: 1) The largest consumer market where more than 1.8 billion people are living; the region has

recorded rapid economic growth in the past decades, which is currently more than seven. 2) higher prospect of engaging in development areas. Despite the high growth rate, the region faces several development challenges, such as poverty, hunger, social exclusion, gender inequality, illiteracy, health, water, sanitation, and hygiene (Bharti, 2023). There are also several other problems, such as environmental and climate change, extremism and terrorism, and other regional challenges, as well as cross-border land disputes. These are major issues for development in South Asia.

Many academics criticise South Asia for huge disparities with the countries where they have the fastest economic growth, but at the same time, society also comprises a hierarchy in the context of resource distribution. Economic development means not only economic growth; it also includes social, cultural, and institutional development. Economic development is directly linked to the standard of living, infrastructure development, health, education, sanitation, poverty alleviation, and others. Mahbub ul Haq was given the concept of human development, which includes these components as an indicator of the human development index. Economic growth must be coined in terms of its impact on our lives and the well-being of the people (Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre, 2015). There is only Sri Lanka below 100 in the rank of HDI among the South Asian nations that are showing a pathetic condition of the region in human development. Other hand, Fundamental demographic and economic indicators of South Asia define the current GDP as 3.597 trillion US dollars, the GNI per capita as 1,834,913 US dollars and the population as 1.836 billion in 2019.^[6] According to Worldmeters, currently, South Asia's population is equivalent to 28.87 per cent of the world's population which covers a total land area of 6,400,127 km². These show the size of South Asia and the increasing consumer market that attracts other countries around the world.

For addressing development challenges, the EU initially was a food aid provider, and the first official strategy paper was adopted in 1994. The EU's adopted strategy document under the title '1994 Towards a New Asia Strategy' was the first official paper that recognised the potential of eight^[7] countries of South Asia with fewer priorities. Before this document, South Asia was still less priorities for the EU because the major focus was on African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (ACP) on Until the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty

in the early 1990s. The EU-South Asia development cooperation has changed to a comprehensive role in the post-Lisbon period (Tripathi, 2011). Initially, South Asia was not at the forefront of the EU's foreign policy and was under the category of Asian and Latin American (ALA) countries with limited development policies. The EU's attention towards South Asia increased for two reasons: 1) openness of the market (adopted liberal policies); and 2) the World Bank report showed an increasing growth rate. The EU adopted two strategy papers: 1) the 1994 Towards New Asia Strategy and 2) the 2001 Revised Asia Strategy, which added a new clause concerning extremism and terrorism (Birochhi, 1999; Tripathi, 2011; Jain, 2015; Bharti, 2020).

After 9/11, the Asia strategy paper was revised in 2001 due to the increasing security issues in South Asia. It was the time when South Asia shaped a full space in the EU's external action to maintain development cooperation after 2007^[8]. The EU has started its development policy instrument as a key tool in promoting democracy, fundamental freedom, human rights, good governance, the rule of law, and equal importance, prioritising economic development.^[9] Yet the more recent strategy paper^[10] of the EU recognised the four Least Developed Countries (LDCs) Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal (as per classification by the United Nations) and other developing countries in South Asia. Therefore, this is why the EU has been a sectoral engagement in the eight countries of South Asia in light of domestic and international factors around security and regional stability that affect its development cooperation with the EU.

The EU is working 'to foster institution-building, democracy, good governance, and human rights, while it also has security concerns, such as the Kashmir conflict and, notably, Afghanistan'. Next, the European Commission explains, *South Asia is currently experiencing violent conflicts, terrorism, or regional tensions. Extreme poverty remains at over 20 per cent in several economies, especially in South Asia, Myanmar (Burma), and Laos.*^[11] It is also one of the least integrated regions. Historical political tensions, security concerns, and cross-border conflicts have slowed connectivity between Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka."^[12] Furthermore, this study also takes 'South Asia' as accepted in the centre of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

But Afghanistan was included in the 14th summit of the SAARC on April 3, 2007, in New Delhi as the eighth member of the SAARC (European Parliament, 2021; Bharti, 2023).

According to the European Parliament, *EU-SAARC cooperation seeks to promote the harmonisation of standards and the facilitation of trade and to raise awareness of the benefits of regional cooperation* (Soutullo, 2020). The EU also encourages effective regional integration and extends support to SAARC. According to the assessment of the Regional Strategy Papers, the EU wants to achieve the following goals in South Asia:

1. Political dialogue: sets political dialogue with its all-key partners to establish better communication. Under the 1994 Strategy, the EU adopted a balanced and comprehensive approach that played an essential role in modernising its relations with partners. The EU wants a strong presence in the region through strengthening and expanding the network of EC delegations as well as SAARC.
2. Peace and security: almost every strategy the paper stressed the priority of contributing to the EU's role in peace and security not only at the regional level but also at the global level. The EU wants to broaden its engagement through bilateral and regional relations.
3. Poverty: the EU sets poverty alleviation as a primary goal in all development cooperation-related strategy papers and documents.
4. Trade and investment: the EU wants to strengthen mutual trade and investment flows in South Asia. There is also the goal of strengthening private-sector cooperation between Europe and South Asia, as well as improving and deepening dialogue on economic and financial policy. It encourages Asian countries to take advantage of the maximum advantage offered by the euro. It also aims for bilateral economic relations based on reduced non-tariff barriers to trade and open space for facilitating investment.
5. Global Partnerships and Alliances: the EU is looking for cooperation with South Asian countries to address challenges for both regions and strengthen its joint efforts regarding environmental and security challenges.

6. Awareness of Europe: Through development cooperation policy, the EU wants a greater impact on its policy to strengthen awareness of Europe in the region. Therefore, the ultimate goal of the EU is to raise the European profile in South Asia.
7. Environment: climate change and the increasing impact of global warming are challenges for the world. The EU wants cooperation and mitigates challenges by helping to build a climate of pro-development policy and adaptation to sustainable development.

ASSESSMENT OF CHANGING DYNAMICS OF EU-SOUTH ASIA DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

1. EU'S CONTRIBUTION TO REGIONAL STABILITY THROUGH DEVELOPMENT ENGAGEMENT

Security remains one of the factors contributing to the increasing ties of the EU with South Asia. But there are other factors as well, which is a major concern for shifting attention in the region. From a consumer market perspective, South Asia is home to two billion people, and there is a rising middle-class and highly skilled working-class population. South Asia increasingly seeks the attention of international actors and key players in international relations (Carlo & Islam, 2021). But there are also criticisms that the EU is getting closer to India and has signed a strategic partnership. This has not been possible with other nations in South Asia, despite having potential. The EU has maintained an individualised approach towards countries in South Asia. There have remained limited relations with Bhutan, Nepal, the Maldives, and especially with Sri Lanka after the action against insurgencies. Due to textile and football materials, the EU maintains specific sectoral relations with Bangladesh and Pakistan (Mayr, 2020).

Despite the shortcomings in EU-South Asia relations, there are key areas where the EU's interests and priorities have changed and are still shifting. Firstly, in recent years, the EU has been increasing interest in the Indo-Pacific

region and the Europe-Asia corridor, which also matters of security. It all began with the shifting of the geopolitical battlefield of strategic contestation in the Indo-Pacific region. The nature of characteristics in the region falls around economics, politics, and security architecture. It has emerged as a new geographic construct and is also engaged in an emerging rivalry between China and the US (Mohan & Vater, 2019). In 2018, the European Council adopted *Connecting Europe and Asia: Building Blocks for an EU Strategy*. This document also, for the third time, revised the EU's strategy for South Asia. The new strategy paper combines the EU's economic objectives with political goals, with a focus on 'fostering efficient and sustainable connectivity'. The EU also acknowledged the 'significant investment gaps' and that it could 'deliver mutually beneficial assistance' in the region (Schottli, 2019).

Aviation is one of the key projects of the EU which runs under the 'EU-South Asia Aviation Project'. South Asia is one of the most traffic in global aviation and the EU provides 'EU regulatory authorities, accident investigation bodies, industry, training and consultancy organisations'. Regarding civil aviation, the project is funded by 'the European Commission to enhance political, economic and environmental partnership between the EU and South Asia. The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) implemented the project between December 2016-2020 (EASA, 2023). From the aviation security and safety perspective, it was a significant project implementation by the EU in the region, showing increasing partnerships that shape an enriching path.

In the early 1990s, South Asian countries adopted neoliberal policies and opened their markets to the world. Governments also started thinking about foreign direct investment (FDI) and its regulation. These were also reasons why the EU's interest increased, and investment was another important factor in shifting geoeconomic interests in the region. The EU-South Asia development cooperation is not limited to the aid and trade framework, but it has also changed in the past decade. In the past decade, the Maldives graduated from LDC status in 2011, and India and Sri Lanka also graduated from International Development Association (IDA) eligibility status, respectively, in 2014 and 2017. Following the progress of Bangladesh and Nepal, both are set to graduate from LDC by 2026 (Bharti, 2023). The EU realised that it was time to expand the outreach of the European Investment Bank (EIB) in

South Asia and opened its first permanent South Asia office in Shanti Niketan, New Delhi, India, in 2017. Then Andrew McDowell, former Vice President of the EIB, stated that *the opening of the EIB New Delhi office will unlock new opportunities for the European Investment Bank to support transformational investment and broader activities throughout South Asia. Visits to see the Lucknow Metro and the transformational upgrade of wastewater infrastructure in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo in recent days have shown how the EIB-backed new investment is helping to improve the lives of millions of people across the sub-continent* (EIB, 2017).

Table 1. EIB Loans to South Asia 2013-2018

S.N.	Countries	Investment (Loan) in million (Euro)
1.	Bangladesh	503
2.	India	2,333
3.	Pakistan	153
4.	Maldives	95
5.	Nepal	191
6.	Sri Lanka	300
Total	South Asia	3575

Source: European Investment Bank, 2019.

The EIB investment in South Asia's main two objectives are: 1) mitigation of climate change by promoting a modal shift from road to rail while reducing greenhouse gas emissions; and 2) development of social and economic infrastructure by contributing to urban development (EIB, 2020). In South Asia, the EIB investment is 0.mainly in two areas: 1) Metro Rail and national rail infrastructure development; and 2) offshore wind projects and solar power projects for solid backing for renewable energy. These projects primarily strive to achieve the goal of the SDGs, helping to cut carbon emissions. A country like Bhutan has a zero-tolerance policy on this and claims zero CO₂ neutrality. Now, EIB investment is welcomed by the Himalayan states of Bhutan and Nepal. Through EIB investments in South Asia, the EU emerged as a leading actor in the area of climate diplomacy with a broadly positive perception due to investment in areas like renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure, and climate-smart agriculture.

Supporting democracy in the world has been a priority for the EU, where observing elections is a key instrument. Democracy is considered the only system of governance that protects human rights and releases the people to achieve development and longer-term stability. The European Parliament plays a particular role in its commitment to support democracy worldwide. The council has adopted a third of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy in 2020 for further support (Lerch, 2023). In the 1990s, there was a difficult path for strengthening democracy in South Asian states, which were facing the main challenges of fair and transparent election conduct, and the restoration of democracy in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan was not easy. The other three states also moved in a positive direction. The European Parliament contributed to the sustainability of democratic institutions, especially the election commission, in a meaningful way. That is one of the reasons that the EU adopted a 'bottom-up' approach while engaging civil society and NGOs to promote democracy and human rights (Khatri, 2009). The EU works with NGOs and civil society in South Asia to achieve multipurpose objectives: 1) awareness about democratic and human rights among people, especially awareness about federal democracy and electoral participation in Nepal and Bhutan; 2) less than 8 per cent participation of women in the political process and organised job sectors; 3) increasing girl education and stopping human trafficking; and 4) awareness about climate change and action (Bharti, 2023).

The EU's MIP 2014–2020 also expired in 2020, and the world was severely affected by COVID-19. There was a greater chance of vulnerability in South Asia due to it being the largest populated region in the world. The EU's COVID alliance, named Team Europe, also supported assistance for addressing the crisis of the global pandemic and minimising its impact in the region, with targeted support to especially the most vulnerable population groups (Soutullo, Gazzina, Masur, & Stanculescu, 2022). Back to South Asian regionalism, there was no active role observed by the SAARC, but on the other hand, the EU has been successful in addressing the social agenda in Europe. The EU's support and model could have a lot to gain for South Asia by addressing public health and socio-economic challenges in the time of COVID-19 (Ahmed & Hussain, 2022).

2. ADDRESSING ISSUES OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM AND MEASUREMENT OF COUNTERTERRORISM

In 2001, the EU revised its strategy towards South Asia due to the rise of non-traditional security threats, especially terrorism post-9/11. Even European cities also witnessed such kinds of attacks. The attack in the United States (US) also heightened the suspicion over South Asian countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan (Bharti, 2021, p. 11). The 9/11 (September 11, 2001) attack on the US and the collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre changed the global security environment. Because the route of this attack was connected to South Asia, before this event, no global power recognised terror and religious extremism as serious threats to states. India has had such serial attacks since 1992 and always blames Pakistan for posing such activities. The events of 9/11 had a multifaceted impact on all of the region's states, with the exception of Bhutan and the Maldives, affecting ongoing insurgencies, struggles for autonomy and self-determination, their economies, foreign investment, internal power struggles, and, most importantly, inter-state relations (Wasi, 2003).

In Europe, 9/11 and Madrid 3/11 sparked a rush of choices, initiatives, and processes aimed at improving Europe's capacities in combating terrorism in all forms. Following 9/11, existing proposals like the European Arrest Warrant were suddenly thrust into the spotlight. Following that, EU member states promised complete solidarity if one of them was the target of a terrorist attack. Increased counterterrorism decisions took the EU into unknown territory, particularly in the sphere of Home and Justice Affairs, boosting existing cooperation and deepening political integration to levels that no one could have predicted a few years ago. The strategy is built around four pillars: prevent, protect, pursue, and respond. 'Prevent' stands for halting the radicalisation process by addressing the underlying reasons that can lead to radicalisation and recruiting. 'Protect' attempts to shield citizens and infrastructure against future threats. Pursue refers to the efforts to track down and investigate terrorists and their networks across our boundaries. 'Respond' implements the 2004 Solidarity Clause by improving consequence management processes and capacities to be employed in the event of an assault on one of the member states (European Union, 2004; Coolsaet, 2005; Delivet, 2016). European prosperity linked to South Asian security.

These are key reasons that the EU started looking at countries in South Asia with three main approaches that adopted 1) democracy promotion, 2) educational support and cooperation and 3) aid for trade mechanisms. Apart from these, the growing economy was also one of the main contributing factors to the EU's engagement in the region significantly increased in the past two decades. The EU's security concern was also reflected in a 2001 strategy paper as mentioned "illustrate the importance of political and security issues in the sub-continent (Commission of the European Communities, 2001) Michel Caillouët, former Ambassador-Head of Delegation, Delegation of the European Commission mentioned security concern India in 2003, *Indeed South Asia remains one of the most volatile regions of the world. Even as the fallout of the fight against terror waged post 9/11 by the international community remains unclear, the persistence of terrorist activities in the region endangers the regional security environment*^[13].

For combating religious extremism and terrorism in South Asia the EU adopted several development programmes. The European Union and the Afghan government are dedicated to ensuring Afghanistan's security, stability, freedom, prosperity, and democracy. Afghanistan's Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013 was written in the context of a changing political and economic landscape. The Afghanistan Compact, established in January 2006, establishes the political framework for Afghanistan's collaboration with the international community from 2007 to 2013. The EU's assistance mirrors the priorities outlined in Afghanistan's National Development Strategy, approved at the Paris Conference in June 2008, which include support for justice and law enforcement, combating drug manufacturing, and assisting the health sector (Bhargava & Mukherjee Reed, 2009). Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) approved a bilateral budget of €19.6 billion from 2014 to 2020. Over 7% of the DCI budget was earmarked for EU development cooperation in Afghanistan, totalling €1.4 billion (±€200 million each year). The most pressing concern for the EU, however, is to handle the possibility of this financial aid being misused and diverted for terrorist financing and corruption by third-party stakeholders like as the expanding Taliban-affiliated NGOs aiming to raise foreign funds. The assurance made by the Afghan government that the

country would not provide a platform from which terrorist acts could be exported to other nations (Puspitasari, 2023).

Police cooperation is one of the counterterror strategies of the EU. Europol, the European Police Office, has implemented mechanisms to transmit information on illegal activity to Member States' enforcement authorities. The combat against terrorism is the European agency's permanent priority (Delivet, 2016). After nine years of progress, the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan has concluded successfully. After nearly a decade of successfully supporting civilian police in Afghanistan, the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan) will conclude on December 31, 2016. EUPOL Afghanistan, in close collaboration with the Afghan government, has made significant progress in several key areas, including professionalising the Afghan National Police, introducing the community policing concept to Afghanistan, increasing the capacity of the Afghan Ministry of Interior, and aligning Afghan legislation with relevant human rights standards. EUPOL Afghanistan is a civilian mission that has been functioning since 2007 under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Its assistance has been mostly provided by police specialists from the EU and other contributing nations who advise the Afghan Ministries of Interior Affairs and Justice. To prepare for the end of the EUPOL mandate, a detailed phasing-out plan has been established, which includes ensuring a smooth transition of activities to EUPOL's local and international partners. The European Union has always been committed to Afghanistan and its people, as well as to promoting peace and stability in the nation. The EU remains committed to assisting Afghanistan in the field of civilian police and contributing to the continued development of sustainable and effective civilian policing structures under Afghan control (European External Action Service, 2016).

Recently, EU-Afghanistan cooperation got a major setback after the Taliban takeover in August 2021. The EU allocated and mobilised almost a billion euros each for Afghanistan before the Taliban takeover. If the EU's interest has increased in South Asia, Afghanistan was one of the reasons due to its connection with the 9/11 attack in the US, and Al-Qaeda was responsible for this attack, whose base was in the country. The EU's security and prosperity are linked to South Asia due to partnership and trade. After that, the EU's

engagement significantly increased in the region. The EU and its institutions were specially engaged in Afghanistan with several developmental projects such as social development, health, education, human rights, and democracy promotion, including an election observation mission (Sabawoon, 2019; Bharti, 2022; Puspitasari, 2023). Here is an example of the EU's development cooperation impact in Afghanistan: *Since 2002, the EU has provided more than 4 billion euros in development aid to Afghanistan, which makes Afghanistan the largest beneficiary of EU development assistance in the world* (European Commission, 2023). After the Taliban takeover, there is still no recognition of the new Taliban government by the EU or its member states. Despite this fact, the EU and its member states continue to provide support to Afghanistan with the basic needs of the Afghan people. For this, the EU allocated 1 billion euros and a new package of 142.8 million euros; it also mobilised a total of 676 million euros (European Commission, 2023a).

CONCLUSION

Concluding remarks observed that the EU's development cooperation significantly grew post-9/11 in two areas: 1) support to South Asian regionalism via development assistance with the aim of regional stability and 2) countertourism. Before 2001, there was less attention due to the EU's priority in ACP states, and South Asia also had not economically emerged. In the past two decades, the EU has conducted a comprehensive development policy intervention that has also helped to improve relations with South Asian nations. Meanwhile, Nepal achieved democracy, Bhutan's monarch adopted a democratic administration, and Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka did not again acquire power by armed forces. More importantly, the EU-India signed a strategic partnership and is also negotiating an FTA and implementing partner for development cooperation in Asia and Africa since India IDA graduated in 2014. But over the past decade, the global order has significantly changed and keeps shifting the context of geopolitical and security, both conventional and non-conventional. There are three major events, specifically EU-South Asia development cooperation: 1) COVID-19,

which appeared as a slayer for the lockdown of the local economy, forced poor people into severe marginalisation and deprivation; 2) the August 2021 Taliban takeover that changed the EU-Afghanistan traditional donor-recipient relations; and 3) the February 2022 Russia invasion of Ukraine that pushed a hard time not only for the European economy but also the world.

Again, after two decades, the EU-South Asia development cooperation and overall relations are being challenged by the above events, as well as several others. For example, 1) once again, religious extremism and terrorism are rising in the region; e.g., Pakistan has seen several blasts in the country, so they are forcing Afghan refugees to go to Afghanistan. For these attacks, Pakistan blames Taliban-controlled governments. This issue is becoming more serious in terms of mass migration, which could potentially flow towards Europe. 2) The EU has always been focused on democratic promotion and conducting free and fair elections in South Asia. But there is a rise of conservative-led governments that pose populism to spoil religious diversity in the region. 3) Changing global geopolitics and conflicts also affect the geoeconomic situation of the region. For example, there was also a huge economic crisis faced by Sri Lanka, and people revolted against its government. The former Sri Lankan president needed to flee the country. 4) On the one hand, India's GDP and economic growth are increasing; on the other hand, India is least interested in the regional integration of South Asia. The EU's development policy has seen regional integration as a key strategy for the region, which could enable SAFTA. Therefore, the EU could negotiate an FTA with all South Asian nations. 5) Lastly, after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, the EU was concerned about climate change and environmental challenges. In the last 4-5 years, pollution and natural disasters have severely increased in South Asia.

The EU adopted the new budgets 'Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027' and 'Asia and the Pacific: Regional Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2021-2027'. Under the MIP 2021-2027, South Asia is placed under 'Priority Areas with the focus on the three priority areas: 1) regional integration and cooperation (addressed by sub-region as well as by a pan-Asia component), 2) pursuing EU interests with key partners, and 3) migration-forced displacement and mobility. However, there is an increase

in China's loans and aid for infrastructure development spread significantly under the ambitious project called the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and China also focuses on people-to-people interaction for more branding. On the other hand, the EU invests in democracy promotion, climate aid, and human rights, which are more human-centric approaches. China's soft power is more visible because its infrastructure attracts people's attention in South Asia. Some of the EU's infrastructure projects are only visible in a few cities in India. There is remain challenges to the EU's development diplomacy to address contemporary issues. Therefore, this study recommends for EU-South Asia development cooperation: 1) The EU should prioritise the most vulnerable communities in India in areas such as education, healthcare, and social security; 2) the EU should adopt a federal structure for the very small South Asian nations like Bhutan and Nepal, which are not bringing significant change in terms of corruption that keeps growing. Since the adoption of democracy, none of the Nepali parties have completed five years of government terms. South Asia is a very diverse region, and administrative choice must prevail among local people where the EU can assist via their NGOs as well as civil society engagement; 3) the EU needs to upgrade its separate regional strategy for South Asia and establish a new dialogue forum for regional integration. In the EU-India summit, the EU and its member states need to force India to play a more crucial role in effective regionalism.

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