After a long, seven-year break, the Polish Prime Minister finally paid a visit in India in September 2010. Poland, which is the biggest of the recent East European entrants to the European Union (EU), has big ambitions to play a leading role in the region and to influence the decision making process in the EU. The recent attempts to cast the net wide and encourage tie ups with strategic partners on a global level, has influenced the Polish decision to boost up her ties with India.

Within Indian decision making circles, Poland is regarded as India’s biggest partner in Central-Eastern Europe. The Indian Minister of Trade, Kamal Nath, referred to Poland as the "Gateway to the European Union," during his visit to Warsaw in May 2006. According to recent economic indicators like, for instance, GDP per capita, the most developed country in this region is Czech Republic, followed by Slovakia, Hungary and Poland. Also, states from this part of Europe are considered high-income economies. While Poland's GDP per capita is the lowest one of all four countries from this region, it is the biggest economy of them all and the sixth one in the EU in term of size. It should be noted from the outset that in 2009, the year of global economic crisis, Poland was the only state from the EU to register a 1.8 per cent growth.

It is interesting to note that in the recent years, the Polish media have been making a lot of comparisons between the Polish and the Indian economies. Today, if we compare the respective GDPs of both the countries, the Polish economy is one third the size of the economy of India (430,197 millions USD to 1,235,975 millions USD) and Indian economy
posses the world's largest upper middle class representing 10 per cent of 1.1 billion population. There is a general view that the value of the Polish-Indian trade is growing from year to year. From 2000 to 2008, for instance, the turnover between the two countries has increased from 190 million to nearly 1.3 billion USD. At this point, Polish side perceives great potential to investment in such areas like mining, supply of machinery for mining, power industry, heavy engineering, waste management, defense industry, pharmaceutical industry, food processing and tourism. In similar fashion, Indian side could look out for new opportunities in investing in areas like the textiles, agriculture, food processing, information technology, infrastructure and tourism.

Furthermore Poland and India have taken steps to deepen cultural cooperation. During the visit of the Polish Prime Minister, an agreement was signed which involves cooperation in the dissemination of information on the cultural heritage of both countries, exchange of experience and realization of joint projects in the field of conservation and preservation of monuments, collaboration between National Archives, Libraries and Museums. As part of the agreement both countries will also cooperate to prevent the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural heritage.

Most of Polish media have positively commented on the visit, stressing on common opportunities and. In contrast to this view, the conservative daily newspaper "Nasz Dziennik" ("Our Newspaper"), which supports the government's opposition party “Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc” (“Law and Justice”) reporting on visit of Polish PM and his discussions with the leading Indian politicians, commented that the Polish PM should have discussed the alleged atrocities being committed on the Indian Christian community by the hindu and Islamic extremist groups. The newspaper recalled that the minority Christian community has been subjected to such atrocities for quite long.

In order to improve bilateral relations, what is urgently required is to clear certain organizational hurdles. First, as the Polish Prime Minister promised, the visa regime for citizens of India should be simplified. Indian businessmen sometimes have to wait for nearly fifteen days to get visas issued by the Polish Embassy. For other types of visas, Indian citizens have to wait even up to two months. Though admittedly, the complicated procedures of the Schengen System is a major cause for the slow down, the Polish authorities perhaps should learn from the process being followed by the German consular authorities, who provide more quicker service in spite of being under the Schengen regime. Second, another difficulty is the
lack of direct flight connections between Poland and India. Such barriers often discourage the India business community from visiting Poland.

Poland is also the fourth supplier of arms to India after Russia, Britain and Israel and it has the potential to increase this supply. Moreover Poland may prove to be a valuable partner for one more reason. Polish authorities also support the Indian efforts for a seat on the UN Security Council.

There is no doubt that apart from view Poland as a stable and growing economy and investment opportunity, India should also perceive her as one of major European strategic partners in the global sphere. In this sense, growing Indo-Polish cooperation is not just about improving bilateral ties. As a member of the EU, Poland’s importance has increased as a strategic partner. In second part of 2011, Poland will take over the Presidency in the Council of the European Union. In addition, this would coincide with the planned EU – India summit in the same year. The Polish PM stated during his visit that Poland and India will closely cooperate in organizing the summit, which will be held probably in December 2011. To sum up, the Polish PM’s visit could usher in a new phase of relationship between an evolving Europe and India.

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