The Counterweight

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With the G20 summit in New Delhi coming to an end, India is preparing its position in a new multipolar world order. Europe seeks to strengthen relations with India in an attempt to find an Asian counterweight to China and Russia. In order to do so, Europe's silence on democratic backsliding and grave human rights violations in India is aggressively loud. While Indian Prime Minister Modi takes note of the European attempts to persuade him, it remains doubtful that he will associate himself even closer with the West.

Historically and geographically, India is faced with a particularly challenging geopolitical position. India has responded to this challenge by resuming different roles in different contexts and institutions. As a former colony exploited by the British Empire, India is a natural champion of the

"Global South" and attempts to reform global institutions like Work Bank in the Global South's favour. India uses formats like the ongoing G20 presidency to present itself as a speaker for the Global South's interest.

At the same time, India is maintaining territorial disputes with its neighbouring countries China and Pakistan. While the conflict over the Kashmir region with Pakistan constitutes a permanent latent risk of war, the Sino-Indian border dispute might be equally problematic for the country. The military conflict in 2020 at the Sino-Indian border, which led to dozens of casualties, initiated an Indian rethinking of the country's geopolitical role. India now more than ever attempts to lower economic and political dependencies on China.

Despite the identity of India as a country of the Global South, India is therefore pursuing important partnerships with the West. For example, the participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with the United States, Australia and Japan is a clear sign that India's interests partly align with those of Western countries. India's actions are only seemingly contradictory, in reality, they reflect the complex interests of the country which are closer to different power blocs dependent on the related issue.

Europe is taking note of this development with great interest. It seeks to find an ally and counterweight in the region. Russia's war against Ukraine has worsened Europe's relationship with Russia to a degree not seen since the Cold War. At the same time, China is emerging as the new superpower of the 21st century, competing with the West economically and politically. For this reason, Europe is extremely persistent in its attempts to strengthen relationships with India.

This Western flirt is overshadowed by serious democratic backsliding and grave human rights violations perpetrated by India's ruling BJP. As a Hindu Nationalist party, the BJP tolerates and partially promotes violence against the significant Muslim minority in India. Steadily aggravating over the years, the situation now constitutes a risk of genocide against the Muslim minority. Human rights activists pushing back against this development regularly face persecution and jail.

Europe remains largely silent on these developments, as it knows that a critical stance against the ruling BJP risks the newly emerging relationships with India. The issue of religious and ethnic identity is the most important and defining cleavage of Indian politics. Critical comments on this bear the risk of poisoning future partnerships with Europe.

Despite this, it remains doubtful that India will associate itself even closer with Western countries. The Indian "neutrality" on the Russian war against Ukraine, frustrating Western diplomats to this day, is a clear symptom of this. India's conflicting interests, in some cases aligning with countries of the Global South and in some cases with Europe, make India an ambiguous partner. The price of remaining silent about the Indian human rights abuses, paid by the West for the attempted partnership, appears perturbingly high in this context.