



POLICY PAPER

No. 15 (63), June 2013 © PISM

Editors: Marcin Zaborowski (Editor-in-Chief) ● Wojciech Lorenz (Managing Editor)
Jarosław Ćwiek-Karpowicz ● Artur Gradziuk ● Piotr Kościński
Roderick Parkes ● Marcin Terlikowski ● Beata Wojna

What Does India Think About Poland?

Patryk Kugiel

Mutual ignorance is a major constraint on stronger bilateral cooperation between Poland and India. After two decades of economic and political transformation, the image of modern Poland has still not reached India, thus hampering business opportunities and closer political ties. As India is becoming a world power, Poland will have to invest more to enhance its visibility in India as a precondition to higher level bilateral relations.

Introduction

With Polish-Indian trade amounting to €1.17 billion in 2012, Poland still does not exploit the full potential of economic cooperation with India, and political ties are only now gaining momentum after two decades of mutual neglect. India is the EU's ninth largest trade partner, with a 2.2% share of total EU27 external trade, while its share of Polish trade is only 0.47%. Sweden, a comparable economy in size (in nominal GDP) to Poland's, exports more than twice of the amount that Poland does to India, which is in turn equal to that of the Czech Republic—a country with an economy less than half the size of Poland's. With 1.2 billion people and fast economic growth in the last decade (8% GDP on average), India became the tenth largest economy in 2011, and is set to emerge as third largest (after the U.S. and China) by 2025. As several countries compete in India for lucrative contracts and access to this large market, Poland's low visibility seems to be an important barrier to stronger economic cooperation.

Without more investment in the “Polish brand” in India, it will be difficult to attract Indian tourists, entrepreneurs or students to come to Poland, or to convince them to buy products “made in Poland”. Similarly, unless Poland is perceived as a regional leader and major member of the EU, the idea of a stronger strategic partnership will have no takers in New Delhi. Although the promotional and cultural policies of Poland have been noticeably more active in India recently, there is still much more to be done to attract serious interest. This analysis, based on field research, presents an overview of the Indian perception of Poland and makes several recommendations for improving Poland's visibility in order to strengthen bilateral relations.

Promoting Poland in India

With improving economic and political cooperation in recent years, the Polish government started paying more attention to promoting itself in India and launched several initiatives to improve its presence there¹. A cooperation programme between the Polish and Indian ministries of culture for the years 2010-2013, signed in September 2010, allowed a more regular exchanges of visits, performances by artistic groups, and

¹ See: P. Kugiel, „Poland-India: Potential for a Strategic Partnership”, *PISM Strategic File #21*, May 2012; P. Kugiel, “Business Opportunities in India: State of Play and Prospects”, *PISM Bulletin*, no 29 (482), 20 March 2013.

exchanges of exhibitions and publications². The agreement on audiovisual co-production, signed in July 2012, facilitated work on around 40 joint film projects, which are currently at different stages of implementation. In early 2013, the first Centres for Polish and Central European Studies in Asia were inaugurated at two Indian universities, in Kolkata and Manipal, to promote knowledge and research about modern Poland. Since January 2013, the Polish Embassy in New Delhi has eased the application procedure for business visas, to reduce the waiting time to three working days and encourage more Indians to visit Poland³. These initiatives point to a new appreciation of cultural activities and closer people-to-people contacts in building stronger ties with India, and should bring positive effects in the coming years.

A major step towards strengthening Polish visibility in India, however, came in June 2012, with the opening the Polish Institute of Culture in New Delhi—the second such establishment in Asia after that in Tokyo. In its first six months, the Institute made a positive mark on New Delhi's cultural map, by organising several events (film screenings, jazz concerts, fashion shows, etc.) and promoting Polish culture, mostly among the Indian youth and well-educated, English-speaking middle class. It has established ties with major cultural institutions in New Delhi, which often host Polish events in the most popular venues, and has focused its activities on social media. The institute is still in its initial stages of formation, with several factors constraining a more active programme. These include its location on the embassy grounds in a diplomatic enclave in New Delhi with restricted access for much of the population, its limited budget and staff (2.5 full-time equivalent positions), especially when the scale and diversity of the country is taken into account. In promoting Poland in India, competition from other countries and Poland's own relatively low starting point must also not be forgotten.

Poland in the Indian Press

Poland is hardly visible in the Indian media, and knowledge about the country is minimal throughout society. Content analysis of three of India's leading English language newspapers, *The Hindu*, *Times of India* and *The Economic Times*, over a period of three years (January 2010 to December 2012) reveals an extremely low number of news items about Poland—only 117 in total⁴. For comparison, a similar study undertaken recently, about press coverage of the EU in three Indian newspapers, *Dainik Jagran*, *The Economic Times* and *The Times of India (ToI)* over a period of only six months, returned 235 records⁵. Poland appeared most often in *The Hindu* (76 articles), followed by the *Times of India* (26 articles) and *The Economic Times* (16). However, most of the articles mentioned Poland only marginally, and were short notes rather than in-depth analysis. Thematically, Poland appeared mainly on the sport pages (38% of all news items about Poland in *ToI*, 24% in *The Hindu*), in reports about cultural events (31% in *ToI*, 29% in *The Hindu*) and some others, including political news (31% in *ToI*, 31% in *The Hindu*). Economic topics referring to Poland were more often analysed in *The Economic Times* (80%) and concerned mostly bilateral relations (such as the expansion of Indian companies in Poland, companies including BPO Infosys, Uflex, Wipro, WNS, Suzlon). Most of the news about Poland was neutral in tone, with a more positive attitude found in about 7% of articles in *The Hindu*.

Analysis shows that the media in India attaches attention to Poland mostly when it relates to sport (the European football championship, football matches, individual Poles in famous clubs), on the occasion of tragic accidents (“the plane crash in Smolensk”, “train collision in which 15 people died”, “five Polish soldiers killed in Afghanistan”), and reports about cultural events in which Polish artists participate. Relying only on the press, an average Indian could hardly understand the changes that have taken place in Poland in last two decades, and its new international role. Poland occurs only sporadically in the news, and is rarely

² The agreement allowed, for instance, the renovation of wall paintings in maharajas' palaces in Rajasthan by the Polish painter Stefan Norblin, which has also been documented in a movie released last year titled “Chitrangali. Stefan Norblin in India” by Małgorzata Skiba, and supported financially by the Polish Embassy in New Delhi.

³ In 2012, the Polish Embassy issued 4,567 visas of all kinds. However, data from the Polish Tourist Organisation shows that around 10,000 Indians visit Poland annually, which suggests that some of them come to Poland with Schengen visas from another EU country.

⁴ The *Times of India* is the most popular English language daily with an average issue readership of 7.615 million; *The Hindu* is a leading left-centre opinion newspaper and which has the third largest readership—2.164 million—and *The Economic Times* is the largest business daily with 735,000 readers. See: “Indian Readership Survey”, *IRS Q4 2012 Topline findings*, Media Research Users Council.

⁵ R.K. Jain, S. Pandey, “Public Attitudes and Images of the European Union”, *India Quarterly*, 68, 4 (2012), p. 334.

seen as an attractive place for investment or tourism. Political bilateral relations also receive limited coverage in the press, with the only exceptions being on the occasion of high level visits to Delhi.

However, it must be noted here that Poland's low visibility in the Indian press is hardly surprising, as even the EU as a whole suffers from a similar problem. As was observed recently, the Indian media rely on foreign news wires in reporting about Europe, and dispatch European foreign correspondents almost exclusively to the UK, which in turn leads to a situation in which Indian readers learn about the EU as viewed through a British prism, which is traditionally more EU sceptic⁶. Traditionally, the Indian media focuses on domestic issues and there is huge competition for space between international news, which most often deals with the neighbourhood and relations with other world powers. When it comes to Europe, the most attention is paid to the biggest countries (the UK, Germany and France), and to the current economic crisis.

The Indian Elite's Views on Poland

Although the general public have limited access to information about Poland, the Indian upper-middle classes are supposed to be more exposed to contact with Poles and, it can therefore be assumed, have a better understanding of the country. Thus to better comprehend the idea of Poland in India, it is necessary to understand what India's elite think of it.

Poland as a "Tabula Rasa"

Interviews with representatives of the Indian elite show that there is no single, predominant image of Poland in the Indian society⁷. Whereas "the majority of Indians have no idea of Poland at all", members of the Indian elite are quite divided in their perceptions. Depending on the background of person, Poland is seen through a historical prism ("a country that suffered a lot during the Second World War", "a fellow socialist country"), with some social affinities to India ("the strong role of religion", conservative society, very strong family ties, friendly people), marred by "cold weather". Importantly it is also gaining new traits, such as "an educated society", "the strongest economy in Central Eastern Europe", "a good trade partner", or a country moving fast "from a third world to first world category". As observed correctly by one journalist, "India is a very young country, therefore most Indians do not remember the Cold War and know nothing about 'old Poland', while the image of this 'new Poland' has not emerged yet".⁸ Interestingly, even if the lack of a strong image of Poland is seen as a liability, it actually offers also some opportunity. As was observed, "the image of Poland is still a tabula rasa, and you can write on it as you like". Another interesting comment was that even if the perception of Poland in India is weak, it creates rather positive associations, which are neutral at worst but rarely ever negative. This offers Poland some a pool of goodwill which should be exploited wisely. As most respondents confirmed that their image of Poland has improved considerably after only their first visit, there were also complaints raised at treatment as a "potential immigrant" by border guards at the airports.

More detailed questions confirmed a lack of general knowledge about Poland, and little interest in the country. In 35% of cases, those interviewed could not name any famous Polish person, 42% of them did not recall the name of a current Polish leader, and half could not mention a single Polish commercial brand. The best known Poles were Lech Wałęsa (five answers), Andrzej Wajda (three), Ryszard Kapuściński, John Paul II, and Adam Mickiewicz (two each); among current politicians, most people could mention Donald Tusk and Radosław Sikorski; and LOT (three) and Bumar (two) were among the few recognised Polish companies and products. Little or no recognition of Polish commercial brands can be especially worrying, as it seems to be a serious barrier to Polish companies willing to enter the Indian market. Moreover, it raised the point that Poland lacks at least one big and recognisable company which could open the market

⁶ Ibidem, p. 335.

⁷ Semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 14 people were conducted in April 2013 in New Delhi. The sample group consisted of three Indian diplomats from different departments of the Ministry of External Affairs, two representatives of major business organisations, two entrepreneurs, two journalists from leading English language newspapers, and five academics and experts from different think tanks and universities.

⁸ This very assumption must have been discovered in market analysis for Emirates airline, which has a major promotional campaign in India in 2013. On a billboards advertising flight connections to Warsaw, there are only two smiling and young anonymous people on an unknown background, rather than the traditional images of Polish historical monuments or cultural events.

for other Polish businesses, as was the case with the Czech Skoda or Japanese Suzuki. To minimise the negative effect of low recognition of Polish brand in India, it is important to stress their European provenance while marketing, since EU products are usually regarded as of higher quality and prestigious.

Media Coverage Reflects Low Intensity of Contacts

One possible explanation of low awareness about Poland is the fact that Poland does not occupy an important place in public discourse. All the respondents admitted that “Poland occurs in Indian print media very rarely”. Among the recent news about Poland, the most often referred to were the European football championship in June 2012, the plane crash in Smolensk in April 2010, the visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski in July 2011, and controversies over a defence deal with Bumar. Apart from the general context discussed above, some specific reasons behind limited interest in news from Poland included the low level of economic links, lack of special political interest in Poland, low people-to-people contacts, an absence of Indian diaspora in Poland, and lack of Indian foreign correspondents in Poland. In this regard, neither print media nor TV, are seen as sources of information about Poland, and more news from the country is to be gathered from the internet or from friends. This confirms that, apart from large international events (such as the football championship), or tragic events, the best way to generate interest in Poland in the Indian media is through high level bilateral contacts.

Active Diplomacy Brings Positive Effects

The activities of Polish diplomats in New Delhi, aimed at improving the low visibility, were seen positively. Eight of the people interviewed have had some interaction with the Polish Embassy in New Delhi through invitations to different receptions, study visits, consultations or other initiatives. Among those who had contact with Polish diplomats, a clear majority had very good experiences, with 62% assessing the Embassy to be “quite active” and 25% claiming it to be “very active”. In one opinion, the activities of the Polish Embassy were marked nine out of ten, and in another, current Polish Ambassador to India, Piotr Klodkowski, as the “best brand Ambassador”. What seems to be quite appealing to Indian partners is the fact that, not only the Ambassador but also the First Secretary and Counsellor are fluent in Hindi—a rare situation not only in Polish diplomacy but also among other diplomatic missions in New Delhi. The other question is, however, the level of financial and human resources that the Embassy needs in order to gain more recognition on the competitive Indian diplomatic market. Interlocutors have observed that Poland is quite active and visible in the context of other CEE states, but looks less impressive when compared to the bigger members of the EU.

Most of the interviewees (75%) had heard about the Polish Institute, opened in June 2012 but none of them had actually ever attended any event organised by it, mostly due to constraints of time. In one opinion, “Poland used to be hardly visible in New Delhi, and establishing the Institute was a great achievement which will, ultimately, help to promote Poland in India”. It was observed that more frequent distribution of newsletters and invitations, and a more accessible office where people can meet and learn more about Poland, would further improve the attractiveness of the Institute.

Poland—Not a Significant Partner, but with Huge Potential

In assessing the real strengths and potential of Poland, most of the respondents (64%) correctly assigned the Polish economy to the category of between the 20 and 30 largest, with 18% overestimating and placing it among the top twenty. Poland’s political role in the EU is however seen as less impressive. The majority of respondents (64%) claimed that Poland “is important player in some aspects but not in others”, and 25% saw Poland as not being an influential EU player at all. Similarly, the majority (64%) admitted they did not see Poland as a potential leader in Europe. Rather, they would see it as a leader in a New Europe or Emerging Europe, a leader in Central Eastern Europe, and a second-tier country in the EU, after the big European powers and Scandinavian countries.

The interviews confirmed a sense of nostalgia for the “old good times” in bilateral relations, with more than half of the answers given (54%) assessing that Poland-India cooperation was best during the Cold War period. Still, a quite considerable group (36%) claimed that the relationship “is the best now” as it had

previously been “implicit compulsion—not their choice” (because of links with Moscow), and only now that both sides are democracies, free market economies “for the first time this is genuine relationship”. Both sceptics and optimists, however, expressed strong beliefs about the positive prospects for bilateral ties. As a reflection of this positive sentiment, 50% of respondents included Poland in the group of India’s 20 most important partners, while 33% assessed Poland to be in 20th to 30th place.

Strategic Partnership—Helpful but Contentious

The question about the prospects for a strategic partnership between the countries proved to be very divisive, with positive and negative responses given equally. Those who were opposed to the idea or claimed that the time for this had “not yet” arrived pointed towards the lack of strategic content in bilateral relations, and said that “Poland is not an equal partner for India” and “cannot offer what India wants”, but also claimed that the concept of “strategic partnership” has been devalued in Indian foreign policy, saying “it is only a label” and “not a creative idea”, thus a new model would be required. It was also observed that, if Poland could offer any area for strategic cooperation, (such as SC UN reform, shale gas, etc.), only then would it be an interesting initiative. On the other side, respondents who were in favour of upgrading the relationship to a strategic level said that this “push from above” would “give a boost” to political and trade cooperation.

Among the reasons put forward for recognising Poland as a strategic partner were its “strategic location in central Europe” making it a gateway to Europe, Poland’s increasingly important role in the EU and close partnership with the United States, and the fact that China has strategic partnership with Poland. However, another question confirmed that there is huge difficulty in naming any important area which could offer solid, beneficial grounds for strategic cooperation. Still, 75% agreed that support for India’s bid for permanent membership of the Security Council could be a valuable starting point, especially if Poland supported India more openly at the EU level and garner the support of other Central European countries. Another interesting idea mentioned for strategic cooperation was internal security, as both countries should explore opportunities in policing, law enforcement, special operations, anti-terrorism forces, etc.

Poland as a Little-Known Land of Opportunities

Mutual ignorance and lack of understanding were regarded as the gravest impediments for closer Poland-India ties by a clear majority of respondents. Other obstacles included low people-to-people contacts, the language barrier, geographic distance, and the lack of direct flight connections. Interestingly, and contrary to Polish official rhetoric, Poland’s membership in the EU was seen by some experts as a problem rather than an advantage for bilateral contacts as it “constrains Polish autonomy” in relations with India, while India prefers to deal with the EU through the biggest EU powers.

Most of the respondents regarded economy and trade as the most important areas in bilateral relations, with defence cooperation in second place. The sectors named as having the best prospects for economic cooperation included IT, pharmacy, energy, food processing, infrastructure and technology, and academic cooperation. However, it was underlined that much more analysis of the potential and complementarities between both states in each sector is required. Although one of the major Indian business associations, the Confederation of Indian Industries, is currently preparing a major market analysis of business opportunities between India and CEE, there is no such research regarding cooperation with Poland, and many Indians are simply not aware of the opportunities that “new Poland” offers. As one person observed, “Indians are, like Poles, conservative people, and do not take risks to operate in the unknown—so the first thing is to turn the unknown into the known”.

A few opinions stressed the importance of having a sectoral and regional approach to India, in order to minimise structural asymmetries between these economies. It was also observed that business delegations to India should be more frequent and regular, as patience and long-term presence are crucial in the Indian market. Furthermore, most of the respondents thought that an eventual FTA between India and the EU would have a mostly positive impact on economic cooperation with Poland, even though Western European countries had a clear edge in relations with India. Half of the respondents assessed Poland as a “quite attractive country for Indian investments”, while minor voices claimed it to be “very attractive” or “not very attractive”. It was observed that Poland can serve as a gateway to the EU market for Indian

products, especially in warehouse facilities, as it offers a good location for lower costs. On the other hand, India can be an attractive destination for the diversification of Polish exports, especially in times of European economic crisis.

Conclusions

The effects of Poland's most recent initiatives, aimed at raising its profile in India, will be visible only in the coming years, but the current situation calls for more urgent and vigorous efforts. Research confirms that Poland is little-known in Indian society, and thus rarely seen as an attractive economic or political partner. The Indian media seldom dedicate attention to Poland, and a new image of "modern Poland" is still missing among the general public. Although the Polish transformation success story has been recognised in the West, it is less known in India. The interviews with members of the Indian elite, however, point to a positive attitude towards Poland, and significant potential for closer cooperation. Bearing in mind India's fast economic growth and its status as an emerging world power, it is in Poland's interests to invest more in its promotion in India.

Although a more comprehensive study is required to grasp a more representative image of Poland in India, and to better address existing challenges, some ideas can be suggested for consideration:

- Information deficit and limited channels of communication are the major obstacles to stronger bilateral cooperation. In order to attract serious attention from Indian political and business circles, Poland needs to further re-energise its cultural policy, public diplomacy and promotion campaigns in India. The incoming 60th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations (2014) offers the perfect occasion to create and promote a new Polish brand in India. The lack of a strong and negative stereotype of Poland will ease the task of building up the perception of Poland as a modern European country and attractive destination for business, tourism and education.
- The establishment of the Polish Institute of Culture in New Delhi in 2012 was a very important and good decision, but it would need more funding and more staff to become more visible, influential and recognisable in New Delhi, and to expand its outreach to other major metropolises in India. Similarly, even though the Polish diplomatic mission in New Delhi is very active, it will find it impossible to do more in a country of 1.2 billion people with limited human and financial resources. Launching the Polish Study Centres at Indian universities were also very useful steps, and they will need constant support to attract Indian students.
- More bilateral exchanges of visits at the highest level is the most natural way to attract the attention of the Indian media. In this regard, Poland needs to strengthen efforts to host the Indian prime minister or foreign minister at the earliest date possible, and to plan a visit of the Polish president to India. To further enhance coverage of Poland in the Indian media, a programme of short-term (up to one month) visits to Poland for Indian foreign correspondents can be launched. Organising high-profile sport events (for instance, a Poland-India football or cricket match at the National Stadium) or Bollywood movie co-productions should boost the popularity of Poland among Indian society. Other ideas for the creation of long-lasting interest in Poland could include launching a government programme of scholarships for Indian students, offering Polish language classes in India on a commercial basis, or stimulating platforms for regular contacts between experts and civil society groups from both countries.
- Establishment of a "strategic partnership" would be helpful in improving Poland's visibility and upgrading it to the group of major partners in the EU, but more work has to be done to map out areas of strategic cooperation. To better leverage its EU membership, Poland needs to make its stance on EU policy towards India more clear, and take a more active role in shaping this policy. Moreover, to be regarded as more valuable strategic partner for India, Poland would need to offer tangible support in important areas such as EU-India FTA negotiations, UN SC reform, counter-terrorism, climate change talks and development cooperation. Poland could also better exploit its position as a regional leader in Central Eastern Europe.
- There is still significant untapped potential for economic cooperation between Poland and India, but more preparatory research about the economies' complementarity, and efforts aimed at

popularisation of knowledge about each country is necessary. Polish companies and SMEs should also form sectoral associations and look for similar clusters beyond New Delhi, in less developed Indian states, to find a niche in the vast Indian market. The Polish government may support these activities through more regular trade missions and more aggressive marketing of Polish products.

- To improve connectivity and boost business and people-to-people contacts, the idea of resumption of direct flight connections between Warsaw and Delhi needs to be seriously revisited. Forty thousand Polish tourists in India and ten thousand Indian visitors in Poland annually, provide a substantial pool of ready customers on which a sustainable solution to this issue could be based. Thanks to its strategic location in central Europe and lack of direct flights to other new EU Member States, Poland has an advantage and could build on this to become a transit hub and a gateway to Europe.
- As the information deficit applies equally to Polish side, special attention must be applied to raising awareness about modern India among Polish business, experts and society. For this end, public Polish Radio could resume the constant post of foreign correspondent of Polish Radio in New Delhi, and government may launch an information campaign “Go India” for entrepreneurs, and further support research projects and academic exchanges with India.