

## **Press Statement of the German President, Frank-Walter Steinmeier**

For us Germans everything in India happens in many ways at the same time - bitter poverty next to five-star hotels, wooden plough on the field alongside high-tech industry on a global level, tradition alongside modernity - but one thing is clear: this country is on the rise. I felt that especially in conversation with the young people at many places here in India.

I am sure that the new Federal Government will be significantly more committed here in India. And we must pay the same attention to India as we devote to other global players. And this will not just be limited to economy. 1800 German companies are invested here, and at the moment German companies are very interesting for India because taking into account the needs of the young generation, German companies offer professional training and this experience is exactly what is needed here in India.

On the other hand, in a situation where many around the globe question the free and fair world trade, India is one of those countries that have an interest in defending it. It would be a good sign right now if the negotiations for a free trade agreement between the European Union and India could be restarted. Anyway, that is what I have tried to point out here in India.

And also beyond the economy we visited research institutes here that already cooperate with German universities, with research institutes from the Max Planck Institute to Fraunhofer. And here, too, there is an urgent desire in India to expand this cooperation, and the same interest should also exist on the German side. Particularly in regard to the fact that, fortunately, the number of Indian students is increasing in Germany. We already have about 15,000 students from India in Germany and the number is increasing further. Many German universities now offer English language courses for Indian students, so the linguistic hurdles that used to be there no longer exist.

This is a country on the move and this is a country in reform. Not everything has been implemented so far, but the direction that we see here, which Prime Minister Modi has taken, is, in my view, a direction that firstly, finds clear support in his own country and secondly, also improves India and makes us a partner.

**Question:** How did you experience the conversation with Mr. Modi? Were you able to, or did you mention it, that there are problems linked to religious diversity in the country?

**Answer:** Above all, he guessed that it could be a topic of discussion, so the place where we met was not chosen completely by chance. The Indian government, in cooperation with the Aga Khan Foundation, has just restored a huge garden from Mughal times, renovated it completely, restored ruined buildings and made it available to the public a few weeks ago. And that is already a sign and it should also be understood that Prime Minister Modi has an interest in not only harping about diversity, but also giving signals to different religions here in India that diversity and living together in India is possible.

**Question:** How important is it for Prime Minister Modi to bring back on track the EU Free Trade Agreement with India?

**Answer:** He agreed with me, first of all, in the analysis that free world trade and in particular the WTO could lose importance, and he also agreed that it is therefore necessary to set a counter-signal now. And of course we will take this with us to Europe.

**Question:** One big topic here is the rise of China. Did the Prime Minister express any wishes about how Germany and Europe can get more involved here and is this rapprochement with India also a response to this rise of China?

**Answer:** There is no political conversation that we have had during these days in India, which did not also include the big neighbour China. Prime Minister Modi has just highlighted in the conversation again that principally there are no bad relations with China, rather lots of exchanges at political and economic levels. But, of course, frankly said, people are worried about China's greater presence not only in the Pacific region, but also in the Indian Ocean. And India calls for all those who have an interest - in trade connections, travel routes also through the Indian Ocean - to be vigilant here, and also to make it clear to China that they are calling for restraint.

(Non-official translation from German)