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Parthasarathi Swami is the Managing Editor of Business India

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

ON A VISIT TO ENGLAND and Scotland in September, I was accosted by a student of Indian history. He called himself a student because, he said, he was still learning. But, in terms of age, he was nudging 90.

He told me that he had served in India in the pre-Independence days, when the "princely states" were being incorporated into the new Indian republic. He had dozens of anecdotes which kept us long amused. More importantly, however, he said the experience had been very useful when it came to setting up the European Union (EU). Creating the EU has not been easy. But, if anything, India - with 650-odd princely states - was a far more difficult exercise.

Like the Indian princely states, the countries of the EU had different currencies, stamps, forms of government, armies and cultures. In India, these states have meshed seamlessly. In Europe, there is some way to go. Norway, for instance, is still to join. Our learning is not complete, the student of history told me.

As Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visits Helsinki for the seventh Indo-EU summit, there is a lot that that the country can give - and take. We have been through an EU-like experience. We will go through another as the barriers to the movement of labour collapse. Regional enmities will become history, as they have in Europe. It may take 50 years, but one can already foresee a single subcontinent, perhaps even a pan-Asia union.

In Helsinki, the PM will have more immediate issues to discuss. Trade and ties between the EU and India are on the rise. But it benefits everybody if they can be further augmented. There are agreements to be sealed in areas such as technology transfer. The last Indo-EU summit in New Delhi had drafted a wide-ranging and ambitious action plan. That's progressing well. But every once in a while, it needs to be nudged a bit to ensure that it stays on optimum track. This Indo-EU summit should help do that.

For many Indians, the EU has primarily meant the larger countries - the UK, France, Germany and Portugal, with whom we have relationships going back centuries. The summit at Helsinki, the capital of Finland, is important because it will bring into focus the smaller countries too. The information technology (IT) companies, the global flag-bearers of India today, are already spreading their wings here. For instance, Hexaware (on which we have a separate story in this issue), is targeting Scandinavia as a new market. Meanwhile, Finland's Nokia is planning large investments in India.

It's two-way traffic. Cooperation today is much more than a matter of sound-bites. Things move faster when people mean business.

*Parthasarathi Swami*

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