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What do the French think about doing business in India?



Indian culture and spirituality have always fascinated the French. But they are just beginning to discover the potentials of the Indian market. They have misgivings and are often concerned about the complexity and the number of decision-making actors; the difficulty and delays of the administrative procedures, the high import taxes as well as the differences in the notion of time. They have many questions concerning the caste system, human rights and even women's rights. The French have an idea of India that doesn't necessarily match Indian reality. They love India but don't really know it*, they don't know how to tackle it.

That's where lobbying can be useful.

What are your views concerning lobbying in India, how do you think lobbying can establish itself here?

The Commonwealth countries, the United States as well as Israel have a long tradition of lobbying, where it is seen as an activity in its own right. So lobbying is alive and well in India. In France it's not like that, and it's too bad. I have been working as a lobbyist both for the Indians and the French, aiming to establish useful bridges between the two countries. On the French side, helping them to understand and work with the complex Indian decision-making process: the National Union and the federal states, but also helping them to work with the numerous and varied networks. On the Indian side, explaining to the political and administrative deciders, the advantages of, the norms, the specificities of French firms so that they may take them into account in their decision-making processes, to consider whether they are pertinent and potentially useful for the country's needs. I did something very similar when I worked for French firms with respects to the European Community.

My first victory was in 2007 when I worked on the creation of the first Euro-Indian firm in business jet sales and management, **SCR-Masterjet India Ltd.**, a deal between SRC-Ltd, a leader in central Asia that operates in the main Indian airports, and Masterjet, based in Lisbon, London, Paris and Geneva.

What do the French think about lobbying and how will the two countries develop future business ties?

Lobbying has long been seen with suspicion in France but has recently been accepted thanks to measure by the European Community who understands its role in a democratic process. Lobbying is the art of influencing a public or private decision, the art of pleading a cause before public authorities or before an entity that has the potential for influencing the decision-making process. Basically a lobbyist has to know how to put together the pieces of a puzzle quickly. French lobbying in India works to present to Indian decision-makers the diversity, the innovative capacities and the specificities of French firms and their adaptability to the sub-continent. With regards to the French, lobbying allows them to better

understand the diversity, the creativity and ingenuity of Indians in every area, their significant scientific achievements, their modern stance. All this is done in light of cooperation, of joint-ventures. This is my job.

How can French firms contribute to India's growth potential?

India is one of the largest world powers, one of the oldest and most outstanding civilisations. It's undertaking the 21st century with strength and vigour. It needs synergies for its development. Historically, India has stronger ties with Commonwealth countries. It's natural to turn to what is most familiar. It would be good for India and France to get to know each other. India has the power, the intelligence, the creativity and the drive of youth on the one hand and the wisdom and age-old knowhow on the other. France is a fine old country where luxury and refinement are a tradition. But it also has unique, innovative and competitive firms in a number of fields where India is seeking expertise. Many factors are present on both sides to guarantee a useful cooperation in a number of areas; the setting up and management of the infrastructures in the field of water resources and waste handling, construction of large infrastructures, roads, highways, airports, railway networks, but also in other more sensitive areas such as Defense and civil nuclear energy. It would be good for the partners to get to know each other, not only during the few official meetings. It would be good to establish permanent ties, to continually develop "networking". It's hard work and must not be improvised, just for the sake of a single contract. That's the job of a lobbyist, to open the possibility for Indians to have a seat on the Board of large French firms and then create subsidiaries in India. This would be a logical step in developing mutual win-win situations.

There are smaller French firms that can work well with same-size Indian firms, in such fields as the environment and agro-food. It would be good to construct networking, set up meetings regularly, to share information and strengthen ties, to adapt to the Sub-continent, understand the specific needs of its people, their expectations and also their prejudices, their culture, religions, to make them a part of the decision-making process of the French firm. This is what lobbying is in India: to get to know each other. We have a lot to learn from the Indians. We have many things to offer them: exchange, reciprocity. This is the work I have begun and that I hope to continue.

Is India a preferred investment destination? What other destinations do French prefer over India?

In Asia, France has staked a lot on China, just recently discovering India. The French are fascinated and puzzled. They don't understand the *modus operandi* and even less the organisms that are supposed to help them in this task. They often have one or several representatives *in situ* and sometimes they are Indian. But you can't improvise lobbying. What can one do if one is based in the Tamil-Nadu or in Maharashtra and don't know the decision-makers in the Union in Delhi? What can a Frenchman do when he doesn't really know the political or administrative organisation of India, and even less its networks? This is what a lobbyist does, help in mutual understanding in the interest of both countries.

*There are some exceptions but they remain anecdotal. Among them, the case of Francis Wacziarg, the most Indian of Frenchmen who for the past 35 years has been an adviser to the large department stores, Galeries Lafayette, Le Bon Marché and Conran Shop and is co-chairman of a large hotel chain. The other is Jean-François Lesage, a specialist in furniture embroidery, living in India since 1993