

# EU Foreign Trade Body Maps Plan to Revive FTA Talks

Amfori president says they're looking at alternatives, including early harvest

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**New Delhi:** Europe's foreign trade association Amfori has said that India and the European Union should focus on resolving differences over three crucial issues if they want to break the deadlock on the long-stalled free trade pact.

Amfori said talks should initially focus on India's demand for a liberal visa regime for its nurses, a relaxed geographical indications regime and duty cuts on its textile exports.

Christian Ewert, president of Brussels-based Amfori, told **ET** that EU's insistence on India committing to sustainability norms is one of the sticking points as Delhi is against the inclusion of non-trade issues such as environment and labour in its trade pacts.

"We are looking at alternatives to revive the talks and early harvest is one of those," Ewert said but highlighted "great reluctance on both sides" for an early harvest.

Talks on the trade pact, called Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA), have been held up since 2013 and a recent informal meeting of two sides on how to resume negotiations failed to yield results.

"We need to identify services which are in short supply in Europe such as healthcare and IT," he said.

The EU now asks for trade and sustainability chapters in all its trade pacts and that is among the five areas of contention between the two sides.

Slashing of import duty on European cars and alcohol by India, recognition of the count-

## Early Harvest

### Give and take

EU can liberalise visa norms for Indian nurses, cut duties on Indian textile

India, EU can negotiate terms to protect GIs in each other's markets

### Sticking points

EU wants India to take commitments on sustainability, New Delhi opposes

Brexit, Europe's refugee crisis, other FTAs have slowed progress of BTIA with India



**Talks held up since 2013, informal meetings yield no results**

ry as a 'data-secure' nation to enable free flow of data between the two and easier visa norms for Indian professionals are the other sticking points.

India exported merchandise worth \$53.5 billion to the EU in 2017-18 while it imported \$47.8 billion worth of goods from the trade bloc. Besides Brexit, the other causes of slow movement on the BTIA is the EU's involvement in free trade agreements with other countries, including some in Asia such as the Philippines. "Further, EU is challenged by the refugee situation," Ewert said.

The EU's apprehension to sign a BTIA separate from the Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) with India has further added to the delay.

"Not having a bilateral investment treaty is a hindrance to investments," he said.

The European Commission had raised concerns over negotiations for a fresh BIT.