

Panel 21: Regional Cooperation in South Asia: the impact of policy and perception and the India-Pakistan relationship

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Abstract: As one South Asian Head of Government and recent SAARC Chair acknowledged in Europe in 2009, without an improved and stronger India-Pakistan relationship, regional cooperation will remain a pipe dream. This panel seeks to explore the impact of policy and perception in strengthening regional cooperation and stability as well as considering the India-Pakistan relationship in this context. If by virtue of its size, location and economic potential, India assumes a natural leadership role in the region, the over-bearing presence of a neighbour with clearer aspirations for global leadership has also been a source of apprehension for other South Asian countries. Most efforts at fostering cooperation are constrained under the pressure of this dichotomy in regional relations. At the same time the need for coordinated and collaborative action by South Asia governments and businesses in trying to address the regional impacts of the global finance, food and fuel crisis has emphasised the value of understanding differences and similarities across national boundaries. As cooperation among nations is shaped by policies and sustained by perceptions, an examination of regional policies and national perceptions in South Asia could help in identifying the real challenges to cooperation in the region. The panel will invite papers which focus on regional interactions through and beyond SAARC for ascertaining the degree to which national policies and public perceptions impact the process and prospects of cooperation in the region.

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