

INDIA-AUSTRIA BILATERAL RELATIONS

Political relations

Diplomatic relations between India and Austria were established in 1949. As early as in 1953, India intervened in favour of Austria during its negotiations with the Soviet Union on the State Treaty of Austria that resulted in the independence of Austria in 1955. The two countries marked in 2019, 70 years of the bilateral relationship which has traditionally been warm and friendly. The 75th year of establishment of bilateral relations will be observed from November 2023 - November 2024.

High level political exchanges - India and Austria have had regular exchange of visits including at the level of leaders, Ministers and Parliamentarians highlighting the importance that both countries accord to further strengthening their relations. The visit by Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru in 1955 was the first Prime Ministerial visit to Austria. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's visit in 1971 was followed by the visit of Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky in 1980. Indira Gandhi's visit in 1983 was succeeded by the visit of the Chancellor Fred Sinowatz in 1984. President K. R. Narayanan visited Austria in 1999; President Heinz Fischer visited in 2005; Austrian Vice Chancellor Josef Pröll in 2010; and President Pratibha Devisingh Patil in 2011.

During President Patil's visit, the talks covered the entire gamut of bilateral relations and international issues of mutual concern. Special emphasis was put on strengthening economic and commercial cooperation, scientific cooperation and people to people exchanges. President Fischer strongly supported India's place in a reformed UN Security Council. He said that 'We recognize that the world is changing fast and that the current composition in the Security Council does not reflect the realities of the new world order currently emerging. Your country deserves to play a bigger role in the Security Council'.

Austrian Federal President Dr. Heinz Fischer visited India in February 2005. The Joint Statement issued during the visit highlighted the need to keep up the momentum of exchanging high level visits, expanding and deepening cooperation in power, environment, health infrastructure, biotechnology, information technology, engineering and transport, intensifying cooperation between universities and research institutions, expanding direct air-links between the two countries, condemning terrorism and a dialogue on UN related issues.

Recent high level engagements – Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a telephone conversation with Austrian Federal President Dr. Alexander Van der Bellen on 26 May 2020. The leaders exchanged views on measures taken in their countries to manage the adverse health and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and reiterated their shared desire to further strengthen and diversify India-Austria relations in the post-Covid world. Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi had a pull-aside meeting with the then Austrian Chancellor, Alexander Schallenberg on 30 October

2021, on the sidelines of COP-26 In Glasgow.

Ministerial Level engagements and visits - EAM had a telephone conversation with Austrian Minister for Europe and International Affairs Alexander Schallenberg on 11 May 2020. They exchanged experiences on combating Covid-19 and agreed to continue the dialogue on preventing and fighting Covid-19. EAM thanked him for taking care of the Indian community in Austria. The two Foreign Ministers met on 18 February 2021, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference where they discussed bilateral and regional issues.

Austrian Foreign Minister, Alexander Schallenberg, accompanied by a high level business delegation visited India from 19-21 March 2022, marking his first visit to India in his current term. During the delegation level talks on 20 March 2022, both Ministers discussed the entire gamut of bilateral relations, including political, economic, commercial and consular ties. They also exchanged views on Covid-19 pandemic including the vaccine maitri initiative and mutual recognition of vaccination certificates. Both sides agreed to further intensify commercial engagements with keen expression of interest by the Austrian business delegates towards investing in sectors like renewable energy in India. Both sides also looked forward to the 75 years of bilateral diplomatic relations. Regional and global issues including India-EU relations, Indo-Pacific, Afghanistan and Ukraine were discussed. FM Schallenberg also met MoS, Smt. Meenakashi Lekhi and discussed ways to further strengthen bilateral relations including vibrant cultural ties and people to people exchanges.

EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Austria from 31 December 2022 to 03 January 2023. During the visit, He met with Austrian Federal President, Dr. Alexander Van der Bellen, Chancellor Karl Nehammer and President of the National Council, Mr Wolfgang Sobotka. He held delegation level talks with the Austrian foreign Minister, Alexander Schallenberg. Five (05) agreements were also signed during the Visit.

The two Foreign Ministers met in Bratislava on 02nd June 2022, on the sidelines of the GLOBSEC Forum. This was followed by their bilateral meeting on 20 September 2022 in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. The two Ministers discussed among other issues, expanding cooperation in mobility and education. Recently met on 13th May in Stockholm, Sweden on the margins of EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Meeting and signed the agreement on Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership.

Earlier then EAM Pranab Mukherjee visited Austria in 1995; Austrian FM Ursula Plassnik in 2005; Austrian FM Sebastian Kurz in 2016. Austrian FM Dr. Karin Kneissl visited India in 2019 to mark the occasion of 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations. The delegation level talks set priorities for further enhancement of bilateral relations, particularly in areas of trade and investment, education, migration, culture, tourism and enhancement of people-to-people ties. They shared assessment on urgent common international challenges – climate change, UN reforms and international terrorism.

Other Ministerial Engagements: Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Shri Nitin Gadkari visited Austria to participate in INTERALPIN 2023 Fair in Innsbruck at the invitation of Ms. Leonore Gewessler, Minister of Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology from 18-21 April 2023.

Minister of State for External Affairs, Smt. Preneet Kaur led the Indian delegation at the 5th Global Forum of United Nations Summit of Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) held in Vienna in February 2013. She also met Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger during her visit. Indian Minister of Culture Chandresh Kumari visited Austria in April 2013. During her visit, the Minister met the Austrian Federal Minister of Education, Arts and Culture Claudia Schmied. Dr. Reinhold Lopatka, State Secretary in the Austrian Foreign Ministry led the delegation to India on 11-12 November 2013 to attend the 11th Asia-Europe Foreign Ministers' Meeting (ASEM-FMM) in New Delhi. Dr. Lopatka also called on Minister of State for External Affairs, Smt. Praneet Kaur during his visit.

Gen (retd.) V.K. Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs made a transit visit to Austria in September 2014 wherein he interacted with the Indian community in Vienna. MOS (VKS) visited Vienna again in November 2014 to attend the UN Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDC). Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Shri Dharmendhra Pradhan visited Vienna in June 2015 to attend the 6th OPEC seminar. During his visit, MOS (PNG) met with officials from the Austrian Ministry of Economy.

Austrian Federal Minister for Transport, Innovation and Technology, Ms. Doris Bures visited India from 1-4 October 2012. Austrian Federal Minister for Environment, Forestry, Agriculture and Water Management, Nikolaus Berlakovich visited India from 16-19 October 2012 to attend a meeting of Conference of State Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity held in Hyderabad. Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs, H.E. Vayalar Ravi, visited Austria from 3-4 February 2013 along with a 2-member delegation at an invitation from Austrian Minister for Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, H.E. Mr. Rudolf Hundstorfer. A Social Security Agreement was signed between India and Austria on 4 February 2013.

Minister of State (I/C) for Power, Coal, New & Renewable Energy and Mines, Shri. Piyush Goyal, visited Vienna in May 2017 to participate in the Vienna Energy Forum. He interacted with leading Austrian energy related companies, especially in the renewable energy sector. Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Shri Dharmendhra Pradhan visited Vienna in May 2017 for the second India-OPEC dialogue. During his visit, Shri Pradhan also interacted with leading companies in the Austrian energy sector. Sh. Pradhan led the Indian delegation to participate in the 7th OPEC International Seminar held in Vienna from 19-20 June 2018.

Parliamentary Level Exchanges – A Parliamentary delegation from India led by the Speaker Lok Sabha Sh. Om Birla and including Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha visited Vienna from 07-10 September 2021. They attended the Fifth World Conference of the Speakers of Parliament, held in Vienna from 6-8 September 2021

and co-hosted by the Austrian Parliament with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations (UN). It was followed by the First Global Parliamentary Summit on Counter Terrorism on 9 September. The Speaker had a bilateral meeting with the Speaker of Austrian National Council on issues of mutual cooperation, cultural and Parliamentary exchanges.

The Austrian Parliamentary Delegation led by the President of the Austrian National Council Mr. Wolfgang Sobotka, including President of the Federal Council Ms. Christine Schwarz-Fuchs, upon invitation of Lok Sabha Speaker visited India from 12-16 March 2022. The delegation had high level meetings with Lok Sabha Speaker, wherein they discussed situation in Ukraine, developments in Indo-Pacific, progress in digital domain, green growth and SDGs. They also met Vice President, EAM and the Governor of Telangana.

Several Parliamentarians from both sides have exchanged visits in the past and in recent times. Lok Sabha Speaker, Smt. Meira Kumar led a Parliamentary delegation during the visit to Austrian in 2009. President of National Council of Austrian Parliament Barbara Prammer visited in 2011 and also in 2012 to attend the Seventh meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament on the topic of 'Gender Aware Parliaments'. An Austria-India Parliamentary Friendship Group was constituted in the Austrian Parliament in 2013.

Institutional Mechanisms

The main institutional mechanism at governmental level between India and Austria are the Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) and the Joint Economic Commission (JEC). The 16th India & Austria Joint Economic Commission(JEC) held in Vienna on 12-13 June. The 7th round of Foreign Office Consultations were held in New Delhi on May 30, 2023. Talks covered areas of bilateral cooperation including trade, consular, skilling, migration, culture and people to people contacts. Both sides also discussed regional and multilateral issues including UNSC reforms, Ukraine issue and India's G20 presidency.

Bilateral Agreements

Bilateral agreements/MoUs in force include:

- (i) Air Services Agreement (October 1989); MoU on Air Services (amended and signed in June 1997)
- (ii) MoU between Ministry of Environment and Forests, India and Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family Affairs, Austria (January 1994)
- (iii) MoU between CII and Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKO) (November 1996); MoU between FICCI and WKO (October 2003)
- (iv) Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (November 1999)
- (v) Bilateral Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investments (November 1999)
- (vi) MoU on Infrastructure Cooperation in the field of Railways (May 2002)
- (vii) MoU for Infrastructure Cooperation in the Health Sector (February 2005)

- (viii) Agreement on Cooperation in the fields of Science and Technology (Nov 2007)
- (ix) MoU for cooperation in the field of Agriculture (September 2010)
- (x) MoU on scientific cooperation signed between Department of Science and Technology, Government of India and Austrian Science Fund (October 2011)
- (xi) MoU on cooperation in the field of Railways signed between Ministry of Railways of India and the Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology of Austria (October 2011).
- (xii) MoU on technology cooperation in the fields of Shipping and Ports (October 2012)
- (xiii) Social Security Agreement (February 2013)
- (xiv) Protocol amending the India-Austria Convention for Avoidance of Double Taxation (February 2017)
- (xv) MoU on cooperation between All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA), New Delhi and Medical University of Graz (September 2018)
- (xvi) MoU between Muziris Projects Limited, Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala and Institute of Conservation, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Austria (March 2020)
- (xvii) MoU on Technology Cooperation in Road Infrastructure Sector (December 2020)
- (xviii) MoU between ICCR and University of Vienna for short term Chair on India studies (May 2021).
- (xix) MoU on Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement (Signed during recent meeting of two FMs in Stockholm in May 2023)
- (xx) MoU on Joint Declaration on a Working Holiday (Signed during the visit of EAM in January 2023)
- (xxi) MoU on Gainful occupation for family members of Diplomatic staff (Signed during the visit of EAM in January 2023)
- (xxii) MoU on Exemption of visa requirements for diplomatic passports holders (Signed during recent meeting of two FMs in Stockholm in May 2023)
- (xxiii) MoU on Cultural Cooperation for the years 2022-26 (Signed during the visit of EAM in January 2023)

Economic Cooperation

Austria, one of the richest countries in the European Union, is an important link for India in its relationship with Europe, especially with countries of central and Eastern Europe. India-Austria economic and commercial cooperation constitutes an important dimension of the bilateral relationship. The two sides have taken steps to strengthen and deepen bilateral economic cooperation. The Indo-Austrian Joint Economic Commission (JEC) established in 1983 (15th session was held in New Delhi on 20th July 2017) and provides a forum for bilateral interaction between the governmental Ministries and Chambers of Commerce and Industry. There have been more than 200 collaborations, including 100 technical collaborations and 60 joint ventures between Indian and Austrian firms especially in the fields of steel, manufacturing technology, railway and transport, equipment and metallurgy.

Indo-Austria Bilateral Trade: The bilateral trade is balanced. According to the Statistik Austria, for 2021, Indian exports to Austria were USD 1.29 billion and imports were USD 1.18 billion. The total bilateral trade for this period was USD 2.47 billion.

After an initial slump in 2020 due to Covid-19, the trade levels bounced back in 2021 with an increase of around 20% over the 2020 levels. In 2022, the bilateral trade is USD 2.84 billion with an increase of 14.97% over the 2021 levels.

Indian key exports to Austria: Electronic Goods, Apparels, Textile, Footwear, Rubber articles, Vehicles & Railways parts, Electrical machinery and Mechanical appliances.

India's key imports from Austria: Machinery, Mechanical appliances, Railway parts, Iron and Steel etc.

Annual Trade Data (India- Austria)

Source: Statistik Austria

Year	Austria's Import from India (Billion US\$)	Austria's Export to India (Billion US\$)	Total Trade (Billion US\$)
2017	0.93	0.85	1.78
2018	1.08	1.06	2.14
2019	1.14	1.02	2.16
2020	1.06	0.99	2.05
2021	1.18	1.29	2.47
2022	1.61	1.23	2.84

Many Austrian companies are active in smart transportation and signalling systems, hydro-electric power plants, tunnelling, parts for steel plants, robotics, water purification/desalination. **The key Austrian investors in India include** - Plassner & Theurer {Railways track laying machines}, Andritz {machines for hydroelectric power plants}, AMS Semiconductors {semiconductors}, AT&S {chips for mobile phones}, AVL {vehicular parts and engine testing systems}, Aichelin {thermo-process plants for automotive and gear industry}, Wienerberger {bricks, roof tiles}, AGRANA J & F Holding GmbH {Fruit Processing}, Doka group {Formwork for Construction sector}, Compost Systems GmbH {Composting}, Biogest {Biogas plants}, Palfinger {hydraulic lifting, loading and handling systems}, Muenzer Bioindustrie {Waste based Biodiesel}, Doppelmayr {Cable Cars & ropeways}, Voestapline {High performance metals & steel}, Ebner Industrieofenbau {Industrial furnace}, Swarovski {Crystal jewellery, watches, accessories}. **The key Indian Investors in Austria include** - Wipro Technologies, Shilpa Medicare, VA Tecg Wabag Ltd, KTM-Bajaj Auto, RACL Geartech Ltd., Vasantha Tool Crafts Pvt. Ltd.

In December 2021, Indian Edutech company Byju's acquired an Austrian start-up Geogebra for about USD 100 million. Recently National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) signed a quadripartite agreement involving Development Bank of Austria for development of sewage infrastructure to stop the flow of sewerage into river Ganga from Kolkata metropolitan area. The tunnel project for the Atal Tunnel was awarded to a joint venture of AFCONS Infrastructure Limited, an Indian construction company of Shapoorji Pallonji Group, and STRABAG AG, Austria, in September 2009. The tunnel was rated in February 2022, as the 'World's Longest Highway Tunnel above 10,000 Feet'.

Crime and Security – On October 21 2022, at the 90th General Assembly of INTERPOL held in New Delhi, India handed over the INTERPOL flag to Austria which would be organizing 91st ITERPOL General Assembly in Vienna in 2023.

Space: Austria's first two satellites TUGSAT-1/BRITE and UniBRITE were launched by India's PSLV-C20 from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota on 25 February 2013. The two satellites are developed in collaboration with the Institute of Communication Networks and Satellite Communications (IKS) at the Technical University of Graz (TUG), Institute for Astronomy of the University of Vienna, and the Space Flight Lab (SFL) at the University of Toronto Institute Of Aerospace Studies (UTIAS).

Culture: The Indo-Austrian cultural relations have a long tradition dating back to 16th century when Balthasar Springer traveled from Tyrol in 1505 to India along with the third Portuguese fleet. The Austrian tradition of Indology began in a period renowned for its distinguished philologist and archaeologist between 1825-1920. The teaching of Sanskrit at Vienna University started in 1845 and a high point was reached in 1880 with the foundation of an independent chair for Indology. Following a brief interruption between 1938-1955, the Chair became an independent department, now known as Institute for South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies at University of Vienna.

The visit of India's philosopher-poet and Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore twice to Vienna – in 1921 and 1926 was one of the crucial bridges of cultural and intellectual exchange between India and Austria. Gurudev's famous lecture in 1921 'The religion of the forest', portrayed the value of getting closer to nature and learning union and compassion.

Reputed artists of India and Austria have performed in each others countries for the past several decades. These include - Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Zakir Hussain, Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, Anushka Shankar. Maestro Zubin Mehta continues to be associated with Vienna Philharmonic and has given New Year performances at the famous Music Verein, including the concert in September 2022. Of late, Bollywood films have begun to be screened at top cineplexes in Vienna. A number of Bollywood films are being filmed in Austria, given its scenic locales.

There is a lot of interest in contemporary Indian literature and theater. Ayurveda, the Indian traditional system of medicine has been widely acknowledged and practiced in Austria. The holistic approach of Yoga in health care and well being has led many

Austrians to embrace Yoga and is testified by the presence of many Yoga schools in Vienna and other Austrian cities. The Mission organizes every year events to observe the International Day of Yoga across Austria to enhance awareness about the benefits accruing from Yoga. Mission organized with Medical University Graz and AYUSH, an Ayurveda, Yoga & Meditation Conference in Graz in November 2022 attended by experts from all over Europe and beyond.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for establishment a Short –Term Chair of Indian Studies at the University of Vienna was signed between the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and University of Vienna in February 2011 and was renewed in 2016. The MoU was signed again in May 2021. An MoU on Cultural Cooperation was signed in February 2016 and was renewed during the EAM's visit in January 2023. Both sides are ready to renew this MoU. The National Museum Institute, New Delhi and the University of Applied Arts, Vienna has an on going cooperation in the field of conservation.

Indian community: There are an estimated over 31,000 Indians (majority from Kerala and Punjab) living in Austria. The Indian diaspora mainly consists of professionals working primarily in the Health Care sector and in the multilateral UN bodies, businessmen and self-employed self-employed individuals. They are roughly evenly divided between NRIs and PIOs. There are over 500 Indian students pursuing their higher education in Austria and the number is set to rise.

Useful Resources

1. Embassy website: www.eoivienna.gov.in
2. Embassy Facebook: www.facebook.com/IndiaInAustria
3. Embassy Twitter handle: @IndiainAustria
4. Embassy Commercial Newsletter: www.indianembassy.at/newsletter.php
5. Embassy Cultural Newsletter: www.indianembassy.at/spectrums.php

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