

## **India-Serbia Bilateral Relations**

### Political Relations

India and Yugoslavia traditionally enjoyed deep friendship as co-founders of the Non-Aligned Movement. The deep bond of friendship continued in subsequent decades resulting in close and friendly ties between India and Serbia. India gives principled support to territorial integrity and sovereignty of Serbia and has not recognized Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by Kosovo. Serbia has been supportive of election of Indian candidates in international fora. India and Serbia also share common views on many major global issues.

2. Most recently, Smt. Meenakshi Lekhi, MOS for External Affairs visited Serbia during 11-12 October 2021. She led the Indian delegation as Special Envoy of the Prime Minister at the high level commemorative meeting to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement held at Belgrade. In a first in three decades, Vice President paid an official visit to Serbia during 14-16 September 2018 and met with President Aleksandar Vucic, Prime Minister Ana Brnabic and Ms. Maja Gojkovic, Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia. Both sides expressed commitment to further build on long-standing friendly ties and to enhance cooperation in the areas of priority such as agriculture, food processing, defence manufacturing, S&T, IT, infrastructure, tourism and pharmaceuticals. The Vice President addressed the special session of the National Assembly of Serbia. On the occasion of 70th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations, Serbia Post and Department of Post of India jointly released commemorative stamps on Serbian scientist and inventor, Nikola Tesla and Swami Vivekananda. Vice President and Serbian President addressed the India-Serbia Business Forum where large number of Serbian companies and Indian business delegation took part. At the forum, bilateral cooperation in the area of agriculture, pharmacy, IT industry, tourism, education, etc, were discussed. Two agreements were signed during the visit : (a) Revised Air Services Agreement (b) Agreement on Cooperation in Plant Protection and Plant Quarantine.

3. External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Serbia on 7-9 November 2019 and met the Serbian President and many other dignitaries including Speaker of National Assembly of Serbia; Defence Minister; First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. In addition, EAM also met members of Indian community and Friends of India in Serbia (Serbians with strong business and cultural links with India). Cooperation in international forums, regular exchange of high level visits between India and Serbia, and further development of relations in economic and trade areas such as IT, Agriculture, Tourism, film production, Pharmaceuticals and Defence industry were identified as areas of cooperation. Agreement on Defence Cooperation between India and Serbia was signed during the visit. A full-page interview of EAM was also published in leading Serbian Politika. Earlier, Speaker, Lok Sabha led a parliamentary delegation to participate

in 141st Assembly of Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Belgrade on 12-18 October 2019. On the sidelines of the IPU Assembly, Speaker met Speaker of Serbian National Assembly, and Prime Minister of Serbia. Dr. Jitendra Singh, MOS (PMO) visited Serbia from 12-16 October, 2016 and met PM Aleksandar Vucic, Speaker Maja Gojkovic, First DPM & FM Ivica Dacic, DPM and Minister of Trade, Tourism & Telecommunications, Rasim Ljajic and Minister of Agriculture & Environmental Protection Branislav Nedimovic. MOU on Cooperation in the field of IT & Electronics was signed during the visit. Raksha Mantri Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman met Serbia's Defence Minister Mr. Aleksandar Vulin in April 2018 on the sidelines of the VII Moscow Conference of International Security (MCIS 2018) to discuss the prospects of bilateral defence cooperation.

4. From the Serbian side, Interior Minister Mr. Aleksandar Vulin visited New Delhi during 18-21 October 2022 and led the Serbian delegation to the 90<sup>th</sup> session of the INTERPOL General Assembly, organized by the CBI in New Delhi. Foreign Minister of Serbia Mr. Nikola Selakovic visited India in September 2021. President Aleksandar Vucic, as the then Prime Minister, visited India from 9-12 January, 2017 to attend the Vibrant Gujarat Summit where he held delegation level talks with the Hon'ble Prime Minister. Among other things, both sides agreed on the need to promote economic cooperation, especially in food production, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, defence industry, health, tourism and IT. Addressing the businesses in Ahmedabad and Mumbai, Mr. Vucic invited Indian investors and promised to provide the best possible business conditions for Indian companies in Serbia. First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Serbia Ivica Dacic visited India in May 2018 at EAM's invitation and held bilateral talks on various topics of mutual interest. He also called on the Vice President. A new comprehensive bilateral agreement on cooperation in the fields of culture, arts, youth, sports and mass media was signed. Mr. Branislav Nedimovic, Serbian Minister for Agriculture, Forestry & Water Management led a delegation including agro processing companies to World Food India, New Delhi (3-5 November 2017) where Serbian companies exhibited frozen fruits, confectionery, dried fruits, etc.

5. A Protocol on Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) between India and Yugoslavia was signed in June 1995. Next round of FOC is likely to be held in 2023.

6. Agreements : Existing agreements include : (i) Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (DTAC) [2006] (ii) Trade Agreement (MFN status) [2006] (iii) Tourism Agreement [2004] (iv) MOU on Agricultural Cooperation [2009] (v) MOU on Cooperation in Science and Technology [2004] (vi) MOU on IT & Electronics [October 2016] (vii) MOU on Archives (Oct 2017) (viii) MOU on Cooperation in Culture, Arts, Youth, Sports and Mass Media (2018) (ix) Revised Air Services Agreement [2018] (x) Agreement on Plant Quarantine and Plant Protection (2018) (xi) Agreement of Defence Cooperation ( November 2019) (xii) MOU between Prasar Bharti & PINK TV Serbia (October 2022)

7. Training: The ITEC Programme was extended to Serbia in 2008 and since then 167 Serbian ITEC trainees have undergone training in India including in IT, telecommunications, WTO, English language, SMEs, management, finance, textiles, rural development, environment, yoga, etc. Serbia has been availing of Training of Diplomats under PCFD and so far 13 Serbian diplomats have undertaken this training. Serbian military officers are also availing UN Peacekeeping training courses in India.

8. Visa: Serbia unilaterally abolished visas for 30 days' stay in a year for Indian nationals holding ordinary passports w.e.f. 2nd September 2017. Number of Indian tourists visiting Serbia have increased substantially since then. Serbian nationals are increasingly using e-visa facility to enter India.

### Economic & Commercial Relations

9. Total bilateral trade for the period January-September 2022 amounted to 247.2 million US Dollars, which represents an increase of 32.5% compared to the 186.6 million US Dollars for the same period of 2021. India's exports to Serbia for the period January – September 2022 amounted to 233.4 million US Dollars, an increase of 38.6% compared to the 168.4 million US Dollars for the same period of 2021. Export of following items registered increase: i) Aluminium, unwrought, not alloyed (from 5.4 million USD to 32.0 million USD), ii) Polyethylene terephthalate, in primary forms (from 2.4 million USD to 4.7 million USD), iii) Glazed ceramic flags and paving, hearth or wall tiles, glazed ceramic mosaic cubes and the like (from 4.1 million USD to 4.8 million USD), iv) Wheeled tractors, agricultural and forestry (from 2.7 million USD to 4.6 million USD), v) Ferro-manganese containing by weight more than 2% of carbon (from 2.4 million USD to 10.2 million USD), vi) Ferro-silico-manganese (from 3.7 million USD to 5.2 million USD). Also, there are two new items compared with same period last year in top 10 items of export to Serbia: i) Telephones for cellular networks or for other wireless networks (6.3 million USD), and ii) Polystyrene other, in primary forms (3.6 million USD). Export of following registered decline: i) Parts for the pumps, compressors, fans and hoods of subgroups 743.1 and 743.4 (from 5.2 million USD to 4.2 million USD), ii) Medicaments, n.e.s., put up for retail sale (from 4.6 million USD to 3.9 million USD).

10. Major Indian investments and present collaboration of Indian & Serbian companies are : Embassy Group has developed an IT Park in Indjija ; Chennai based TAFE exporting tractors to Serbia for over six decades acquired strategic asset of Serbian IMT ; CG Group India has invested Euro 9m in a noodle factory in Ruma; Mahindra and Sonalika have assembly lines through local partners; A UAE-based Indian company Mulk Holdings (Alubond Europe) has invested USD 20m in Serbia for manufacturing aluminum panels; and Himalaya Herbals, Panacea Biotec, HiMedia Laboratories, etc have local representatives. In

November 2021, Motherson Sumi of India opened its second factory in Serbia. New facility produces parts for the interiors of luxury cars such as Porsche, Audi and BMW etc. Euro 38 million have been invested. The other Serbian facility PKC Wiring Systems, a Finnish company was acquired by Motherson in 2017. Both companies put together have investment of about Euro 65 million and provide employment to about 4500 people. In 2022, PKC Wiring Systems doo, a member of the international Motherson Group, opened a part factory where 900 people would be employed in Pozarevac. This is the company's third facility in Serbia – it employs 3,826 workers in the factory in Smederevo and 286 in Cuprija.

11. Joint Economic Committee (JEC): The India-Serbia JEC was established under the Agreement on Trade & Economic Cooperation signed on 7<sup>th</sup> Feb 2006. Three such meetings have been held so far. Next meeting is likely to be held in 2023.

### Cultural Relations

12. Serbian people have lot of interest in Indian culture and Mission has been taking initiatives to enhance and deepen its activities. There is also a lot of interest in Serbia on Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore visited Serbia in 1926 and gave two lectures in the Belgrade University. Serbia has two streets named after Mahatma Gandhi and Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru with the busts of the two leaders. The streets were named in 1970s and the busts of the leaders installed in late 1990s (Pt. Nehru) & 2007 (Mahatma Gandhi), on the occasion of declaration of 2<sup>nd</sup> October as the International Day of Non-violence. Serbia co-sponsored India's Resolutions at UN for declaring October 2 as International Day of Non-violence and June 21 as International Day of Yoga.

13. Serbia participated very actively in celebrating 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The Government of Serbia hosted Mahatma Gandhi's granddaughter Smt Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee for her visit to Serbia in April 2019. Serbian government translated her book "Reflection of an Extraordinary Era" into Serbian language and published it in Serbia. Serbia Post released a commemorative stamp on Mahatma Gandhi. City of Belgrade co-organized tree plantation and cycling events. Twelve Serbian schools across the country hosted Ambassador of a talk on Gandhiji and his ideals. In commemoration of 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Embassy of India, in association of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), organized a *Bharatnatyam* dance performance in Belgrade on 5 August 2019.

14. The Embassy launched Sanskrit learning app "Little Guru" in April 2021. As part of India @ 75 celebrations, a Talk on Tagore's visit (in 1926) to Belgrade was organized at the University of Belgrade in May 2021. Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi, in his monthly address (Mann in Baat) to the nation on 26.12.2021, lauded

the efforts of Serbian author Dr. Momir Nikic who had recently written a Sanskrit-Serbian dictionary.

15. On behalf of the Prasar Bharati, the Ambassador of India Shri Sanjiv Kohli signed an MoU with the PINK TV Serbia in October 2022 for mutual cooperation between the two media organizations.

16. Yoga, Ayurveda and Homeopathy are recognized in Serbian law. International Day of Yoga (IDY) has been celebrated every year in the major cities of Serbia. Most recently, the Embassy celebrated the 8<sup>th</sup> International Day of Yoga on 18 June 2022 under the Victor Monument at Historical Kalemegdan Fortress overlooking the confluence of the rivers Danube and Sava. The Vidya Yoga, Mohanji Foundation and Isha Foundation partnered the Embassy in this celebration. Overall, the IDY 2022 was celebrated across Serbia at 17 locations in 16 cities. More than 1000 Yoga enthusiasts participated in these events.

17. Indian film shootings have commenced in Serbia. First India-Serbia joint production 'Dev Bhoomi' by renowned Serbian Director Goran Paskaljevic was shot in Uttarakhand with Indian starcast. Shooting of Indian films in Serbia has a new trend in recent years and Serbia has emerged as a new major film destination for Indian film makers.

18. Indian community in Serbia is quite small, numbering around 200-300 and there is no Indian association.

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