

India - Italy Relations

India and Italy are ancient civilizations but young states (Italy having been reunified only in 1861). The classical languages, Sanskrit and Latin both belong to the Indo-European language family. Peoples of these two ancient civilizations have known, interacted and traded with each other for over 2000 years. Italian port cities were important trading posts on the spice route. The Venetian merchant Marco Polo, during his travels to the east, also traveled to India in the 13th century and wrote about his experiences. Indian troops, serving with the British Indian Army, were active in Italy during the World War II. These included the Rajputana Rifles and Gurkha Rifles. The 10th Indian Division took part in the East African Allied campaign against the Italians in Somaliland and Abyssinia.

Political Relations:

Political relations between India and Italy were established in 1947. The two countries enjoy cordial relationship. There has been a regular exchange of visits at political and official levels between both countries. From the Indian side, at the level of Head of State/Government, the visit (s) date back to 1953 & 1955 when Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru visited Italy, Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi in November 1981; President Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma in October 1996; Prime Minister Shri H.D. Deve Gowda in November 1996; Prime Minister Shri I.K. Gujral in September 1997; Prime Minister Shri A.B. Vajpayee in June 2000; and Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in July 2009. From the Italian side, the first visit at the level of Head of State/Government took place in 1988 when Prime Minister Mr. Giovanni Goria visited India. This was followed by President Dr. Oscar Luigi Scalfaro in Feb 1995; Prime Minister Prof. Romano Prodi in Jan 1998; President Mr. Carlo Azeglio Ciampi in Feb 2005; and Prime Minister Mr. Romano Prodi in Feb 2007. Both countries regularly hold an institutionalized Senior Officials Dialogue (Foreign Office Consultations). An Italy-India Parliamentary Friendship Association was established in the IPU Italy Chapter in 2004. Year 2011 was marked by visit of then EAM Shri SM Krishna to Italy to participate in the 150th anniversary celebrations of Italy's unification. The same year MOS (External Affairs) also visited Italy to meet Indian Business community and had Bilateral Talks with Italian counterpart. In 2012, Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Terzi visited India and held bilateral discussions with EAM and CIM. Union Home Minister, Shri Sushil kumar Shinde visited Rome from 4-5 November 2012 to participate in the triennial Interpol Ministerial Meeting.

Economic Relations:

Italy is among India's top 5 trading partners in the EU. The balance of trade has been in India's favour since the early eighties. The bilateral trade witnessed a strong growth till 2007, before the world-wide recession of 2008 led to a marked slowdown in Italian economy, which had an adverse impact on the bilateral trade. In 2011-12, the bilateral trade stood at € 8.52 billion registering an increase of 18% *vis-à-vis* 2010-11 and owing primarily to the global economic recovery. However, in 2012-13 the total bilateral trade has decreased to € 7.09 billion due

to the onset of a severe economic recession in Italy coupled with the economic austerity and reform programme initiated by the Italian government in 2012. In 2014-15, the total trade was of US\$9 billion with a negative growth of 1.12%. Main items of Indian exports to Italy are ready-made garments, leather, iron ore, motor vehicles, textiles, chemicals, gems & jewellery. Main items of import from Italy are general and special purpose machinery, machine tools, metallurgical products, and engineering items. Around 140 large Italian companies are active in India. Some of the major Italian companies that have invested in India are FIAT Auto, Heinz Italia, FIOIA, Italcementi, Necchi Compressori, Perfetti, Lavazza, Fata Hunter Engineering, ENI, SAI India, Isagro (Asia) Agrochemicals, Piaggio, and Impreglio, SEA Deutzfahr Group, Finmeccanica SpA, Ferrero, Salini etc. Indian companies present in Italy are in sectors such as IT, electronics, pharmaceuticals, automobile, textile and engineering. The prominent Indian companies operating in Italy include Tata, TCS, Wipro, Engineers India Limited, L&T, Mahindra & Mahindra, Ranbaxy, Raymonds etc. SBI has a representative office in Milan. Six Italian banks have representation in India. Top sectors attracting FDI inflows from Italy are Automobile Industry/Transportation, Food Processing, Metallurgical Industry, Textiles, Electrical Equipment and Others. The Joint Economic Commission is an institutional mechanism chaired by the respective Commerce Ministers of both countries. Under the JEC, there are Joint Working Groups in the following areas: Infrastructure, Tourism, Railways, Food Processing, Renewable Energy, Information Technology and Agriculture. The 18th session of the JEC was held in New Delhi in December 2009. In June, 2014, Air India, National Carrier of India started connecting Rome and Milan of Italy with New Delhi giving opportunity to both tourists and business people from India and Italy to visit each other country for both tourism and business purposes.

Cultural Exchange, Scientific Co-operation etc.:

The agreement for cultural cooperation was signed in 1976. It includes the Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) between Italy and India which entails exchange of students in language programmes as well as other academic courses. There are around 10 Universities/higher education institutions in Italy with highly qualified faculties which conduct courses in Indian art, history and languages. Many of these institutions teach Hindi and Sanskrit to Italian students. An ICCR Chair on Modern Indian History was also established in September 2011 in 'La Sapienza' University in Rome. An Agreement on S&T Co-operation exists since 1978. The Agreement envisages three yearly action plans under which a maximum of thirty joint research projects can be undertaken. Some of the prime areas of joint research are Electronics, Biotechnology, Design Engineering Automotive Technologies, Energy, etc. An Agreement for Audio-visual cooperation was signed between the two countries in 2005. An 'Indological Conference' was organized by the Mission in collaboration with the academic institutions in the prestigious Museum of Oriental Art (MNAO) in March 2014. The First International Day of Yoga on June 21st 2015 was celebrated enthusiastically in Italy.

Indian Community:

The Indian community in Italy is the second largest community of Indians in Europe after UK. As per the latest Italian official estimates, more than 1,60,000 Indian Nationals are resident in Italy. As first generation migrants, majority of them are engaged in economic sectors such as agriculture, dairy farming, leather industry, construction works and in service industry. A significant proportion of the Indian diaspora is concentrated in the northern Italy regions like Lombardia, Piemonte, Veneto and Emilia Romagna regions, Central Italy like Florence, Rome and Southern Italy like Campania, Puglia and Calabria.

Useful Resources:

Embassy of India, Rome website:
<http://www.indianembassyrome.in/>

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