

## 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 for a. India and Serbia also share common views on many major global issues.

2. While many ministerial visits have been exchanged since 2000, 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 70<sup>th</sup> 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 visited Serbia on 7-9 November 2019 and met the following dignitaries in Serbia: Speaker of National Assembly of Serbia; Defence Minister; First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister; and President. 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 141<sup>st</sup> 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, President Aleksandar Vucic visited India from 9-12 January, 2017 in his capacity as PM to attend the Vibrant Gujarat Summit where he held delegation level talks with PM Modi. 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. Minister Nedimovic met with Shri Radha Mohan Singh, Union Minister of Agriculture who suggested exports of tropical fruits such as mango, pineapple, banana, papaya etc. Cooperation in food processing was discussed with Union FPI Minister Smt. Harsimrat Kaur Badal.

5. A Protocol on Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) between India and Yugoslavia was signed in June 1995. The 1<sup>st</sup> round of FOCs was held in Belgrade during Secretary (West)'s visit to Belgrade in February 1998. The 2<sup>nd</sup> round was held after a gap of three years in March 2001, also in Belgrade during the visit of Secretary (West). The 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting took place two years later in Jan-Feb 2003 when Secretary (EAA) accompanied by JS (CE) visited Belgrade. The 4<sup>th</sup> round of FOC with Serbia & Montenegro was held in New Delhi in December 2004 while the 5<sup>th</sup> round was held in Belgrade in July 2009. The 6<sup>th</sup> meeting was held in November 2010 in New Delhi. The 7<sup>th</sup> round of FOC was held in July 2012 during the visit of Smt. BB Harrison, AS(CE) where the two sides stressed on more political level exchanges and reactivating the Joint Economic Committee. Next FoCs are likely to be held in New Delhi after the meeting of Joint Economic Committee this year.

6. Agreements : Existing agreements include : (i) Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA) [2003] - BIPPA would stand terminated on 22 March 2020 and New Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) is under negotiation (ii) Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (DTAC) [2006] (iii) Trade Agreement (MFN status) [2006] (iv) Tourism Agreement [2004] (v) MOU on Agricultural Cooperation [2009] (vi) MOU on Cooperation in Science and Technology [2004] (vii) MOU on IT & Electronics [October 2016] (viii) MOU on Archives (Oct 2017) (ix) MOU on Cooperation in Culture, Arts, Youth, Sports and Mass Media (2018) (x) Revised Air Services Agreement [2018] (xi) Agreement on Plant Quarantine and Plant Protection (2018) (xii) Agreement of Defence Cooperation ( November 2019). All working group meetings have been held including Agriculture Joint Commission (Nov 2016), Joint Economic Committee (2017), Joint Committee on S&T (2016 & 2017) and JWG on IT & Electronics (Oct 2017).

7. Training: The ITEC Programme was extended to Serbia in 2008 and since then 160 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 9 Serbian diplomats have undertaken this training. Serbian military officers are also availing UN Peacekeeping training courses in India.

8. Visas: Serbia unilaterally abolished visas for 30 days' stay in a year for Indian nationals holding ordinary passports w.e.f. 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2017. Number of Indian tourists visiting Serbia have increased substantially since then. Number of Indian tourists visiting Serbia in 2018 and 2019 are 7,683 and 9497 respectively. Serbian nationals are increasingly using e-visa facility; 2186 Serbians visited India for business, tourism and other purposes during 2019.

### **Economic & Commercial Relations**

9. Bilateral trade at US\$ 198.5 m in 2017 registered an increase of 39% as compared to 2016 with Indian exports worth US\$ 187.6 m and imports US\$ 10.9 m. Bilateral trade increased further by 8.2% in 2018 to reach US\$ 214.8 million with Indian exports of US\$ 202.6 million. More than 200 business visas were issued in 2018 to Serbian companies to provide business solutions to India companies. Recent bilateral trade figures are given below (in US\$ Million):

*Source: Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia*

<b>In US\$ million</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
India's exports	153.6	173.9	139.9	140.0	133.3	187.6	202.6
India's imports	4.9	8.7	8.7	5.6	9.4	10.9	12.2
<b>Total trade</b>	<b>158.5</b>	<b>182.6</b>	<b>148.6</b>	<b>145.6</b>	<b>142.7</b>	<b>198.5</b>	<b>214.8</b>

10. Major Indian investments and present collaboration of Indian & Serbian companies are : Embassy Group has developed an IT Park in Indjija (USD 20m); Chennai based TAFE exporting tractors to Serbia for over six

decades acquired strategic asset of Serbian IMT (April 2018) for EUR 600,000; CG Group India has invested Euro 9 m in a noodle factory in Ruma; Mahindra and Sonalika have assembly lines through local partners; A UAE-based Indian companies Mulk Holdings (Alubond Europe) has invested USD 20 m in Serbia for manufacturing aluminum panels; and Himalaya Herbals, Panacea Biotec, HiMedia Laboratories, etc have local representatives.

11. Joint Economic Committee: The India-Serbia JEC was established under the Agreement on Trade & Economic Cooperation signed on 7th Feb 2006. The first Meeting of the JEC was held in New Delhi on 2nd April 2008 while the 2nd meeting was held via DVC on 9th October 2014. The 3rd meeting of the JEC was again held through video conferencing on 10th March 2017 where both sides expressed readiness to find ways and means for further development of bilateral economic cooperation. The 4th meeting of the JEC scheduled to be held on 9 October 2019 through video conferencing was postponed due to technical difficulties faced by the Serbian side. Meeting is likely to be held at mutually convenient date this year.

12. A business delegation of 20 EEPIC member Indian engineering companies participated in the 86th International Agricultural Fair held from 11-17 May 2019 at the Novi Sad Fair. Mahindra & Mahindra, Sonalika and TAFE of India also participated in the Fair. They displayed their tractors at the Fair. Mahindra & Mahindra launched four new products. TAFE, after acquiring Serbian company IMT, displayed a range of IMT tractors. EEPIC India representative had separate meetings at Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Vojvodina Chamber of Commerce. Additionally, the Embassy of India in Belgrade also set up a pavilion in the Fair to promote export of agricultural machinery from Punjab, the leading manufacturer of agriculture machinery. A brochure on agricultural machinery sector of Punjab and catalogs of large number of Punjab based companies were prepared in consultation with EEPIC and displayed and distributed during the exhibition.

### **Cultural Relations**

13. 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 02<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.

14. Serbia participated very actively in celebrating 150<sup>th</sup> 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.

15. In commemoration of 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Embassy of India in Belgrade, in association of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), organized a Bharatnatyam dance performance in Belgrade on 5 August 2019. Nine-member dance troupe from Chennai-based Bharata Kalanjali, led by Shri Satyajit Dhananjayan, performed the dance under the theme "Gandhi" before a packed auditorium with more than 500 audience. Senior government officials, diplomatic community, member of Indian community, members from media and a large number of Serbian watched the performance. Dance performance received good media coverage. Embassy organized ICCR sponsored Exhibition "Rumals of Chamba: Embroidered Expressions of Pahari Women" at the historical building of National Assembly of Serbia from 01-07 November 2018. The exhibition was based on explorations, revivals and innovations using diverse stitches and textures in Pahari (hills) embroidery.

16. Yoga, Ayurveda and Homeopathy are recognized in Serbian law. Serbians take spontaneous interest in Yoga. International Day of Yoga in 2019 was celebrated in front of iconic National Assembly of Serbia in Belgrade. Madam Tamara Vucic, wife of Serbian President participated in the celebrations. 14 cities in Serbia celebrated IDY 2019.

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: Only a handful of NRIs/PIOs and no Indian association.

***February 2020***