

## **India - Bulgaria Relations**

### **Bilateral Political Relations**

The relations between India and Bulgaria are longstanding, warm and friendly. The two countries which happen to be ancient civilizations are proud of their glorious cultural heritage. People to people contacts and cultural links between the two countries pre-date the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1954 and there are traces of contacts between the peoples of the two countries as early as the 8th Century AD.

Bilateral high-level visits include that by Vice-President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1954), PM Indira Gandhi (1967), President V.V. Giri (1976), President Sanjiva Reddy (1980), PM Indira Gandhi (1981), Vice President R. Venkataraman (1985), President S. D. Sharma (1994), Vice President Krishan Kant (2000) and President Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam (2003). From the Bulgarian side, their Presidents visited India in 1976, 1983 and 1998, and Prime Ministers in 1974 and 1980 and 2007.

Despite political changes witnessed by the two countries in the last six decades, India and Bulgaria, as two independent nation-States have developed a close, cordial and multi-dimensional relationship. The multi-faceted relationship has flourished based on continuity and mutual understanding and has progressively evolved into a binding friendship.

### **Important Bilateral Treaties and Agreements**

The two countries have signed agreements on Tourism; Avoidance of Double Taxation; Combating Organized Crime, International Terrorism and Illicit Trafficking in Narcotics and Psychotropic substances; Protocol on Foreign Office Consultations; Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement; Air Services Agreement; Defence Cooperation; Science and Technology; Extradition; Cooperation in Youth Affairs and Sports; Information Technologies; Economic Cooperation; Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters; Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Civil and Commercial Matters; Treaty on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons; Protocol for Amending the Agreement for the Promotion and Protection of Investment; Protocol of Intent on Labour Relations; Employment and Social Security; Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Development; abolition of visa requirement for holders of Diplomatic and Official Passports; Programme of Cooperation in the field of Science & Technology and Cooperation in the field of Health and Medicine.

### **Bilateral Commercial and Economic Relations**

Trade and investment relations between the two countries, though of modest level, have been on rise since last few years.

Bilateral trade between two countries, after worldwide economic recession, has recovered rapidly. However, there is still considerable untapped potential keeping in view Bulgaria's geo-strategic location, EU membership and India's strong economic growth and profile. Our trade with Bulgaria still reflects the traditional export basket of India which is not reflective of the true export profile of India of today. Mutually beneficial opportunities exist for investment in

agriculture, food processing, IT, Pharmaceutical, manufacturing, tourism and construction.

Indian firm "Elder Pharmaceuticals" acquired a majority stake in a pharmaceutical company "Bio-meda" in Plovdiv in 2007. In 2014, the first major Bulgarian investment in India in line with the new campaign "Make in India" was done by the Bulgarian company Prime Petroleum for packaging bitumen in Bhiwandi, Maharashtra.

Bilateral trade during January-October 2014 was US \$ 171.3 million [Bulgarian exports US \$ 51.9 million and imports US \$ 119.4 million] compared to total trade of \$ 207.6 million [Bulgarian exports US \$ 43.5 million and imports US \$ 164.5 million] in 2013. Between 2012 and 2013, the trade volume grew by almost 50% while it has grown manifold from US \$ 15.8 Million in 2000 to US \$ 207.6 Million in 2013.

There is a lot of scope for expanding the current bilateral trade basket as well as for enhancing the quantum in the existing items of export and import.

Major items of Indian Exports to Bulgaria are Organic chemicals; unmanufactured tobacco; medicaments; electric parts; wool; paving blocks, slabs, bricks; polymers of propylene; ferro-alloys.

Major items of Bulgarian Exports to India are Laboratory instruments & apparatus; animal feeding preparations; kraft paper; radio-broadcasting apparatus; aluminium waste & scrap; medicaments; machinery for working rubber or plastics; copper waste & scrap; engines & motors.

### **Cultural Relations and people to people contacts**

While the interest of Bulgaria in India existed since many centuries, during the 19th century, the Bulgarian revolutionary Georgi Rakovsky expressed support and sympathy for the people of India on the occasion of the India's First War of Independence in 1857.

Indian culture has enjoyed considerable popularity in Bulgaria right from the days of Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Bulgaria in 1926 which was an important milestone in developing literary relationship between the two countries. Indian classics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Vedas, Upanishadas, Bhagvat Gita and Panchatantra as also the modern authors like Prem Chand, Mulk Raj Anand and Amrita Pritam are very popular among Bulgarians. Some of the eminent Bulgarian poets like Hristo Botev, Hristo Smyrensky and Nikola Vaptsarov have also been widely translated to Indian languages.

Existence of many Yoga centres, daily telecast of Hindi serials dubbed in Bulgarian, popularity of Indian cuisine, music and dance and increasing tourist traffic are pointers to the keen interest which Bulgarians have in Yoga, Ayurveda, Bollywood films and spiritual heritage of India.

Sofia University has an Indology department within its Centre for Eastern Languages and Cultures. This department, which completed 30 years of its establishment in 2013, plays an important role in spreading awareness about Indian languages, philosophy, history and culture in Bulgaria. It has been conducting courses at graduation and post-graduation levels and some

students from this department go to the *Kendriya Hindi Sansthan* in Agra to learn Hindi every year.

Four India-related friendship / cultural societies - Friends of India Club, East-West Indological Foundation, UNESCO Club of Varna and Namaste Bulgaria- are involved in spread and propagation of Indian culture with support from the Indian Embassy. Some other factors which contribute to the two countries' goodwill and friendship are - visiting chairs of Hindi at Indology Department of Sofia University and of Bulgarian at Delhi University; Indira Gandhi High School in Sofia; Indira Gandhi Kindergarten in Pravetz and Georgi Stoikov Rakovsky Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya in Delhi.

Government of India offers scholarships under ITEC programme to Bulgarian nationals. Bulgarian Diplomats have also been attending the Professional Courses for Foreign Diplomats organised by the Foreign Service Institute.

### **Indian Community**

Indian community in Bulgaria is expected to be around 250 persons. A significant component of the Indian community is of students studying medicine in the Medical faculties of Universities of Sofia, Pleven, Plovdiv and Stara Zagora. Some Indians are engaged in trading, restaurants, private employment etc. There are some representatives of IT companies, who have come on temporary deputations for developing software for banks and multi-national companies.

### **Air - Links with India**

There are no direct air-links between India and Bulgaria. Indirect connections are through Vienna, Frankfurt, London, Moscow, Istanbul and Doha.

### **Schengen visa holders**

Bulgarian government took a decision on 25 January, 2012 that until Bulgaria's full accession to the Schengen Area, the country will unilaterally apply visa-free regulations for holders of valid Schengen visas. According to the decision, holders of **valid**, multiple entry, Schengen visas may enter and stay in Bulgaria for a period of up to three months within each six-month period from the date of the first entry in this country without having a Bulgarian visa.  Holders of single-entry Schengen visas and those whose Schengen visas have been utilized completely are not allowed to enter Bulgaria.

### **Useful Resources**

Embassy of India, Sofia website:

<http://www.indembsofia.org>

Embassy of India, Sofia Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/indianembassy.sofia>

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