

India - Albania Relations

India and Albania established diplomatic relations in 1956. The Marxist-Leninist regime presided over by Enver Hoxha during 1946-1985 adopted rigid and isolationist positions throughout its existence. As Albania was closely aligned ideologically with China during the Sino-Soviet dispute from 1961 onwards, it took harsh and partisan positions on the India-China conflict as well. The stridency of Albanian statements led inevitably to the suspension of diplomatic contacts which were resumed only after the death of Enver Hoxha in 1985. The Government of India responded positively to feelers sent out by Albania in 1986-87 and relations were resumed in 1990 with concurrent accreditation from Bucharest. India also had a Honorary Consul in Tirana since 2004. Albania had a Mission in New Delhi since early 2008 and the first Albanian Ambassador to India presented his credentials to the President in October 2010. The Mission was, however, closed down in 2014 along with Missions in some other Asian countries for economic reasons. Albania has two Honorary Consuls, one in Mumbai (Mr. Vikram Munshi) and the other in Delhi (Mr. Devinder Pal Singh).

Despite the long hiatus in bilateral relations, present-day India-Albania relations are positive and friendly and such contacts as have taken place since the formal restoration of relations in the 1990s have been forward-looking on most counts. Albania has taken note of India's rapid growth in the past few years, and its manifest achievements in high-tech and services industries. The propensity of Indian industry and business majors to invest abroad has not escaped Albanian attention. There seems to be a consensus in the present and immediately previous Albanian administrations on expansion of relations with India.

Bilateral Exchanges

Bilateral contacts between India and Albania have been infrequent. Two rounds of Foreign Office consultations have been held - the first was held in February 2003 in Tirana where the delegation was led by Shri Shashank, Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs; the second FOC was in New Delhi in January 2006. The then Minister of State for External Affairs Shri Salman Khurshid visited Albania in 1994. In 1997 the President of the Albanian National Assembly, Pjeter Arbneri visited New Delhi for an Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting. Albanian President Rexhep Meidani went to Kolkata in 1997 to attend the funeral of Mother Teresa. Paskal Milo, a former Foreign Minister of Albania, visited India in the capacity of Head of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly. Occasional high level contacts have taken place on the margins of multilateral meetings such as the meeting between the former Minister of External Affairs Shri Pranab Mukherjee and Albanian Foreign Minister Lulzim Basha at the 62nd UNGA in New York on September 24, 2007. The first visit by an Albanian Foreign Minister took place in December, 2008 when Mr. Lulzim Basha visited India. The President of Albanian National Assembly, Mrs. Josefina Topalli visited India in December 2010 and extended invitation to Hon'ble Speaker, Lok Sabha to visit Albania. Mrs. Topalli again visited India to attend the Conference of Women Speakers in September 2012. The First Lady of Albania Mrs. Odeta Nishani visited India in December 2015 on a private visit to attend an international conference.

Mrs. Preneet Kaur, MOS(PK) visited Albania in July 2012, accompanied by a CII delegation. She met the Prime Minister, Dy.PM and Minister of Economy, the Foreign Minister and the Speaker of the National Assembly and held discussions on issues of bilateral and multilateral interest. During her visit an MOU for Cooperation was signed between CII and the Albanian National Chamber of Commerce. There is a pending invitation from the Speaker of the Albanian Parliament for our speaker to visit Albania.

Recently the Hon'ble Minister of Railways, Shri. Suresh Prabhu paid a visit to Albania (13-26 October 2016). During the visit, Mr. Prabhu had wide ranging discussions with President Bujar Nishani, the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, the Speaker of the Albanian Parliament and the Foreign Minister.

Agreements

Following protocol/agreement have been signed or are under discussion:

(i) **FOC**: A Protocol on India-Albania Foreign Office Consultations was signed in February 2003 in Tirana.

(ii) **DTAA**: Negotiations on Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement have been completed and the Agreement was signed in July 2013.

(iii) **Visa Waiver Agreement for Diplomatic and Official Passport** was signed in Tirana on 27 November 2015. The Agreement is yet to come into force.

Cooperation in Multilateral Fora

India and Albania cooperate on an issue-based approach in multilateral fora. Albania supported India's candidature in the 2010 election for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council in return for Indian support to Albania in the elections for the term 2022-23. Albania supported India unequivocally on the international aspects of the agreement on civil nuclear power co-operation and also at ICJ elections.

Mother Teresa

In post-communist Albania, Mother Teresa is a symbol of self-identification. Tirana international airport has been named after her and an Albanian film maker, Dizdari, has made a film on her. In her centenary year 2010, a symbolic pathway of peace has been inaugurated in Tirana where flagstones have been contributed by a large number of heads of state and government.

ITEC Training

Albania has been availing of the two ITEC slots made available to it annually. Three Albanian diplomats have completed the professional course for foreign diplomats at the Foreign Service Institute.

Trade and Investment

Commerce with India was practically absent till the early 1990s. Since early 90s there has been modest growth in bilateral trade with a spike in India's import of mineral fuels and oils and allied products from Albania in some years like 2013-14. The main export items are chemical products including pharmaceuticals, electrical machinery, construction materials, sugar products, coffee, tea and spices. India's main imports are minerals and allied products, copper ore concentrates, plant extracts for pharmaceutical use, inorganic chemicals and television parts.

India-Albania trade statistics for the last four years are given below.

[Department of Commerce statistics in US\$ million]

Year	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Exports from India	17.48	18.73	19.42	11.72
Imports by India	31.04	198.80	50.76	17.28
Total	48.52	217.53	70.18	29.00

There is potential for exporting Indian goods and services in Albania and for imports from that country. Relationships between some of the active chambers of commerce in India and Albanian chambers is desirable, in order to form a framework for commercial contacts. At present none exist and commercial activity is episodic.

There is a modest, though not insignificant, Indian investment in the chromium mining industry in Albania which is known for its chromium reserves. Albania has been seeking investments in infrastructure, energy, oil and gas, high tech parks, small scale hydropower projects, mineral exploration of Nickel, Chromium etc. During the visit by Albanian Energy and Trade Minister to India in January 2015, he sought investment in oil & gas sector and held discussions with BHEL on this. Indian skilled workers have carried out specialised finishing work in commercial malls in Albania. Other ideas which have been broached by Albanian leaders include the setting up of industrial facilities in sectors where India has expertise such as pharmaceuticals and ICT

Albania, particularly its Adriatic coastline, will soon become an important tourist destination. There is scope for Indian investment or at least involvement in this area. Tourism from Greece or Turkey could be a viable alternative for the Indian tourist.

Culture

The prevalence in Albania of mass-based cultural activities common to socialist regimes, made the people receptive to popular music and cultures from other countries. Indian films have been shown on Albanian television which is state-run and a few Indian films have been shot on location. Indian mass culture has potential in Albania and exchanges of films and film-related activities can be part of this propagation. An ICCR sponsored Manipuri Dance troupe visited Albania in November, 2012 and performed during the centenary celebrations of Albania's independence. Their performance was very much appreciated by local parliamentarians and other dignitaries. The International Day of Yoga held in 2015 and 2016 in Tirana, Albania.

Indian Community

There is a miniscule Indian community in Albania not exceeding 70 persons. As per data provided by Ministry of Interior of Albania, there are 68 Indian citizens living in Albania holding valid residence permits ranging from 1-5 years duration. Most of them are professionals in management positions in foreign-owned companies. For Albanian businessmen, visa is granted the next working day unless a reference is required to be made, in which case visa is granted in five working days.

Useful Resources:

Embassy of India, Bucharest Website: <http://eoiromania.in/>

Embassy of India, Bucharest Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IndiainRomania/>

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