
INDIA-NORTH MACEDONIA: BILATERAL RELATIONS

1. India and the Republic of North Macedonia share cordial and friendly relations with no outstanding bilateral issues. Mother Teresa, who was ethnic Albanian, was born in Macedonia and lived there till 18 years of age. She enjoys high regard among the people of North Macedonia and her name is frequently mentioned by the North Macedonian side in bilateral meetings.

2. After Macedonia declared independence from former Yugoslavia in January 1992, India was one of the 40 co-sponsors of the Resolution in the UN General Assembly for its admission into the UN under the provisional name of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) due to a dispute with Greece over the use of the name given in the new country's Constitution, namely 'Republic of Macedonia'. India formally recognized Macedonia through an exchange of letters at the level of the Permanent Representatives of the two countries to the UN in New York in February 1995 as FYROM, the name under which the country had been admitted to the UN. Due to Macedonian side's insistence on use of nomenclature of 'Republic of Macedonia' instead of the provisional name of FYROM, the Government of India decided in August 2001 that such name could be used in bilateral communications whereas FYROM would continue to be used in multilateral *fora*.

Recent Political developments in North Macedonia

3. Following the signing of Prespa Agreement with Greece on 17 June 2018 to resolve the long-standing dispute over the name, the country was renamed as the Republic of North Macedonia w.e.f. 14 February 2019. After the Prespa Agreement was ratified by the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia on 20 June 2018, the Greece withdrew its objection to the entry of the Republic of North Macedonia in the EU and the NATO under the new name. In July 2018, NATO invited Macedonia to start accession talks; and on 27 March 2020, North Macedonia became NATO's 30th member.

4. After withdrawal of the objections by Greece, the European Union started considering the start of accession talk with North Macedonia as the latter had been an EU candidate country since December 2005. However, in a surprise move in November 2020, Bulgaria blocked the start of EU membership talks with North Macedonia as it sought that the latter must formally acknowledge that both its identity and language had Bulgarian roots. North Macedonia, on the other hand, insisted that it has a distinct South Slavic language that formed part of the country's culture and national identity.
5. Subsequently North Macedonia single-mindedly pursued the goal of getting the US and EU partners to put pressure on Bulgaria to lift its veto. Under pressure from its western partners, Bulgaria agreed to a compromise solution presented by French Presidency of the EU for lifting its veto in end-June 2022 which was accepted by the then SDSM-DUI government of the North Macedonia in July 2022. The compromise agreement with Bulgaria required RNM to amend its Constitution to include Bulgarians as a 'founding ethnic minority' group like other minorities (Albanians, Serbs, Roma, etc) mentioned therein, as well as show progress in implementation of their Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness and Cooperation signed in January 2018. The first round of EU accession negotiations with RNM were held on 19 July 2022. The SDSM-DUI government made efforts to amend the constitution as agreed with Bulgaria but due to lack of majority in the Parliament and concerted opposition from the VMRO-DPMNE led by Hristijan Mickovski, they failed to make any headway. This led to a pause in EU accession talks.
6. In the Parliamentary elections held in June, 2024 VMRO-DPMNE came to power defeating SDSM-DUI. The new Prime Minister Hristijan Mickovski has taken the stand that his government would not undertake an amendment of the Constitution "under the Bulgarian dictate". They are seeking from the EU to re-launch the accession talks and have proposed that the amendment of the Constitution would be undertaken when North Macedonia enters the EU as a member. The new government also wants to renegotiate the Prespa Agreement with Greece which has strained the relations between them.

Diplomatic Representation

7. The Indian Embassy in Bulgaria is concurrently accredited to North Macedonia. In 2006, the Government of Macedonia appointed an Indian businessman in New Delhi as its Honorary Consul before proceeding to open a full-fledged Embassy under its constitutional name 'Republic of Macedonia' in New Delhi in October 2008.

8. The Government of India appointed an Honorary Consul to Macedonia in 2008. Currently, the post of Honorary Consul to Macedonia is lying vacant. The Macedonian government appointed an Honorary Consul in Kolkata in 2009 as a follow-up of the Macedonian FM's visit. In addition, Macedonia has subsequently appointed Honorary Consuls in Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore.

High level / Ministerial Visits

9. The Macedonian Dy. FM, Mr. Faud Hasanovic visited India in February 2004 and signed a Protocol on Foreign Office Consultations between the Indian and Macedonian Foreign Ministries. He met Commerce Secretary and drafts for Bilateral Investment Protection Agreement and Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement were exchanged. Our Ministry of Culture also handed over a draft agreement on Cultural cooperation between the two countries to the Macedonian delegation.

10. The first Ministerial visit exchanged between the two countries was that of the Macedonian Foreign Minister Mr. Antonio Milososki who came to India in January 2009. He met the then EAM, Shri Pranab Mukherjee and the Speaker, Shri Somnath Chatterjee. He also paid a visit to Kolkata and to the memorial home of Mother Teresa, where a commemorative plaque was placed as a sign of gratitude on behalf of the Macedonian citizens (Mother Teresa was born in Skopje). He also had a meeting with the Finance Minister of West Bengal and the Mayor of Kolkata. He officially opened the Macedonian Embassy in New Delhi. An Agreement for abolition of visa regime in respect of diplomatic passport holders of both the countries was signed during the visit.

11. The Macedonian PM, Mr. Nikola Gruevski from VMRO-DPMNE party paid a visit to India from March 5-8, 2012 to promote economic linkages between the two countries and to showcase the investment and business opportunities in Macedonia to the Indian investors. He was accompanied by Dy. PM and Minister

of Finance, Mr. Zoran Stavreski and the Minister of Foreign Investments, Mr. Bill Pavleski. He addressed business forums at Delhi, Pune and Mumbai. While in Delhi, he called on the Prime Minister and various issues of mutual interest including bilateral and multilateral issues were discussed. The Macedonian side expressed their support for India's bid for permanent membership in UNSC during the meeting.

12. Minister of State for External Affairs, Smt. Preneet Kaur, accompanied by a business delegation of the CII, visited Macedonia on July 10-11, 2012 and met FM Nikola Poposki, Dy. PM and Finance Minister Zoran Stavrevski and the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Policy of the Macedonian Assembly and former FM, Antonio Milososki. This was the first visit by an Indian Minister to Macedonia. A MoU between CII and the Macedonian Industry Associations was signed during the visit.

13. In continuation to the Macedonian PM's visit to India in March 2012, the Dy. PM and Finance Minister, Mr. Zoran Stavreski, accompanied by the Ministers of Information Society and Foreign Investments visited India in October 2012 and addressed business fora in 6 Indian cities.

14. President of the National Assembly, Mr. Trajko Veljanoski, led a Parliamentary delegation on an official visit to India from 5th to 8th March 2013. During the visit, he met Vice President, the LS Speaker and MoS [PK]. The delegation also witnessed a joint session of the two Houses of Parliament on 6th March, 2013.

15. Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki visited New Delhi in December 2013 and two agreements were signed during the visit.

16. Prime Minister Mr. Nikola Gruevski again visited India from 11-17 January 2015 to attend the Vibrant Gujarat [VGS] Summit in Gandhinagar, the CII-Partnership Summit in Jaipur and to address business fora in Chennai and Kolkata. He met PM Modi on the sidelines of the VGS and discussed ways to bolster business cooperation. PM Gruevski also met VGS's host, Gujarat Chief Minister Anandiben Patel. Gruevski took part in a business forum in Chennai and presented investment opportunities in Macedonia. Gruevski addressed the CII-Partnership Summit 2015 in Jaipur and also met Railways Minister Suresh

Prabhu, Commerce and Industry Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje and CII DG Chandrajit Banerjee. *(PM Nikola Gruevski is currently living in exile in Hungary since 2016 as a fugitive from law and is being prosecuted in corruption related cases.)*

17. Minister of State for Textiles Shri Ajay Tamta visited Macedonia (6-8 May 2018) and met with Minister of Economy Mr. Kreshnik Bekteshi. He visited Textiles cluster in Macedonia (Okite-Tex Macedonia) and food processing facility (Bonum Macedonia). During the meetings, setting up fiber and fabric production facilities in Macedonia by Indian companies and cooperation in skill development and waste disposal were identified as areas with special potential.

18. Ms. Renata Deskoska, Minister of Justice visited India from 6-12 November 2019 for participating in the 20th International World Conference of Chief Justices held in Lucknow.

19. Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture, Smt. Meenakashi Lekhi visited North Macedonia from 10-11 July 2023. During her visit MoS (ML) had bilateral meetings with Ms Fatmire Isaki (FI), Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Mr. Daim Luci (DL), Deputy Minister of Culture of the Republic of North Macedonia. She also called on Mr. Talat Xhaferi (TX), President of the National Assembly.

20. Mr. Bujar Osmani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia visited India from 31 August to 1 September, 2023. This was the first visit of Mr. Bujar Osmani to India. During the visit Mr. Bujar Osmani called on the Hon'ble Vice President of India Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar and had bilateral meeting with the Foreign Minister of India Dr. S. Jaishankar. He also had a meeting with the Deputy NSA Shri Vikram Misri and also visited Mother Teresa House and paid tribute at the Mother Teresa Memorial in Kolkata. He also held meeting with officials of the Government of West Bengal.

21. EAM met the Foreign Minister of North Macedonia Mr. Timco Mucunski at the sidelines of UNGA79 in September 2024 and discussed investment, connectivity and bilateral cooperation with the region.

Foreign Office Consultations:

22. The first round of Foreign Office Consultations (FOCs) was held with Macedonia in July 2007 in Skopje. Mr. Igor Ilievski, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs led the Macedonian delegation while the Indian delegation was led by Shri K. C. Singh, Additional Secretary in the MEA.

23. The second round of FOCs took place in New Delhi on September 15, 2010. Shri Vivek Katju, Secretary (West) led the Indian delegation while the Macedonian delegation was led by Mr. Zoran Petrov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

24. Additional Secretary (Central Europe) visited Skopje on 7 May, 2012 for Mid-Term DG-level FOCs. The Macedonian side reconfirmed its support for the India's bid for permanent membership of UNSC during the FOCs.

25. Deputy Foreign Minister Ms Fatmire Isaki along with Director Jasmin Kahil visited New Delhi and held the fourth round of Foreign Office Consultations with Secretary (West), Shri Sanjay Verma on 27 October 2022. ICT, agriculture, food processing, pharmaceuticals, bio-tech, tourism, hospitality, culture health, police and cyber-security were identified as possible sectors for bilateral cooperation.

Other Exchanges

Voice of Global South Summit

26. In the first Voice of Global South Summit held in January 2023, the Environment Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia, Mr. Naser Nuredini represented the country. In the Second VOGSS-2 held in November 2023, North Macedonia was represented by Environment Minister Mrs. Kaja Shukova.

27. In the VOGSS-3 held on 17 August 2024, there was double participation from North Macedonia. The Minister for Implementation of Roma Strategy, Prof. Dr. Shaban Salihu participated in the Youth Ministers' Session and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Mr. Zoran Dimitrovski, participated in the Foreign Ministers' session of the third edition of the VOGSS.

Bilateral Agreements:

28. Following bilateral agreements have been signed with North Macedonia so far:

- i. Bilateral Investment Promotion & Protection Agreement [BIPA] (2008) ***(not in operation now as RNM wants to revise it)***
- ii. Visa waiver Agreement for holders of Diplomatic Passports (2009)
- iii. Agreement on Double Taxation (DTAA) [2013].
- iv. MoU between the Foreign Service Institute and the Macedonian Diplomatic Institute (2013).
- v. MoU on Cooperation in the Field of Health (2021)–signed on 21 Jan 2021

29. Following agreements/MoUs are being negotiated though some of them have been under discussion for several years:

- i. Agreement on Economic and Trade Cooperation (Proposed by India; under consideration since 2008).
- ii. Amendment to Visa Waiver Agreement to include Official Passport.
- iii. Mobility and migration agreement (Proposed by India)
- vi. Agreement on Cultural Cooperation (*Proposed by India*)
- vii. Agreement on Social Security (*Proposed by India*)

Position on Issues of importance to India

30. On Kashmir: Macedonian side supports India's position on no third-party intervention and that the matter be resolved bilaterally.

31. On Article 370, North Macedonia has shown an understanding of India's action in abrogating Article 370.

32. The Macedonian side has expressed support for India's bid for **permanent membership of UNSC** during the visit of their PM to India in March 2012. North Macedonia supported India's candidatures in the UN including for the non-permanent seat in the UNSC for 2021-22 and earlier for 2011-12. It has supported India's candidatures for elections in UN and other multilateral fora, including IMO, ICAO, World Customs Organization. It also supported India's

candidature at Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) for the period 2020-2024 for which elections were held at UNESCO, Paris. North Macedonia side has orally conveyed support for India's candidature for non-permanent seat for the 2028-29 term on reciprocal basis in lieu of India's support for North Macedonia's UNSC candidature for 2042-43 term. A written confirmation of the reciprocal arrangement has been sought from the Macedonian side.

33. Regarding **terrorism**, North Macedonia strongly condemned the Mumbai attacks in 2008. It supports the Indian draft for a Comprehensive Convention against International Terrorism.

Economic Cooperation

34. North Macedonia got EU candidate status in December 2005 and is entitled to duty-free exports to EU member-countries. This has enhanced its attractiveness as a potential launching pad for the EU market. It has low profit tax, low-income tax and zero tax on reinvested profit.

35. The bilateral trade (Table below) is much below the potential as there is lack of good and cheap cargo freight connections between the two countries.

Year	India's Exports to N. Macedonia (US\$ millions)	India's Imports from N. Macedonia (US\$ millions)	Total Bilateral Trade (US\$ million)
2023 - 24	36.64	0.73	37.37
2024-25	33.73	2.01	35.74
2025-26	31.17	1.36	32.53

(Source: Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, GOI)

36. Main items of Indian exports to North Macedonia are: Organic Chemicals, Iron and Steel, Textiles and Fabrics; Electrical machinery, Scientific & Medical Instruments, Mechanical machinery; Ceramic, Rubber

Articles etc. bituminous minerals; agricultural & forestry tractors; partly or wholly stemmed pre-stripped flue-cured tobacco, coffee; sesame seeds; single cotton yarn of combed fibers; Auto parts, Pharmaceuticals pneumatic elevators & conveyors etc.

37. Main items of North Macedonian exports to India are: ferro-alloys, marble and travertine, electrical machinery & equipment and plastics. Machinery, Ships and Boats, Iron and Steel, Mineral Fuels, Electrical machinery, Auto accessories.
38. Indian investment in North Macedonia is negligible. Macedonia ranks quite high in Ease of Doing Business (17th rank in 2020 World Bank's Ease of Doing Business list) and has been seeking Indian investment. In 2004, Arcelor Mittal took over Balkan Steel and later also bought the state-owned shares, amounting to 90% of the ownership but later divested its share. Bang & Scott DOO (Macedonia), a 100% step down subsidiary of Bang Overseas Limited, Mumbai incorporated in September 2011 is into trading of fabrics and garment manufacturing. Indus Medika laboratory set in Skopje, Macedonia in 2018 with investment of Euro 3 million is the biggest Indian investment in Macedonia. Established by Mumbai based Dr Sanjay Mehta and Mr Bakul Jain, this is the first high-tech laboratory of its kind in Macedonia and the neighbouring region.
39. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Balkan-India Business Association and the Macedonian Chambers of Commerce in November 2017 to enhance bilateral trade and commerce.

Bilateral Cooperation under ITEC / PCFD Programme:

40. Government of India offers scholarships under ITEC programme to North Macedonia and there are 2 slots for Macedonian candidates. Macedonian diplomats participate in the Professional Course for foreign diplomats organized by the Foreign Service Institute from time to time. In 2023-24, a young diplomat from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia attended the Professional Course for Foreign Diplomats (PCFD) organized by the Foreign Service Institute in India, and two Parliament employees attended the Lok Sabha training under ITEC programme.

Cultural Cooperation

41. Macedonians evince keen interest in Indian culture. Yoga is popular in North Macedonia. The International Yoga Day is regularly celebrated there in association with the Art of Living, North Macedonia, ISKON and other Yoga centers and partners.
42. Tourism is an area which holds prospects for both the countries. North Macedonia, with its beautiful landscapes could become an attractive destination for Indian film Industry. Some Indian films were shot at locations in Macedonia, including Tamil blockbuster 'Mersal'.
43. North Macedonia has sizable population of around 60 thousand of Roma people, many of whom trace their origins to India. Roma people have been recognized a founding ethnic minority in the Constitution of North Macedonia and they have right to study in their own language. Dr. Shaban Saliu from the Roma community is a Minister in the present cabinet for dealing with the implementation of the National Roma Strategy. Cooperation among the youth of India and North Macedonia was discussed during Dr. Shaban Saliu's participation in the Youth Ministers' Session of the VOGSS-3 held on 17 August 2024.

Indian Community

44. The Indian community in North Macedonia is very small. There are around 52 persons including 9 OCI holders and 43 Indian nationals (*as per the last official data shared by the North Macedonia in 2023*). Most of them are engaged in the IT sector, teaching at universities or working as executives in multinational companies. There are very few Indian students in North Macedonia. At present, North Macedonia is facing problem of being a transit country for illegal immigrants coming from Serbia and trying to enter into Greece. In the recent years, several Indian nationals were detained in North Macedonia for illegal entry. North Macedonia has tightened its visa policy for non-EU nationals which has created some difficulties for Indian travelers. With North Macedonia getting increasingly integrated with the EU, India has proposed signing a Migration and mobility agreement. North Macedonia has indicated that they would like to wait till their screening process by the EU as part of the accession process is completed.

45. In 2024, 440 visas were issued to North Macedonian citizens including Business, medical, tourist, and conference/seminar visas.

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