

## India - Greece Bilateral Cooperation

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After a yawning gap of 18 years, Indian External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar becomes the first Indian foreign minister to visit Greece, the Hellenic Republic from 25 to 27<sup>th</sup> June this year. The visit coincided with the 200<sup>th</sup> Independent Anniversary of Greece. The foreign minister conveyed the felicitations of Indian President and Prime Minister. The visit has set the stage for a surge in the opportunities for strengthening and upgrading India-Greece relations in a number of key areas. Unveiling the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Athens on 26<sup>th</sup> June symbolizes the strength of friendship between the two states and the way ahead to consolidate on the past relationship and further it through engagement on issues such as environmental, maritime security, trade and investments and UN reforms, thus forging a meaningful strategic partnership.

According to Greece, India is a land of legendary borders, where Alexander the Great's legacy still remains intertwined with India's history. The immensity of ancient civilizations coupled with rich traditions and cultures, India and Greece stand as natural friends and allies and tend to gain if the ties are forged further. While India is rising as a power in the global stage both militarily and financially, Greece has the most formidable military and exciting economic prospects in the East Mediterranean region.

India and Greece first established diplomatic relations in May 1950. The Embassy of India in Athens was opened in March 1978. The inauguration of the new Greek Embassy building in New Delhi took place on February 6, 2006. Both the countries enjoy close bilateral relations and their annual bilateral trade stands at \$0.70 billion.<sup>1</sup> ***Greece is the world's oldest functioning democracy while India is the largest.***

India and Greece enjoy friendly relations which have been reinforced by the shared values of democracy, rule of law, pluralism, equality, freedom of speech and respect for human rights. A lot of international challenges such as UN reforms, the crisis of Cyprus, issues related to Turkey and such like others are shared by India and Greece.

Both the nations will be benefited from strategic collaborations in maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, collaborative infrastructure projects, and tourism promotion, among other things. The basis of collaborative partnership between the two countries is mutual respect for International Law, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and a peaceful resolution of international issues. Both sides have agreed on the importance

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Greece-India\\_relations](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Greece-India_relations)

of the Indo-Pacific region. The free, open, inclusive, cooperative, connectivity and growth of the Indo-Pacific Region was widely discussed as being one where people are free to travel, trade, and live, as well as have full access to resources of all kinds keeping the international maritime laws on the table. While China's expanding maritime dominance in the Indo-Pacific raises the threat of naval mobility for several countries, the dependence of Greece on Beijing since the financial crises and its claims on *Piraeus Port* causes concerns for both Greece and India.

The discussion on regional and global issues was not only relevant, but was also well covered. The Greek government is looking to forge stronger ties with India through military cooperation. Not only did both the counterparts examined the current developments relevant to the Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, and Libya, but also the repercussions from these developments in the global arena. Both agreed that the rule of law, as well as respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, plurality, equality, freedom of speech and respect for human rights are fundamental elements of international relations that must be upheld by all states. Cooperation in the areas of trade and investment, science and technology, culture and people-to-people contact were examined and deliberated to boost up the relation.

Dr S Jaishankar and his counterpart Nikos Dendias signed an agreement on *International Solar Alliance (ISA)* which was a landmark achievement. The ISA was established in 2015 with 120 member countries including the majority lying either entirely or in part between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. The agreement will serve to advance the two countries' energy strategies, which are to make renewable energy a key part of the energy supply.

Stressing their sense of responsibility towards multilateralism and an international order based on a set rules, the two sides vowed to work together to promote urgent UN reforms that would include expansion of the UN Security Council and other multilateral institutions to ensure they better reflect today's geopolitical realities. The Greek delegation restated its support for India's permanent membership in a transformed UN Security Council. There was also an emphasis on migration and mobility which led to the signing of agreement for Cultural Exchange Programme 2021-25.

The threat of terrorism and radicalization, as well as territorial disputes, cross border terrorism and tensions with Turkey, were among the common risks addressed by India and Greece when they met to discuss issues related to nations' integrity and security. The risk of terrorism in the wider context involving Turkish claims in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and Turkey's alliance with Pakistan to disrupt peace in Kashmir was also asserted. According to Indian and Greece officials, Turkey-Pakistan alliance has shifted the strategic landscape of international order and to counter their relations, India and Greece should consider close collaboration in joint production of weapons as well as defence tie ups.

According to Maj. Gen. (Dr.) G. D. Bakshi "the alliance between Greece and India will be able to counter joint Turkish-Pakistan aggression". In an interview with Director of RIEAS, Dr John Nomikos, Gen Bakshi aforementioned that "Turkey has gone insane, the whole world is not Turkey's property. Turkey's support towards terrorism, sending fighters into Azerbaijan, Armenia, Libya and Syria portrays its inclination towards Khalifat (caliphate), and if it misbehaves there will be costs and consequences".

Sharing a history of downright hostility and reconciliations for centuries, at present Greece and its neighbouring state Turkey have poor relations. The Turkish occupation of Northern portion of Cyprus has been a source of tension since 1974. They came extremely close to war last year over natural gas resources in the Mediterranean. On the other side, Greece and India are both concerned about Turkey's backing for Pakistan in providing weaponry and explosives to break the peace in Kashmir. India and Greece can thus unite, pool forces to hit back at Turkey.

### **Way Ahead**

Both the nations have grand opportunities in trade and investments, security and technology. Greeks can improve Indian seamanship both militarily and commercially, Greece can offer India knowhow into the shipping industry and building a competitive commercial fleet and port structures. And India can equip and train Greeks with its vast experience in countering terrorism. India with its knowledge related to tech industry would improve the soft power of Greece. Both the states should explore opportunities for cooperation in the areas of maritime security and international law enforcement throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Indo-Greece should also join their hands in transport, energy security, tourism, healthcare, education and socio-economic development.

As a strategy of widening India's economic and investment reach within Europe, India must pursue increasing maritime connectivity with Greece. In terms of economics, the two countries' requirements and capacities are complimentary. Greece has a highly established freight handling and logistics infrastructure that it may put to use for India as it increases and diversifies its commerce with the individual European Union member countries.

The words of Ramnath Kovind, the President of India on Twitter are most apt, ***“the most famous Greek to come to India was of course Alexander the Great. He arrived at the head of an invading army in 326 BC - but he left as a friend. Every Indian schoolchild knows of how Alexander and Porus fought a pitched battle and then became allies.”***

With the stamp in an indelible ink of being history's most ancient and surviving civilizations and rich cultures coupled with the vibrant and stable democracies, both the states must revive the Alexander the Great's valour and Porus' honour and forge ahead friendship with renewed spirits and vigour.