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Ambassador of Italy to India

Why Italy matters to India

Piracy in the Red Sea, the conflict in the Middle East, and the effects of Russia's aggression against Ukraine on agricultural and oil trade require our joint efforts to ensure a free, open, and prosperous Indo-

Mediterranean

In this age of 'polycrisis', Italy and India share common interests but also joint challenges in the Indo-Mediterranean Sea. This region is vital for global trade, especially for Italy which ranks sixth among the world's largest exporters. It is also crucial for digital connectivity: the Blue-Raman submarine data cables will soon connect Genoa with Mumbai. Piracy in the Red Sea, the conflict in Gaza and Lebanon, and the effects of Russia's aggression against Ukraine on agricultural and oil trade require our joint efforts to ensure a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Mediterranean.

Therefore, Italy has stepped up its commitment in security and defence in the Indian Ocean Region and West Asia. Apart from joining the Group of Friends of UNCLOS in 2021, it has been the second largest contributor to the European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Atalanta and the European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASoH). Since February 2024, Italy has been a driving force in the EU military operation, EUNAVFOR ASPIDES, to safeguard freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Gulf.

Naval presence

We have also increased our naval presence in India. After joining the Information Fusion Centre of the Indian Ocean Region in March 2023, patrol ship *ITS Francesco Morosini* visited Mumbai in August 2023. The Italian Carrier Strike Group (aircraft carrier *ITS Cavour* and frigate *ITS Alpino*) is currently in Goa. We are expecting the amazing tall ship *ITS Amerigo Vespucci* in Mumbai from November 28 to December 2. It is the training vessel of the Italian Navy. We are also planning to build an 'Italy village' that will offer cultural, fashion, and culinary events, as well as conferences and exhibitions.

ITS Cavour is a short take off and vertical landing ship constructed by the Italian naval shipyard Fincantieri and has been in the service of the Italian Navy since 2009. As a 'dual use' vessel, it can project maritime power, but also provide logistical autonomy and serve

environmental and humanitarian interventions. We are delighted that PASSEX exercises (training exercises to develop and maintain mariner skills and strengthen interoperability) are being held during the stay. *ITS Cavour* is also hosting a workshop on defence industry cooperation. At the same time, it serves as a hospital to operate children with facial malformations: a team of Indian and Italian doctors is performing surgeries under the framework of 'Operation Smile', organised by the Smile House Foundation, Italy.

Defence ties

Bilaterally, the Italy-India defence cooperation relies on a defence agreement signed in October 2023. This document lays the basis for a further expansion of our defence ties in many fields, from research to industrial cooperation, maritime domain awareness, sharing of information, and education and environmental issues related to military activities. At the same time, our defence cooperation strongly relies on regular talks such as the Italy-India Military Cooperation Group meeting, held in March in New Delhi.

When it comes to defence production, Italy matters to India: two of our companies, Leonardo and Fincantieri, are ranked among the first 50 of SIPRI's top arms-producing and military services companies in the world (2022), while other companies, such as Beretta, Elettronica and KNDS, albeit smaller in size, possess outstanding technical know-how. Over the last few years, Italian defence companies have shown to be open to joint ventures, co-production, and joint development. Fincantieri is cooperating with Cochin Shipyard since 2020, while Elettronica signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Bharat Electronics Limited in 2019. This partnership approach is in line with India's 'Make in India' ambitions and can respond to growing requirements by the Indian armed forces.

Italy also looks at India as a valuable partner for development of the Indian Ocean Region, from East Africa to India's shores via the Arabian Sea. Both Italy and India are keen promoters of Africa in international fora and jointly supported the inclusion of the African Union in the G20. During the Italy-Africa Summit in January, Italy launched a new initiative with Africa, the Mattei Plan, aimed at creating a mutually beneficial partnership to realise several important projects across the continent. This initiative mobilises Italian capabilities with €5.5 billion in public investments and the involvement of all public entities and the private sector. Among the first countries chosen for this plan, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Mozambique are adjacent to the Indo-Mediterranean area. The ambition is to engage with other partners to realise sustainable projects which will help drive economic and social development in Africa.

At the same time, Italy has supported the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Amid the conflict in Gaza and the escalating tensions in West Asia, we believe that IMEC can be part of a long-term vision to ensure shared prosperity in the region. Railway connections, ports, logistics and custom systems can support peace endeavours along a trade route that is as essential for Italy as it is for India.

People-to-people ties

Italy matters to India as a friend. We host the second largest Indian diaspora in the EU. Italy is a reliable economic and defence partner, the second largest manufacturing country in Europe, and a robust security provider taking up responsibilities as a member of the EU and NATO. What persists over time are people-to-people ties. These bonds dig deep into an ancient history of contacts between our two civilizations and find new inspiration with every story of cultural exchange, integration, and business success.