



India and Europe: The Rise of the Indo-Mediterranean

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Summary

As India intensifies its engagement with Europe, new sub-regions of the old continent are emerging as focal points. The Mediterranean region, particularly Italy, Spain and Greece, is gaining prominence in Indian diplomacy. The growing interconnections between India's relations with the Mediterranean and the Middle East relations are forming a new Indo-Mediterranean region, driven by connectivity, commerce and geopolitics.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy has made a special effort to elevate Europe in India's strategic priorities. After decades of limited interaction, New Delhi now [places special emphasis](#) on European ties. While reinvigorating relationships with Britain, France and Germany, and strengthening dialogue with the European Union, India is also exploring Europe's distinct sub-regions, each with unique economic and geopolitical dynamics. The last couple of years have witnessed India's growing engagement with the Nordic region and Central Europe.

The Mediterranean region has now emerged as India's newest diplomatic focus in Europe. While Europe's relations with North Africa and the Levant have long existed, the Mediterranean, [especially its eastern part](#), has now gained new geopolitical significance. This stems from the rise of the Gulf capital, eastern Mediterranean oil and gas discoveries, the normalisation of Israel's ties with a section of the Arab world and the sharpening civil wars in the Levant and North Africa.

During a Rome visit in late November 2024, India's External Affairs Minister [S Jaishankar outlined](#) India's emerging integrated view of the Mediterranean vision at a regional forum, "India's annual trade with the Mediterranean nations is about US\$80 billion [S\$107.6 billion]. We have a diaspora here of 460,000. About 40 per cent of that in Italy." He also identified "fertilisers, energy, water technology, diamonds, defence and cyber" as "India's major interests in the Mediterranean", and highlighted significant projects that are currently, including airports, ports, railways, steel, green hydrogen, phosphates and submarine cables. Jaishankar also underlined India's expanding defence collaboration with the Mediterranean region.

In June 2024, when India launched the India-Mediterranean Business Conclave, [Jaishankar pointed](#) to India's new commitment to revive the historic connections between India and the region, "Mediterranean ports and maritime routes have long facilitated East-West trade. Indian merchants travelled these land and sea routes, trading spices, textiles, and precious stones with Mediterranean partners and beyond. These exchanges transported not just goods but ideas and culture. The Suez Canal's opening reaffirmed this historical pathway. Today, we aim to reinforce these connections by linking the Atlantic with the Indo-Pacific

through the Mediterranean. Our task is to make history work positively in the contemporary era.”

Jaishankar emphasised two key initiatives aimed at reinforcing the idea of Indo-Mediterranean, “The Mediterranean presents both opportunities and risks in an uncertain world. Beyond current trends, connectivity will define our future relationship. The IMEEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor) announced in September 2023 can be transformative. Despite ongoing Middle East conflicts creating complications, the IMEEC advances on its eastern front, particularly between India, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. The I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-United States) grouping will also gain prominence.”

Meanwhile, India’s bilateral relations with key Mediterranean countries have strengthened significantly. This analysis focuses on three nations – Greece, Spain, and Italy. Despite longstanding ties with Greece in the post-independence period, it had largely fallen off the Indian radar in recent decades. That has begun to change with the elevation of the bilateral relationship to a [strategic partnership](#) in August 2023. Both nations aim to double bilateral trade by 2030 while expanding cooperation in space science, biotechnology, and clean energy.

Greece views India as both a longstanding ally and a rising global power, reflecting a mutual commitment to deeper ties. This strategic partnership marks a pivotal moment in their relationship, as both countries leverage historical connections and shared values to build modern cooperation in trade, defence, and cultural exchange. The partnership shows [particular promise](#) in maritime security, renewable energy and multilateral diplomacy.

After prolonged mutual neglect, the relations between India and Spain are now on the upswing. The visit of Spanish President Pedros Sanchez to India in October 2024, the first in 18 years, [underlined the commitment](#) to build a robust bilateral relationship encompassing trade, investment, tourism, culture and multilateral diplomacy. Spain’s eagerness to invest in India’s defence production is marked by the [Spanish Airbus project](#) to produce the C-295 military transport aircraft in Gujarat in partnership with the Tatas. Spain’s global footprint goes beyond Europe and the Mediterranean and extends to the western hemisphere. Madrid’s support for India’s participation in the [Ibero-American summits](#) as an Associate Observer will enhance India’s Latin American connections through the Spanish channels.

The extended political indifference between New Delhi and Rome turned into tensions during the early 2010s, with the [Italian Marines case](#). If the United Progressive Alliance government struggled to find a way out, the Modi government succeeded and laid the foundation for a reset in bilateral relations. [Modi](#) saw the unveiling of a partnership between India and Italy, the second most industrial power in Europe and a member of the G7. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni’s visit to India in 2023 gave a solid boost to the strategic partnership.

The relationship has begun to evolve from a traditional commercial focus to a [comprehensive strategic engagement](#), driven by shared interests in global stability, sustainability and innovation. Defence cooperation has emerged as a major new element of

bilateral engagement and the two sides are now [focused on negotiating](#) a comprehensive defence industrial roadmap and military-technical research. Italy is also positioning itself as India's [European gateway](#) as New Delhi and Rome plan to collaborate on the IMEEC to enhance India-Europe connectivity via the Mediterranean.

The broader vision for the new partnership with India was articulated by Meloni in her [address to the Raisina Dialogue](#) in early 2003. She framed the Mediterranean as the sea linking the Euro-Atlantic area with the Indo-Pacific littoral. She views the partnership with India as part of a historic effort to reconnect Italy and Europe with Africa, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific. As India's ties with the Middle East and Europe acquire greater salience, a new geography of the Indo-Mediterranean is beginning to take shape.

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