

Visegrad Four and India

Searching for collaboration agenda

amid global geopolitical upheaval

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Central European Institute
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Executive summary

- 1 The Visegrad Four (V4) is gaining strategic weight in India's European calculus.** Traditionally focused on Western Europe, India is now expanding its diplomacy to Central Europe. The V4—Poland, Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia—has emerged as an industrial and geoeconomic hub with strong alignment opportunities in manufacturing, innovation, and defense.
- 2 Geopolitical shifts demand deeper India–V4 engagement.** The war in Ukraine, energy insecurity, and intensified great-power competition are compelling both India and the V4 to diversify strategic partnerships. India's push for multipolarity and regional resilience resonates with the V4 debates on EU autonomy and security architecture.
- 3 Poland and Czechia are leading bilateral partners for India in the V4.** India–Poland ties were elevated to a Strategic Partnership during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2024 visit, with a focus on strong cooperation in defense, logistics, and migration. Czechia shares mutual interest in innovation and digital governance with India, supported by robust trade and institutional linkages.
- 4 Hungary and Slovakia lag behind, despite growing potential.** Hungary benefits from Indian foreign direct investment (FDI) and shares a multi-alignment foreign policy outlook, but relations lack strategic depth. Slovakia's economic complementarities remain underutilized, despite symbolic gestures like the 2025 Indian presidential visit. India must bridge these gaps to treat the V4 as a cohesive bloc.
- 5 Economic complementarities align with India's manufacturing and de-risking agendas.** V4 economies are deeply embedded in high-end manufacturing and EU value chains. India seeks technology transfers and EU market access through sectors such as automotive, industrial machinery, clean tech, and digital infrastructure. Nevertheless, lack of bilateral investment treaties with the V4 countries is a serious roadblock for unlocking the mutual investment potential.
- 6 Supply chain resilience and digital sovereignty are key convergences.** Both India and the V4 countries are de-risking their supply chains from China and prioritizing secure, trusted supply chains. Digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, and regulatory cooperation offer fertile ground for innovation-led engagement.

- 7 Energy transition offers a politically neutral, high-value collaboration domain.** India's expertise in solar, batteries, and green hydrogen complements the V4's EU-backed decarbonization efforts. Joint projects under India's ISA and EU's Global Gateway can create a sustainable tech corridor.
- 8 Mini-lateral V4+India format remains underdeveloped but has clear potential.** While bilateralism dominates economic ties, the V4+India dialogue could serve as a platform for political coordination, modeled on existing V4+Japan and V4+South Korea formats. Institutionalization remains the next frontier.
- 9 Public perception is a critical bottleneck.** Opinion polls indicate limited awareness and ambivalence toward India among the V4 publics, especially among the youth. Poland is an exception, with relatively positive views. Targeted public diplomacy and people-to-people connections are crucial to fostering societal support.
- 10 Educational and cultural exchanges remain underleveraged.** Despite nascent efforts, such as the Visegrad Student Virtual Summit, institutional partnerships, student mobility, and joint research remain underdeveloped. Expanding these under IVF or Erasmus+ would create long-term constituencies for India–V4 cooperation.
- 11 Institutional mechanisms must now match political momentum.** A formal V4+India Dialogue, regular 1.5 Track meetings, and sectoral cooperation platforms—focused on green technology, digital governance, defense, and education—are necessary to structure the relationship and deliver tangible outcomes.
- 12 Multilateral coordination is an emerging frontier.** India and key V4 members, such as Poland and Czechia, can collaborate on global issues including technology norms, democratic governance, and Indo-Pacific security through the G20, ASEM, and EU–India platforms.

Introduction:

India and the Visegrad Four in a fractured Europe

Jagannath Panda • Matej Šimalčík

India's strategic vision for Europe has traditionally focused on the continent's heavyweights—France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. These states are long-standing partners in trade, defense, and multilateral forums, often dominating Europe's voice in global affairs. However, the rapidly shifting geopolitical environment, intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the evolving Sino-American competition, has necessitated a reassessment. Central and Eastern Europe, particularly the Visegrad Four (V4), is no longer just a peripheral theatre of diplomacy. It is fast becoming a zone of geopolitical contestation and economic resilience, one India can no longer afford to overlook.

The V4 countries—Poland, Hungary, Czechia, and Slovakia—form a regional bloc which can jointly shape EU policy debates in areas of aligned interest. With a combined population of over 65 million and a joint GDP exceeding \$1 trillion, the bloc constitutes the EU's manufacturing powerhouse, with deep integration into global (especially Germany's) industrial value chains.¹ Their economies are rooted in advanced automotive manufacturing, industrial automation, defense production, and clean tech innovation—areas where India is actively looking to invest and expand its bilateral cooperation. The V4 region also serves as a transit hub for energy pipelines and a linchpin in Europe's North-South and East-West infrastructure corridors. Their geographic and logistical relevance gives the V4 geoeconomic clout far beyond what traditional metrics might suggest.

Moreover, these countries are actively rethinking their international partnerships. While maintaining their EU and NATO memberships as key building blocks of their international engagements, the V4 states have become increasingly interested in diversifying their strategic options, looking beyond traditional partnerships, especially in the Indo-Pacific region.

On the level of V4 external cooperation, individual countries have paid differing levels of attention during their presidencies to the Indo-Pacific region, as well as to India specifically. Over the past five years, expanding ties with India were mentioned as a distinct priority by the Hungarian (2021/2022) and Slovak (2022/2023) presidencies. The Hungarian presidency went as far as proposing a meeting of V4+India foreign ministers in its presidency program, which, while it ultimately did not take place, the V4 foreign ministry territorial directors did reach a consensus on moving forward with launching V4+India cooperation. However, no specific mentions of pursuing relations with India were made in the subsequent plans of the Czech (2023/2024) and Polish (2024/2025) V4 presidencies, although this should not be taken as evidence of disinterest in the relationship.

This interest aligns with India's push to reframe its European diplomacy from a Western-centric to a pan-European approach, where smaller but strategically positioned actors become vital entry points into regional frameworks and EU policy circles. Over the past five years, India has taken initial steps to engage with the V4, which have already yielded some results. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Poland and Hungary in 2019 marked the first such outreach in decades and emphasized India's desire to build closer ties with Central Europe.² In 2020, the minister hosted envoys from all four V4 countries, reiterating India's recognition of the grouping's geopolitical value. In 2022, he visited Slovakia (the first-ever visit by an Indian foreign minister)

and Czechia. Most notably, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic visit to Poland in 2024—the first by an Indian Prime Minister in 45 years—elevated the India–Poland relationship to a Strategic Partnership.³ Poland has since emerged as India's most robust partner in the V4, with growing ties in defense production, innovation, and logistics. The string of top-level engagements has, for now, been capped by Indian President Droupadi Murmu's visit to Slovakia in 2025.

Likewise, Czechia has deepened its cooperation with India, particularly in sectors such as innovation and cybersecurity, reflecting shared concerns over strategic technologies and a desire for diversified global value chains.⁴ All four V4 states have defense cooperation agreements with India, although the relationships remain uneven. This asymmetric engagement suggests that while India–V4 ties are progressing, they still lack institutional coherence, and much of the potential remains unrealized.

Still, when discussing V4-India cooperation, we must remain mindful of the fact that the preferred levels of engagement of V4 states with external partners will remain bilateral or conducted via EU channels. This is especially true for trade-related agendas, where the European Commission has exclusive competence in addressing issues such as tariffs and the conclusion of free trade agreements (FTAs). Indeed, the currently ongoing FTA negotiations are a prime example.

What is the Visegrad Four?

- The Visegrad Group (V4) is a loosely knit bloc comprising four Central European countries: Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia.
- The group was founded in 1991 and takes its name from a Hungarian castle where the kings of Poland, Hungary, and Bohemia met in 1335 to discuss cooperation in trade and politics.
- With its onset in the early 1990s, one of the main goals of the cooperation was to facilitate the four countries' attempts to join the Euro-Atlantic area by integrating into NATO and the EU.
- Throughout its existence, the V4 has grown to cover cooperation and coordination on a range of issues across a plethora of policy areas, including in shaping countries' positions on issues handled on the EU level.
- The V4 is a loose intergovernmental platform without a proper institutionalization or secretariat. The grouping is presided over by an annual rotating Presidency (July to June), with the presiding country issuing a presidency program that serves as a blueprint for the group's activities throughout the year.
- The only common institution under the V4 is the International Visegrad Fund (IVF). This international grant institution supports regional cooperation among civil society organizations to enhance their relationships, exchange ideas, and foster mutual understanding among participating countries.
- The V4 has also developed an external dimension in the so-called V4+ formats. Such formats have been developed in collaboration with key partners in Europe, including Germany, Austria, and Slovenia. In the Indo-Pacific region, the V4 has established a regularized cooperation platform with Japan and South Korea through consultation meetings involving high-level political representatives.

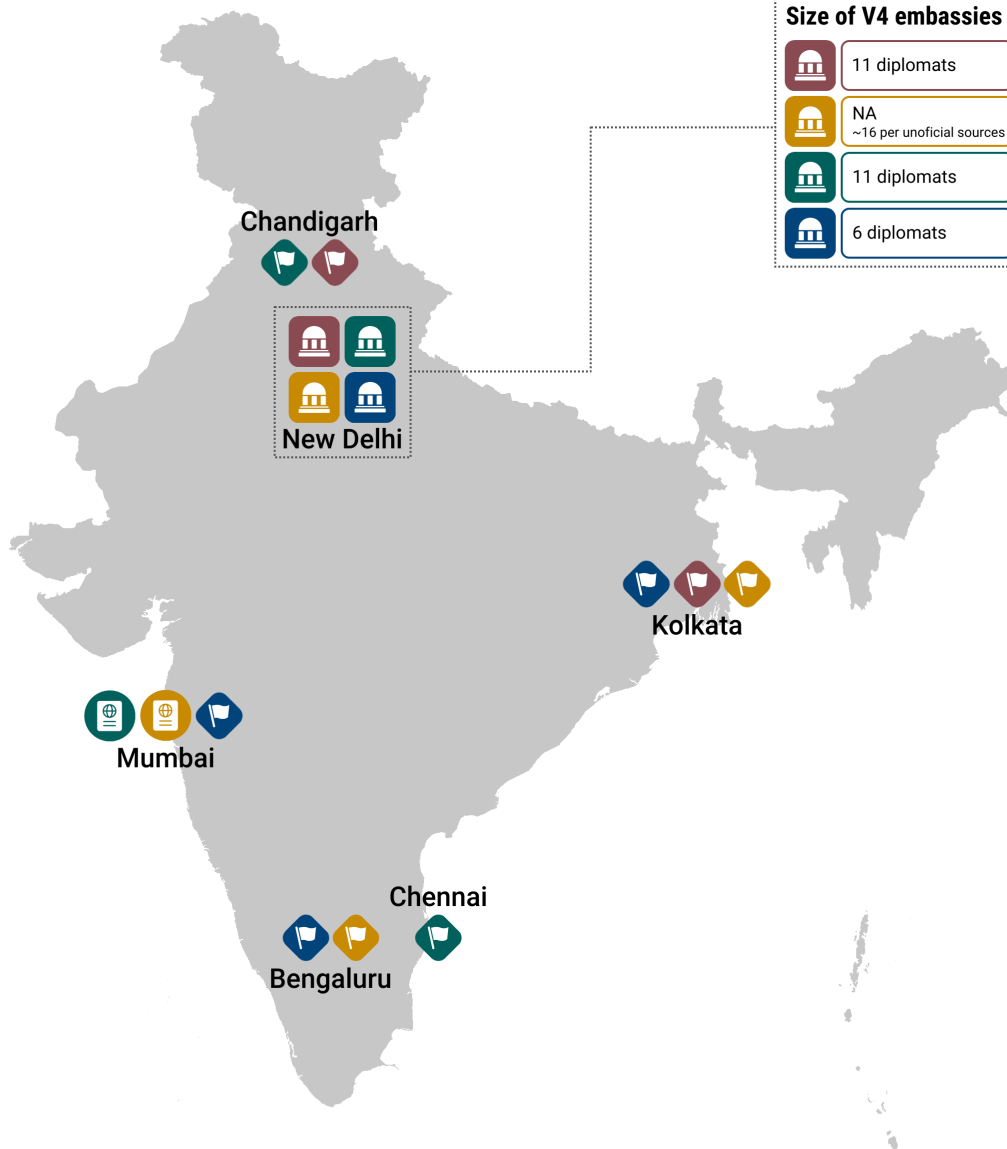
V4 diplomatic presence in India



Embassy
 Consulate General
 Honorary Consulate
 Czechia
 Hungary
 Poland
 Slovakia

Size of V4 embassies

	11 diplomats
	NA ~16 per unofficial sources
	11 diplomats
	6 diplomats



Data: Author's compilation bases on V4 MFA's websites.

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Mini-lateral engagements play a supplementary role and are pursued primarily in agendas where the V4 states have a clear alignment of interests, thereby mitigating their zero-sum thinking, which is often present when pursuing economic ties with foreign partners. Conversely, the V4+ format can be a helpful conduit for political dialogue. Existing cooperation formats with South Korea and Japan, as well as with other countries outside the Indo-Pacific, offer insights into how the India-V4 political dialogue may be structured. Besides, irregular summits of the Heads of Government, political engagements would also happen on the levels of (deputy) ministers of foreign affairs, (deputy) ministers of defense. Below that, dialogues of foreign ministry political directors or policy planning units are also quite a common format.

Despite the internal V4 constraint, current fragmentation of global order gives new urgency to the need to develop relations between India and European countries, including the V4. India is seeking partners in Europe beyond the major capitals—partners who are pragmatic, industrially capable, and willing to work towards a multipolar world. A recalibrated strategic focus on the V4, therefore, not only makes diplomatic sense but aligns with India's broader objective of balancing regional cooperation with great power autonomy.

From Ukraine to multipolarity: Realignments and regional autonomy

Few events have reshaped Europe's internal and external posturing as dramatically as the Russia–Ukraine War. It has upended the continent's security architecture, triggered unprecedented sanctions, realigned energy dependencies, and revived discussions around defense modernization, digital sovereignty, and regional resilience. For the V4, the war has not just been a policy issue but an existential crisis—especially for Poland and the Czech Republic, who view Russian aggression as a direct threat to regional stability.

These states have provided extensive military, humanitarian, and logistical support to Ukraine. Poland, in particular, has served as a frontline state—hosting refugees, facilitating NATO deployments, and emerging as a de facto security hub in Central Europe. Czechia, though smaller, has also punched above its weight, supplying arms and advocating for a robust EU response. Meanwhile, Slovakia has largely followed suit, although with a growing domestic pushback against prolonged involvement and economic fallout. This has been particularly apparent since the 2023 snap elections, which brought the current government of Prime Minister Robert Fico to power. In stark contrast to the previous government coalition, this government promotes increasingly anti-Western rhetoric and actions, often veiled under the guise of “All-Azimuth Foreign Policy.”

Hungary, in stark contrast, has charted its own course. Citing energy security, national sovereignty, and economic pragmatism, Budapest has resisted complete alignment with EU sanctions on Russia and continues to maintain a relatively warm relationship with Moscow. This divergence has created internal tensions within the V4, complicating its traditional unity. Yet, from India's perspective, this fragmentation presents both risk and opportunity.

India's stance on the Ukraine conflict has been carefully calibrated. While it has maintained deep historical ties with the Soviet Union and now Russia, especially in defense and energy, it has also engaged in humanitarian outreach to Ukraine and called for diplomacy, restraint, and de-escalation. This balanced approach has drawn criticism from certain quarters in Europe, particularly those who view neutrality as tantamount to complicity. But within the V4, reactions have been more varied.

For Hungary and Slovakia, India's refusal to take sides aligns with their own pursuit of strategic autonomy and energy flexibility. Budapest, in particular, may see in India a partner that shares its skepticism of Western pressure and prefers bilateralism over bloc politics. Still, their approach is likely to change dramatically should Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán or Slovak Prime Minister Fico fail to secure re-election, as in both countries, opposition parties have differing views on foreign policy, anchored in their Euro-Atlantic orientation. For Poland and the Czech Republic, India's nuanced position may be harder to reconcile with their firm Atlanticist commitments. Yet, even here, the economic and strategic incentives for deeper ties with India continue to outweigh single-issue disagreements.

India's “pointed alignment” strategy (which focuses on Quad partners more in Indo-Pacific as a deeper extension of multi-alignment strategy) becomes particularly useful here.⁵ Rather than

seeking blanket consensus, India can engage different V4 states based on specific domains of cooperation. With Poland, defense production and logistics; with Czechia, innovation and digital governance; with Hungary, industrial investment and energy; and with Slovakia, manufacturing and vocational training. This model, already successful in India's Indo-Pacific diplomacy, allows for issue-specific partnerships while sidestepping ideological or political divergences.

Crucially, the Ukraine war has also reinforced shared concerns around energy security and overdependence on single sources. The V4's scramble to reduce reliance on Russian gas and oil mirrors India's own diversification agenda. India's advances in renewable energy, particularly solar and green hydrogen, provide tangible opportunities for collaboration.⁶ Energy cooperation, especially on clean technology transfers, co-development projects, and supply chain restructuring, could form one of the most politically neutral yet strategically rich areas of India–V4 engagement.

The post-Ukraine environment has also sparked broader debates in the V4 about the EU's strategic trajectory, transatlantic dependency, and the need for a more robust Eastern European voice.⁷ India's multipolar outlook and preference for decentralized global governance resonate with these debates. In this context, India is not merely an economic partner; it is an ideational partner, capable of supporting the V4's desire for a more balanced and sovereign role within international systems.

Economic complementarities and the strategic supply chain logic

Despite recent diplomatic momentum, India's trade with the V4 remains relatively modest, particularly when compared to its engagements with Western European powers. Yet the underlying economic complementarity is increasingly evident. The V4 countries, particularly Poland and Czechia, are at the heart of Europe's manufacturing and engineering value chains.⁸ They are deeply embedded in industrial automation, electric vehicle production, high-precision machinery, and ICT hardware. These are sectors where India is seeking investment, technology transfer, and market access as it aspires to become a manufacturing hub through initiatives such as "Make in India" and the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes.⁹

The India–Czech trade relationship, for instance, has experienced steady growth, reaching \$3.6 billion in 2023, up from just \$83.7 million in 1993.¹⁰ Poland, too, has emerged as a prominent partner, not only in goods trade but also in logistics infrastructure, defense repair hubs, and even higher education. The two countries have launched platforms for regular dialogue on innovation, smart city projects, and supply chain security. Meanwhile, Hungarian companies have received significant Indian FDI, notably in sectors like IT services, pharmaceuticals, and auto components.

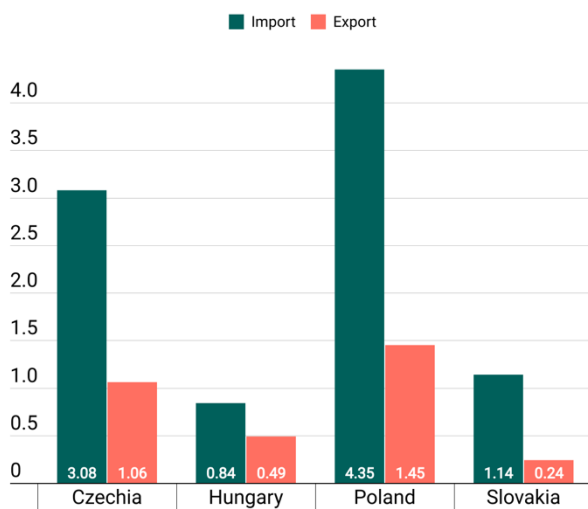
India's broader ambition to de-risk from China has sharpened its interest in trusted European supply chains. The V4, with its skilled workforce, EU regulatory alignment, and rising skepticism toward Chinese investment, is well-positioned to become a new production and transit corridor.¹¹ According to recent estimates, China's share in indirect exports to Central Europe exceeds direct exports by 80% to 250%, a figure the V4 seeks to reduce.¹² This makes supply chain resilience a shared strategic priority.

Digital cooperation is another underexplored frontier. The V4's growing push for digital sovereignty, especially in 5G, cybersecurity, and cloud infrastructure, resonates with India's own regulatory approach.¹³ India has established strong credentials in public digital infrastructure, including digital ID (Aadhaar), payment systems (UPI), and healthcare technology. Joint platforms on cyber norms, AI regulation, and data localization could position the V4–India cooperation as a

Visegrad Four's trade with India

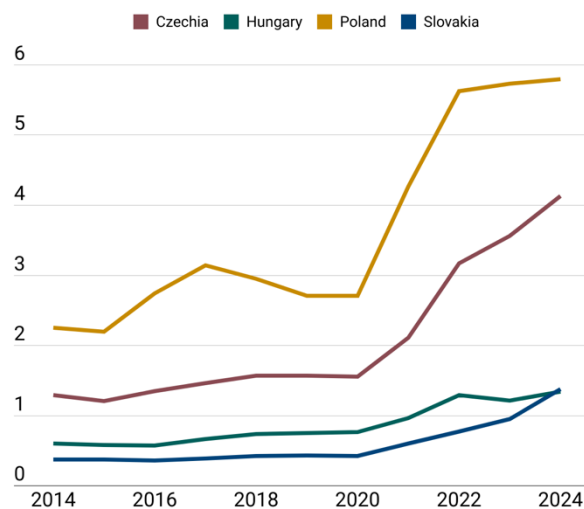


Import – export (2024; bil. \$)



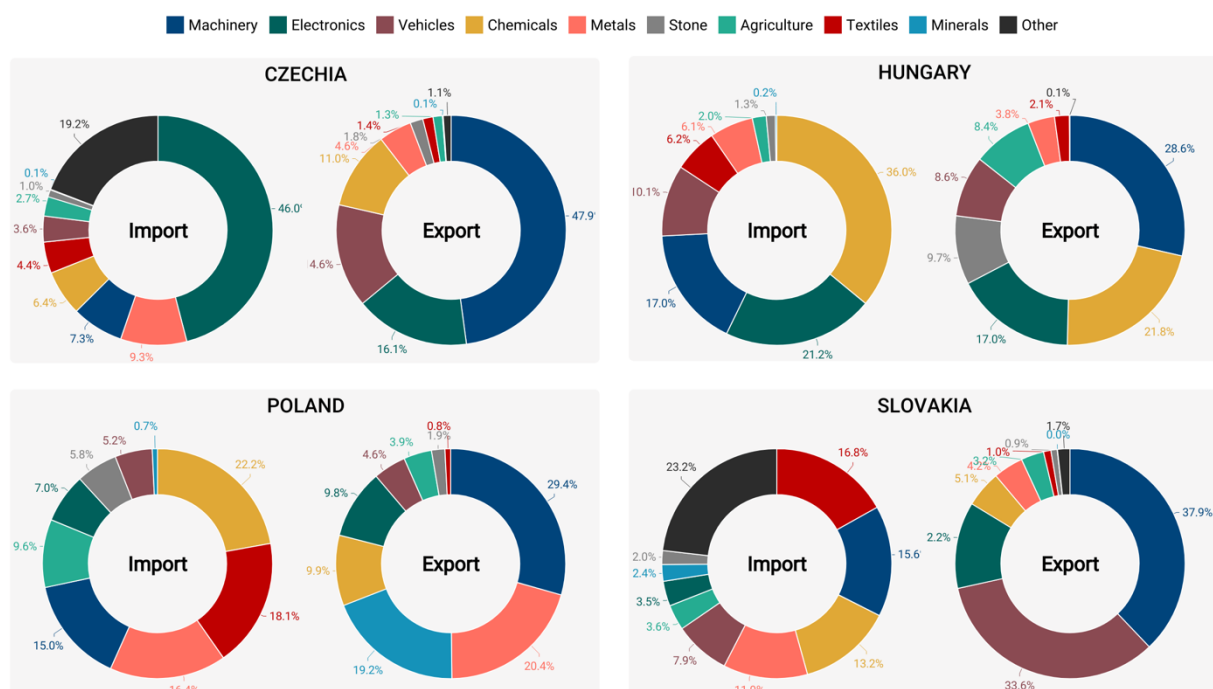
Data: UN Comtrade Database

Total trade (2014-2024; bil. \$)



Data: UN Comtrade Database

Trade structure (2023)



Data: Atlas of Economic Complexity

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middle path between Silicon Valley's market dominance and Beijing's state-led tech authoritarianism.

Energy transition is yet another area of convergence. The war in Ukraine has created a profound energy security crisis in Europe, forcing a pivot toward renewables and decentralized energy grids. India's globally recognized capacity in solar manufacturing, battery innovation, and green hydrogen pilot projects can be leveraged in the V4's decarbonization journey. Small and mid-sized V4 firms, backed by EU green funds, are now actively scouting for non-Western partners. India's

International Solar Alliance could serve as a natural bridge, offering co-financing, technical training, and scalable models for sustainable energy ecosystems.

Regarding investment, evaluating their overall volume remains difficult. As is typical with FDI data, precise information on investment volumes is unavailable, mainly due to confidentiality of data reported by investors, or significantly differs between various sources. It is thus more practical to focus on specific projects than macroeconomic parameters. Among Indian investments in the V4, several projects stand out: in the automotive sector, investments by Jaguar Land Rover (owned by Tata Motors) in Slovakia and Apollo Tyres in Hungary; in the metallurgy sector, by ArcelorMittal in Poland; and in information technology, by Infosys in Czechia. Companies from the V4 have also invested in India, albeit in lower volumes.

In short, India–V4 economic ties are not merely a diversification strategy. They reflect a convergence of technological ambition, regulatory values, and industrial restructuring, forming the bedrock of what could evolve into a resilient, forward-looking economic corridor. Such development would be facilitated by the conclusion of new Bilateral Investment Agreements, which were previously unilaterally terminated by India in 2015. The closure of these agreements would help improve the legal certainty for both Indian and Central European investors when pursuing projects with each other.

The Hungary and Slovakia gap: Addressing asymmetries in engagement

While Poland and Czechia have led the charge in forging deeper ties with India, Hungary and Slovakia remain under-engaged. Hungary has received substantial Indian investment and maintains an open-door policy for Asian capital. Yet it lacks strategic depth in its bilateral engagement with India. Slovakia, on the other hand, has the least developed ties across all domains, despite its potential in areas like automotive engineering, metallurgy, pharmaceuticals, and the defense industry. This uneven engagement risks undermining India's potential to treat the V4 as a collective strategic bloc. Without a more balanced approach, India's ties could fragment along bilateral lines, weakening its ability to shape regional dynamics or to use the V4 as a collective interlocutor in EU corridors.

India should adopt a tiered engagement strategy with Central European partners, focusing on deepening sectoral cooperation in emerging technologies. Such cooperation could serve as a necessary bridge to overcome the existing gaps with Slovakia and Hungary. Establishing joint initiatives, such as a Technology and Innovation Fund, could support collaboration in areas like green technologies, artificial intelligence, fintech, quantum technologies, pharmaceuticals and biotech, or defense technologies.

Enhancing educational and innovation diplomacy through partnerships in EU research and academic programs, such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe, can provide a strong foundation for long-term people-to-people connections. In this sense, it is crucial that V4 states offer their support for finalizing the EU-India deal on India's full participation in the Horizon Europe framework.

To foster further trust and identify areas of mutual interest, India could promote structured dialogues through business forums, track 1.5 engagements, and inter-parliamentary exchanges. As regional actors in Central Europe increase their relevance in EU defense and NATO strategies, they can also serve as important partners for dialogue on the Indo-Pacific and broader security cooperation.

India must also support subregional cohesion by proposing a V4–India Business and Policy Forum, co-hosted by rotating capitals, to institutionalize cooperation. This would send a strong signal that India treats the V4 as a genuine bloc rather than a convenience grouping in the EU framework. Diplomatic parity is essential if India wants to build lasting credibility and avoid over-reliance on any single V4 partner.

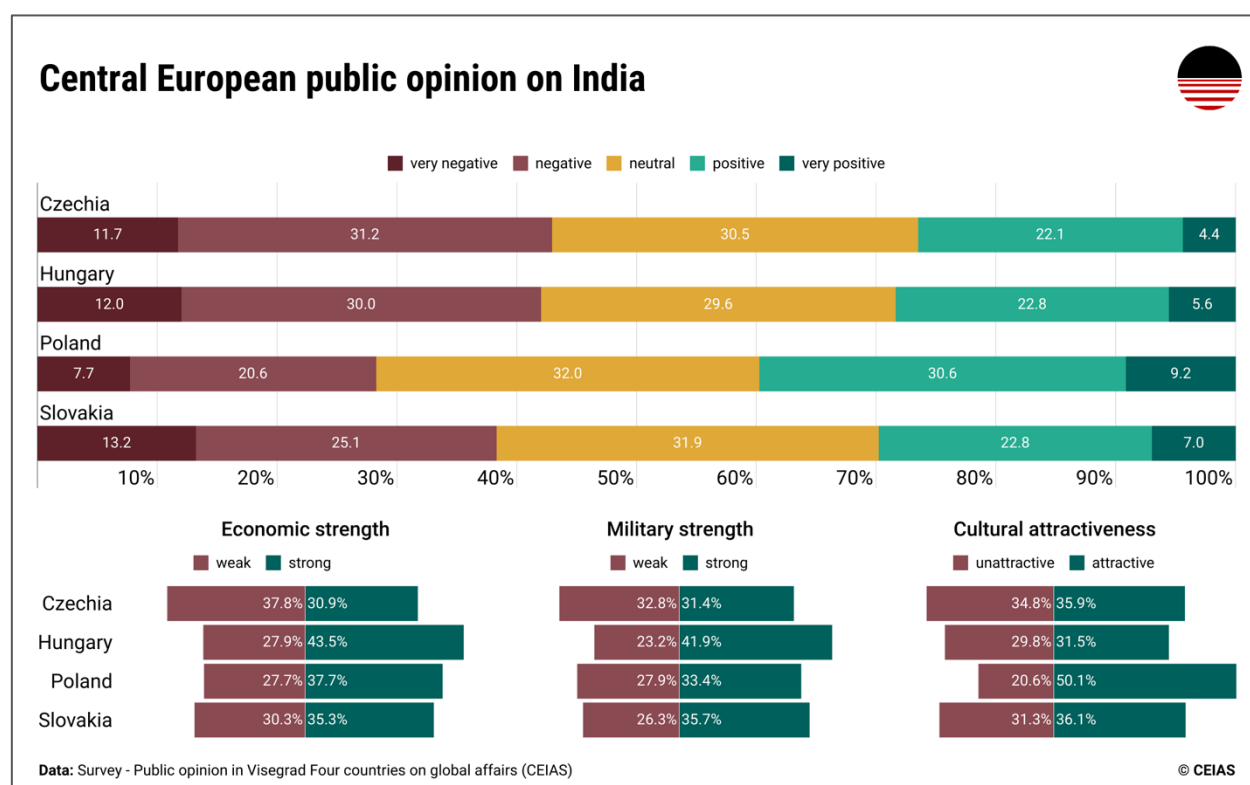
Public opinion about India remains a roadblock

Although we see growing political momentum for more engagement between the V4 and India, the public sentiment in the V4 countries has not yet caught up to this, possibly having a constraining effect on building the relationship.

CEIAS' representative public opinion survey of V4 states, conducted from late February to early March 2025, shows that the V4 publics have somewhat skeptical views of India.¹⁴ Among the four countries, only respondents from Poland have a higher share of positive views (39.7%) than negative (28.3%). In the remaining three countries, the views of India are rather similar, with approximately 25-30% having positive views of India. Still, in each country, almost one third of respondents have neutral (or ambivalent) opinions of India.

The public views of India also tend to be immune to significant changes. Comparing the 2025 polling with a previous poll from 2020 reveals only a few changes in perception. Looking at net favorability (share of positive views minus share of negative views, neutral views disregarded), in the span of five years, the largest improvement in views of India was recorded among the Slovak population (an improvement of 10 percentage points), followed by Hungary (up 7.8 percentage points). On the other hand, both Czechia and Poland recorded slight deterioration of public perception over this period, down 1.3 percentage points and 3.1 percentage points, respectively.

Still, neither of the V4 states is homogeneous in its views of India. Differences are particularly evident along the age and education divides, which prove to be statistically significant

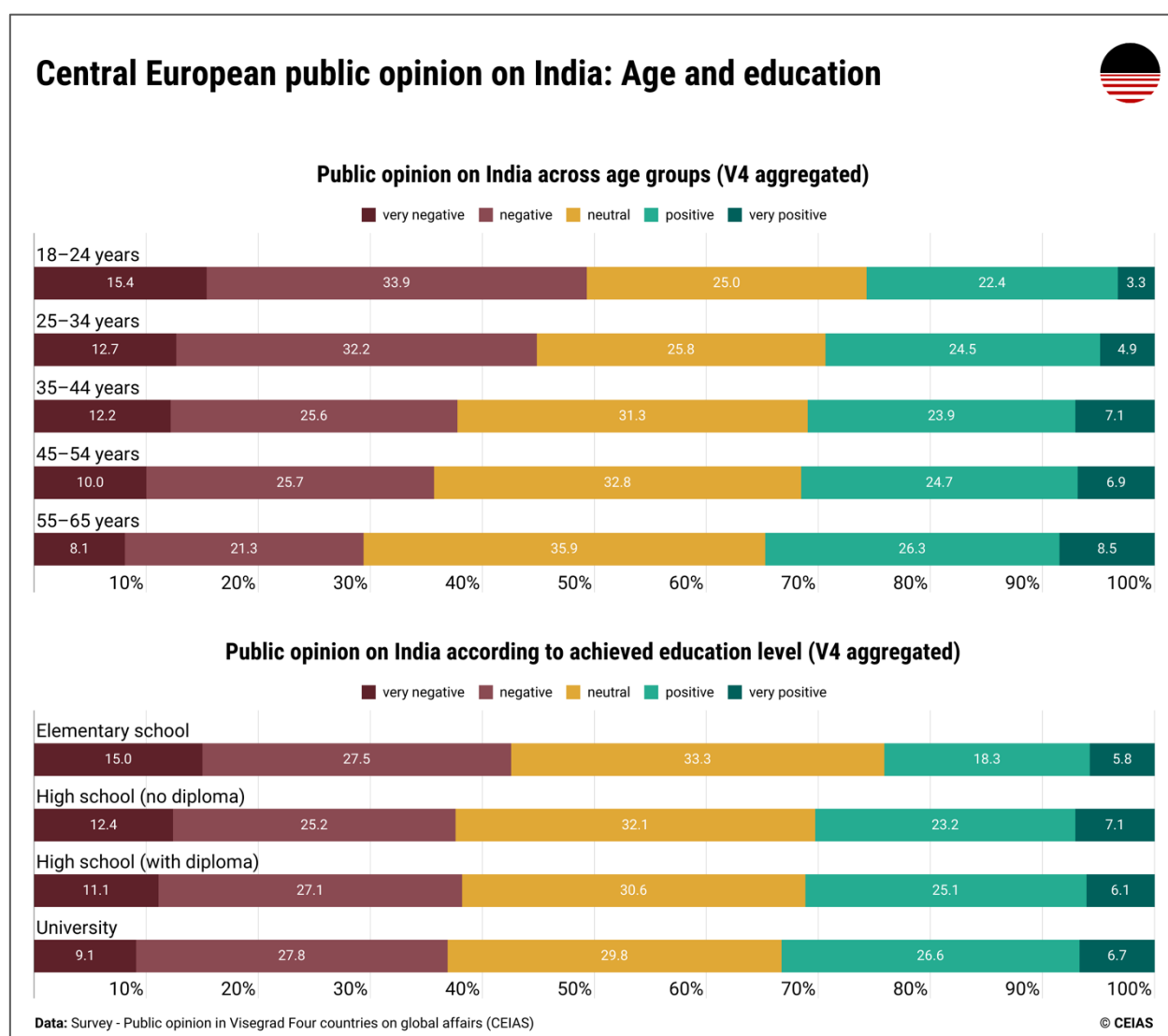


determinants of how respondents view India. As far as education is concerned, respondents with a higher level of education tend to be more positive about India than those with a lower level of education, although none of the education-level groups exhibit a net positive perception of India.

Interestingly, the two youngest demographics in the V4 (18–24 years; 25–34 years) have significantly more critical outlook on India, with almost half (49.3% and 44.9%, respectively) reporting negative views of the country, compared to the mostly positive views among the oldest respondents (55–65 years), among which 29.4% have negative and 34.8% have positive views of India. This is the only age bracket with a higher share of positive than negative views.

Poland is a significant outlier. Even though the relationship between age and perception of India holds here as well, and younger respondents tend to view India more negatively, all age groups show more positive views of India than the rest of the region (with net favorability being 14–22 percentage points higher compared to V4 as a whole). At the same time, in Poland, all the age brackets except for the youngest report a net positive view of India.

These views also translate to how specific aspects of India's power and politics are perceived. Hungarians are the group most convinced that India is a strong country, both in terms of military might (41.9%) and economic strength (43.5%). This is significantly higher than in the remaining



three Central European countries, where approximately one-third of respondents view India in a similar manner. Czechia also stands out as being the only V4 state where more people see India as weak rather than strong.

A different dynamic, however, is evident in terms of India's cultural attractiveness, a metric that can help us understand the soft power potential of India. In Poland, as many as 50.1% of respondents view India as culturally attractive, while in the rest of the region, only one-third of respondents share this view, with slightly smaller shares of the population finding India unattractive.

Czechia is also the country with the smallest share of people having a positive view of India's foreign policy and political values, only 9.3% and 10%, respectively. The most positive sentiments are recorded in Poland, with 19.3% holding positive views of both India's political values and foreign policy. This presents India with a complex position and a challenging road to navigate regional public opinion. Investing more in publicity campaigns, especially those that present India as a modern partner ripe for economic cooperation in key sectors, will be crucial for India to sway public opinion.

From momentum to mechanism: Institutionalizing the V4+India partnership

India–V4 relations have reached a point where political will must be converted into policy architecture. A good starting point is the creation of a formal V4+India Dialogue, akin to India's Track 1 mechanisms with Nordic and Baltic states, or V4 countries' semi-regular political dialogue with Japan and South Korea. Depending on the theme/topic, this platform could host annual meetings between prime ministers, foreign ministers, and other senior governmental representatives, as well as business and civil society leaders, focusing on priority areas such as defense manufacturing, climate innovation, and critical technology regulation. Initially, and for the sake of expedience and efficiency, V4+India dialogues can occur alongside larger regional meetings.

Such meetings must yield tangible results rather than mere political declarations, as this would help create a sense of mutual benefit in the relationship, boosting political confidence, trust, and fostering an atmosphere of regular engagement. Such meetings can also serve as a platform for regular exchanges between business leaders or to hold 1.5 Track meetings together with representatives from Indian and Central European think tanks and academia. Having a regular 1.5 Track exchange would establish a necessary feedback loop for the governments, which can offer an objective perspective on the state of relations, and help to promote new ideas for future cooperation between the V4 states and India, such as various meetings organized in the EU-India framework, or as part of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

The V4 has often been seen as a somewhat informal, consensus-seeking grouping. India can leverage this by proposing sectoral cooperation on:

- Defense and dual-use technology collaboration, including joint R&D in unmanned systems and encrypted communications.
- Green transition and climate tech, with India offering scale and the V4 providing EU financing linkages.
- Digital governance, including data privacy, disinformation, and AI standards.

- Higher education and mobility, including mutual recognition of degrees and research visas.

This institutional engagement should also be integrated into broader EU structures. The Global Gateway Initiative—Europe’s infrastructure alternative to the Belt and Road—could serve as a platform for facilitating the external dimensions of the India–V4 relationship, especially in top-priority areas for the V4, such as the Western Balkans, Ukraine (especially post-war reconstruction), and other Eastern Partnership countries.

People-to-people diplomacy must also be scaled up. The 2022 Visegrad Student Virtual Summit was a promising start, but India and V4 countries should push for physical student and academic exchanges, joint language programs, and funding for India Chairs at major V4 universities (and vice versa) to include courses on European Studies and India’s university curricula. A shared scholarship or mobility program can generate familiarity, reduce stereotypes, and create future constituencies for the relationship. More academic collaborations should also be encouraged. India’s prospective accession to the Horizon Europe framework would serve as a significant impetus to achieve this.

This can be achieved by cooperation via the International Visegrad Fund (IVF), the V4’s only formal institution. To facilitate people-to-people contacts, India and IVF could enter into an agreement on co-funding projects jointly proposed by civil society organizations from the V4 and India. In the past, this model has been successfully utilized to foster academic and cultural cooperation with other Indo-Pacific partners, including Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

The final element is multilateral alignment. Poland and Czechia are increasingly vocal in democratic governance platforms, technology ethics discussions, and Indo-Pacific debates. India can collaborate with them to establish issue-specific coalitions within the G20, OECD, and ASEM. Multilateral engagement, backed by bilateral substance, can raise the profile and strategic weight of the India–V4 relationship within broader global forums.

What’s next?

The post-Ukraine landscape has revealed new fissures but also new opportunities. Europe is recalibrating its alliances, reassessing its dependencies, and exploring new partnerships. The Visegrad Four, as both geopolitical swing states and economic pivots, are at the center of this transformation. India, too, is undergoing its own foreign policy evolution—one that prioritizes resilience, regulatory alignment, and long-term balance.

India–V4 ties offer more than just economic convenience. They represent an opportunity to establish a regional corridor of trust, grounded in strategic autonomy, technological cooperation, and political flexibility. To seize this moment, both sides must move beyond gestures and embrace structured, thematic, and multi-level cooperation. This means recognizing that the V4 is not a marginal bloc, but a critical lever for shaping India’s engagement with an increasingly multipolar Europe. Conversely, the V4 must see India not as a transactional emerging market, but as a partner capable of anchoring their pivot to Asia. A comprehensive India–V4 framework, built on joint institutions, calibrated diplomacy, and shared innovation goals, can serve as a template for India’s next phase of European engagement—one that’s less capital-centric, more distributed, and future-proof in a fractured global order.

Czechia–India relations: From shared ideals to strategic innovation

Jiří Krejčík

Key takeaways

- Despite different positions on global security issues, especially the war in Ukraine, both countries continue to deepen cooperation through strategic, economic, and civil society ties.
- Economic exchange is thriving, with growing trade in goods and services, mutual investments in automotive, defense, and technology sectors, and tourism slowly recovering post-COVID.
- The future of the bilateral relationship hinges on innovation, strategic alignment in the Indo-Pacific, and opportunities emerging from the potential EU–India Free Trade Agreement.

The relationship between the Czech lands and India has deep historical roots, marked by scholarly and cultural exchanges that predate India's independence in 1947.¹⁵ Notably, Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore visited Czechoslovakia in 1921 and 1926, leaving a lasting impact on Czech cultural life. Diplomatic contacts were also formalized early, with Czechoslovakia opening consulates in Bombay (1920) and Calcutta (1929). A symbolically significant moment occurred in 1938, when Jawaharlal Nehru, then a leading figure in the Indian independence movement, visited Prague. Nehru's visit, which took place shortly before the Munich Agreement and the subsequent Nazi occupation, was a powerful gesture of solidarity with Czechoslovakia's democratic aspirations. Deeply sympathetic to the Czech struggle against fascism, Nehru spoke publicly about shared values of freedom and sovereignty. His visit left a lasting impression on Czech intellectuals and political leaders, laying the foundation for the post-war political affinity between the two nations.

Following India's independence in 1947, Czechoslovakia and India established formal diplomatic relations, building upon pre-existing economic ties, notably through Czech enterprises, such as Baťa's operations in India during the 1930s. Throughout the Cold War, Czechoslovakia became a significant partner for India, contributing to major industrial projects in sectors such as energy, metallurgy, and transportation. After the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the newly formed Czechia and India continued to strengthen their bilateral relations. Despite an initial slowdown due to economic transitions, trade between the two nations rebounded, escalating from approximately \$83.7 million in 1993 to over \$4.1 billion in 2024.¹⁶ This growth has been supported by high-level visits and agreements, including the 2010 agreements on economic cooperation¹⁷ and social security,¹⁸ and the 2018 cooperation accords in science, technology, and energy.¹⁹ The partnership has expanded into defense, science and technology, and education, reflecting a robust and multifaceted relationship.

Political determinants and political relations

India's importance to Czechia has steadily grown in recent years, driven by both economic opportunities and broader strategic concerns. This recognition is articulated in the Czech Indo-Pacific Strategy, adopted in October 2022, which prioritizes deepening ties with democratic nations in the region and India is projected as a key future partner.²⁰ Aligned with EU strategic goals, the document underscores the importance of partnerships with countries like India to promote stability, economic growth, and adherence to international law.²¹ This complements India's efforts to boost its own regional influence while diversifying partnerships beyond China. Both countries have grown increasingly wary of China's assertiveness, albeit from different perspectives: Czechia has taken a notably critical stance, aligning itself with Taiwan and EU skepticism toward Beijing.²² India, while firm on sovereignty issues such as its border conflict with China, still engages selectively with China on multilateral platforms. This asymmetry in approach complicates deeper coordination in the Indo-Pacific.

From India's perspective, Czechia is a valuable partner within the EU and the Central European region, particularly in terms of industrial cooperation, investment, and defense production. India has sought to strengthen ties with European nations to diversify its partnerships, especially amid shifting geopolitical alignments. However, the differing positions of the two countries regarding Russia's aggression against Ukraine have created a certain level of strategic nuance in their relations. Czechia has been one of the most vocal European supporters of Ukraine.²³ It has provided Kyiv with humanitarian aid and military equipment, and pushed for strong sanctions against Russia.²⁴ India, on the other hand, has maintained a more neutral stance, refraining from publicly condemning Russia while calling for dialogue and peace.²⁵ This divergence has not derailed bilateral relations but has required diplomatic balancing, especially in multilateral forums.

Czech political parties, regardless of ideological affiliation, generally support closer relations with India. The current government led by Prime Minister Petr Fiala (ODS) has maintained this consensus and continued the trend of deepening bilateral ties. However, defense-related cooperation is sometimes debated, given India's long-standing arms trade with Russia, a point of sensitivity for Czechia and other NATO allies. While Tatra trucks have been a regular supplier for the Indian Army, and some new opportunities for further cooperation seemed to be opening up after the 5-day visit of Chief of Defense Staff of India General Bipin Rawat to Czechia in November 2021,²⁶ the situation became significantly more complicated after the start of the war in Ukraine.²⁷

High-level contacts between the two countries have continued on a regular basis. Notable visits include that of Indian President Ram Nath Kovind to Prague in 2018, the first by an Indian head of state in 50 years. During the visit, several agreements were signed in areas such as trade, science and technology, and culture. On the Czech side, high-level delegations and ministers have participated in flagship forums, such as the Raisina Dialogue and Vibrant Gujarat, expressing their intent to elevate ties further.

In January 2024, Fiala and Modi adopted the "Czechia-India Strategic Partnership on Innovation" during a meeting at the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit in Gandhinagar.²⁸ This agreement aims to enhance cooperation across various sectors, including trade, defense industrial collaboration, cybersecurity, environmental technology, energy, and healthcare. A notable emphasis is placed on fostering innovation through increased cooperation between universities, applied research institutions, and scientific mobility programs. A concrete example of this collaboration is the recent establishment of the Mařík Institute for Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, and Cybernetics at NIMS University in Jaipur in March 2023.²⁹ The institute is the outcome of a collaboration between NIMS University in Jaipur and the Czech Institute of Informatics, Robotics, and Cybernetics at the Czech Technical University in Prague.³⁰

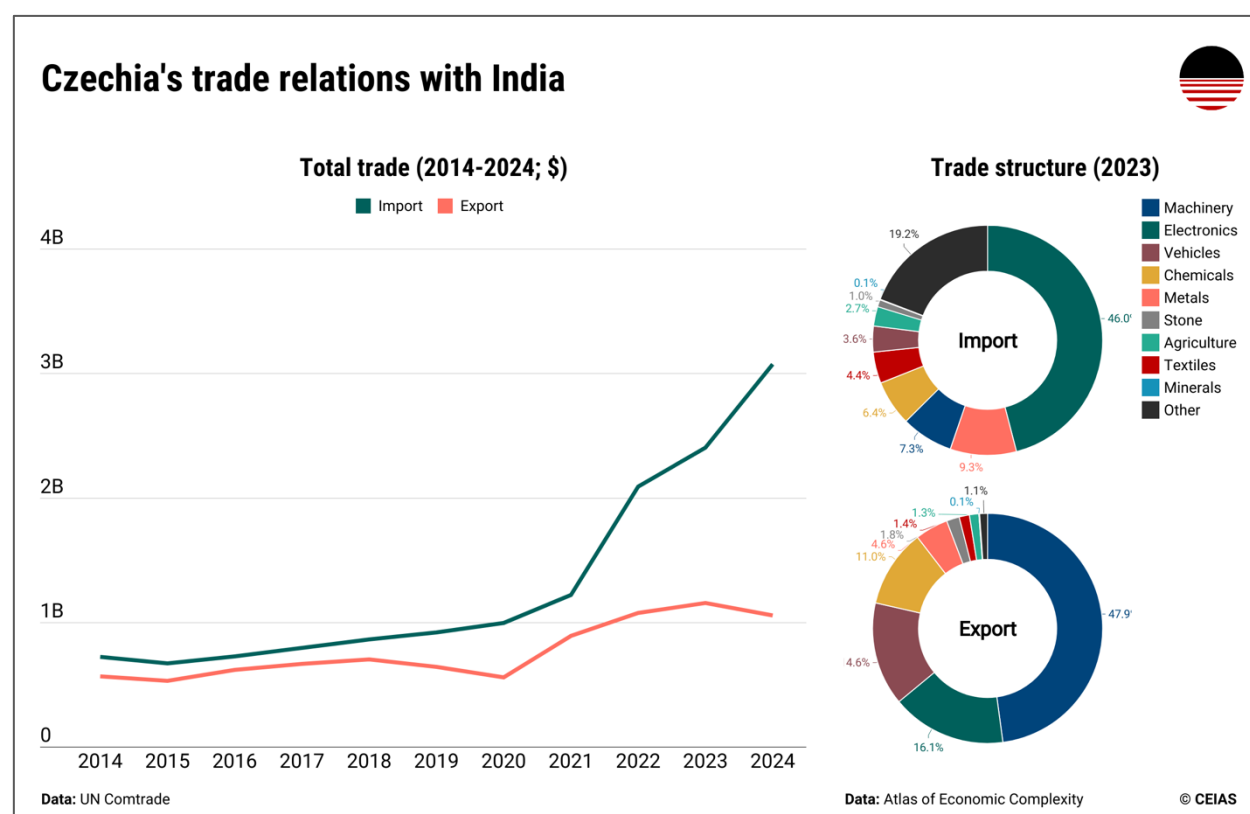
While the agreement marks a milestone in bilateral relations, branding it a “strategic partnership” sets a high bar. The emphasis on innovation reflects a desire to focus on politically neutral, future-oriented domains, such as AI, green technology, and digital transformation, while avoiding more pressing areas, including security cooperation, climate diplomacy, and foreign policy coordination. However, the absence of a dedicated institutional mechanism, limited prioritization across a broad agenda, and asymmetrical geopolitical outlooks between India and Czechia may constrain its implementation. Without deeper coordination and practical instruments—joint innovation funds or structured academic exchange programs, for instance—there is a risk that the partnership may remain more declarative than operational.³¹

Economic exchanges

Economic relations between India and Czechia started in the early 1950s when Czechoslovakia began providing significant technical assistance to India. By the 1990s, trade between the two nations was modest but grew rapidly after Czechia's independence in 1993. In fiscal year 2024–2025, Czechia's exports to India reached \$1.1 billion, while Indian exports to Czechia were valued at \$3.1 billion, showing strong growth.³² India is an increasingly important market for Czech exports, particularly in automotive parts, electronics, and industrial machinery. In return, Indian exports include pharmaceuticals, chemicals, textiles, and electrical components.

Trade in services has also gained momentum. Czechia exports travel services and transportation services, while India is an emerging partner in information technology and telecommunications. The growing strength of India's service sectors, particularly IT and software development, is a significant factor in the expanding service trade between the two nations. With India being one of the largest producers of software and IT services globally, this has created opportunities for Czech businesses to leverage India's vast expertise in technology.

Mutual foreign direct investment (FDI) is another cornerstone of the relationship. Czech companies such as Škoda Auto, Zetor, Tatra Trucks, and Doosan Škoda Power have invested significantly in India's manufacturing and defense sectors. Škoda, in particular, has committed

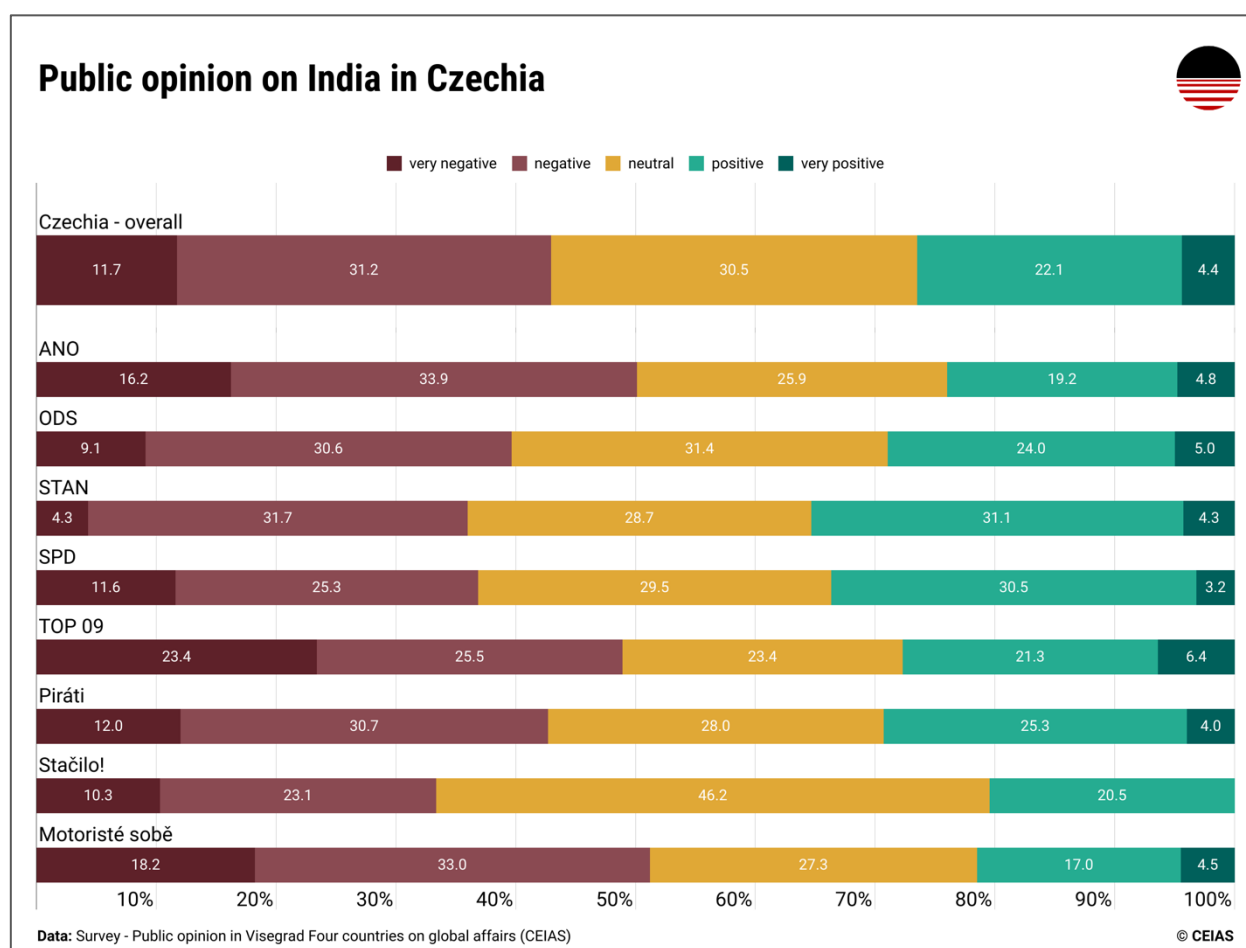


over €1 billion under its “India 2.0” strategy to expand production and market share in South Asia.³³ Other major Czech investors in India include the pharmaceutical company Zentiva, which acquired the Sanofi plant in Ankleshwar in 2020.³⁴ Home Credit, one of the most prominent investors in recent years, has recently sold its business in India worth approximately €80 million to a group of investors led by TVS Holdings.^{35 36} In return, Indian companies are also increasingly active in Czechia. Infosys has a major IT center in Brno; Glenmark Pharmaceuticals operates in the healthcare sector; and Varroc Lighting Systems supplies the Czech automotive industry (although Varroc Lighting Systems plants in Czechia, Poland and other countries were sold to French Plastic Omnium in 2022).³⁷

Tourism and educational exchanges complement these economic ties. Despite the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, India remains an attractive long-haul destination for Czechs,³⁸ while an increasing number of Indian tourists explore Central Europe via Prague.³⁹ The total number of Indian citizens living in Czechia has increased sharply in recent years and, as of the end of May 2025, stood at over 9,000 Indians staying temporarily and more than 1,700 residing permanently, with the majority of the Indian diaspora living in Prague.⁴⁰

Civil society relations

India’s image in Czech society remains ambiguous. A recent opinion poll by CEIAS found that 42.9% of Czech respondents held negative or very negative views of India, 30.5% were neutral, and 26.6% had a positive view of India.⁴¹ While these figures show modest improvement since 2020, they suggest that India is still often perceived through stereotypical lenses: yoga, spirituality, spicy food, Bollywood, or as a budget travel destination rather than an emerging economy.



That said, civil society engagement is slowly growing. The India-Czechia Friendship Forum (ICFF), established in 2024 as an umbrella platform under the Embassy of India in Prague, brings together the Indian community and cultural organizations to promote collaboration between the two nations.⁴² Indian cinema also plays a role in public diplomacy. Bollywood's interest in Czech film locations and the annual Indian Film Festival in Prague, held every October, has helped introduce Indian culture to broader Czech audiences.⁴³

What's next?

The trajectory of Czechia-India relations seems poised for continued growth. In the coming years, one of the most significant developments is likely to be in the field of technology, where both nations will seek to collaborate on innovation, AI, and sustainable development. This aligns with recent agreements signed between the two governments, particularly in the areas of clean energy and smart technology.

One of the most significant developments for the mutual relationship could be the potential adoption of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the EU and India. If adopted, it could significantly enhance trade between Czechia and India, particularly in the technology, automotive, pharmaceutical, and service sectors. Czech businesses would benefit from improved access to the Indian market, and Indian businesses would gain greater ease in entering the EU market.

However, several obstacles must be overcome. On a practical level, high-level political visits are still relatively infrequent, which limits sustained momentum and visibility. The absence of regular ministerial or presidential engagements hampers strategic coordination and reduces opportunities for signing new agreements. In parallel, educational and scientific collaboration is underdeveloped. Student exchanges, joint research programs, and inter-university partnerships remain limited, weakening the broader innovation agenda. Administrative hurdles, slow regulatory procedures, and the lack of direct flight connections between Prague and major Indian cities continue to constrain business, tourism, and academic mobility. Strengthening these practical aspects – such as creating more direct flights and aligning regulatory processes – would further facilitate deeper ties.

At the same time, perceptual challenges persist. While both countries view China as a strategic competitor, Czechia has taken a more vocal and critical stance, especially regarding Taiwan, while India pursues a more cautious, multi-vector approach rooted in strategic autonomy. A similar divergence exists on Russia: Czechia strongly backs Ukraine and aligns with NATO's response to the war, whereas India maintains a neutral position due to long-standing defense and energy ties. These contrasting outlooks also extend to the Indo-Pacific, where Czechia's involvement is shaped by its EU and transatlantic commitments, while India emphasizes regional leadership and a multipolar approach. Without greater alignment, such differences may hinder cooperation in multilateral forums or joint strategic initiatives.

The V4 countries share common interests with India, particularly in defense, energy, and trade. As India's role in the global economy and security architecture grows, there is increasing potential for the V4 to present a united front in its engagement with India. While Czechia has maintained strong bilateral ties with India, there is room for enhanced cooperation among V4 nations to engage India as a bloc, provided it does not outweigh the mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation.

Hungary: an evolving relationship with India in a multipolar world

Júlia Szivák

Key takeaways

- Despite perceptual political differences, Hungary views India as a growing power and a key international partner in supporting its outlier foreign policy position
- Anti-immigrant rhetoric is a roadblock in Hungary's Eastern opening policy
- Key sectors, such as renewable energy sources, filmmaking, and tourism, could revitalize economic relations

Diplomatic relations between Hungary and India were established in 1948, shortly after India's independence. Following President Zakir Hussain's 1958 visit to Budapest, diplomatic relations were elevated to the ambassadorial level.⁴⁴ During the socialist regime in Hungary, the relationship had a strong focus on cultural exchange, with regular high-level visits between the two countries.

Following the change of regime in Hungary in 1990, and especially after it acceded to the EU in 2004, Hungarian policies focused more on strengthening its Western connections. A shift was brought about by the introduction of the Eastern Opening policies in 2010, which started to emphasize the importance of Asian relationships. India has also been identified as a potential partner with significant opportunities for economic and possibly political collaboration. However, these policies have failed to coalesce into a coherent strategy, and the relationship remains to be explored more fully.

As of 2025, the Indian Embassy in Budapest serves as the representative of India to Hungary, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina. Hungary has an embassy in New Delhi and, following the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's visit to India in 2013, a Consulate General was established in Mumbai.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the relationship to India pales in comparison to the Hungarian government's ties with other Asian partners, such as China, South Korea, and Japan.

Political relations

Examining the history of India-Hungarian relations, it is evident that while bilateral relations have been cordial, Hungary has traditionally played a minor role in India's foreign policy, and vice versa. There is a significant disparity in terms of high-level visits between the countries. The most recent prime ministerial visit from Hungary to India was a large delegation led by Orbán in 2013. The last Indian prime minister to visit Hungary was Rajiv Gandhi in 1988, a fact that Orbán even acknowledged in 2011.⁴⁶ It is noteworthy that Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó has been a frequent guest in New Delhi, having visited in 2016, 2020, 2022, 2023, and 2025.⁴⁷ The last visit of an Indian foreign minister to Hungary was in 2019.⁴⁸ This is perhaps all the more surprising,

given that India's current foreign minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, served in the Indian mission in Budapest from 1990 to 1993.⁴⁹

Szijjártó's most recent visit was at the 2025 Raisina dialogue in New Delhi, where, together with Jaishankar, he reinforced Hungary's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations in terms of trade and politics.⁵⁰ This has been a recurring slogan since Orbán's 2013 visit to New Delhi, where he argued that India and Hungary should perceive each other as strategic partners to enter the European and Asian markets respectively, albeit with few tangible results to underpin such commitments.⁵¹

The rhetoric of strategic partnership fits into Orbán's foreign policy considerations. Despite Hungary's EU membership and dependency on trade relations with other EU member states, most importantly, Germany,⁵² Hungary's foreign policy rhetoric has been growing increasingly critical of its Western orientation and European alliances since the Fidesz government took power in 2010. Orbán frequently discusses the decline of the unipolar world order and the necessity of moving beyond its Western orientation to achieve middle power status in the region.⁵³ This often means going against established EU standpoints, such as opposing deeper EU involvement in the war in Ukraine or limiting engagement with Russia. With European relationships under pressure, Orbán is increasingly seeking to strengthen his ties with countries outside Hungary's more traditional partners.

Strengthening Hungary's political relationships with India would make sense, as India has been pursuing a similar foreign policy of multi-alignment. The current Indian and Hungarian standpoints exhibit similarities in their approach to the war in Ukraine, as well as their Russia policy, and this strategic overlap could bring them closer together in terms of politics and diplomacy. The fact that both the Indian and Hungarian governments occupy outlier positions regarding the Ukraine war, maintain cordial relations with Russia despite the EU and NATO's stance, and have been supportive of the Trump administration provides them with a strategic opportunity for collaboration.⁵⁴

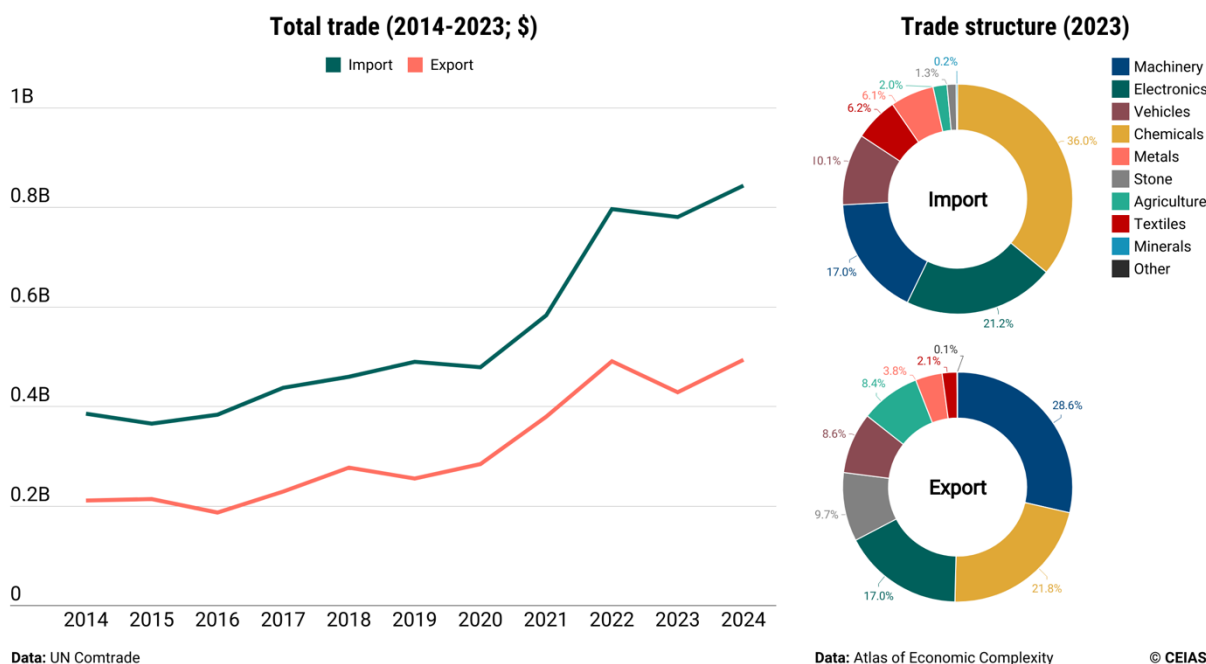
The view that India could be an important partner in the emerging multipolar world order is often echoed by both Modi and Jaishankar.⁵⁵ This could potentially revitalize Hungary's Eastern Opening policy regarding India, which has thus far failed to become a coherent strategy. The exact ways in which this could materialize at the political and diplomatic level are yet to be seen. Still, it is also highly contingent upon the upcoming elections in Hungary in 2026, which could result in a change of the foreign policy thinking that has been relatively consistent for the past 15 years.

Economic relations

During the socialist era, India was Hungary's most significant trade and economic partner in Asia. For India, Hungary served as a first European market for non-traditional export goods, such as Maruti cars and mopeds. In addition, Hungary was involved as a collaborator in 55 projects in India.⁵⁶ Following the regime change in Hungary in 1991 and the economic liberalization in India, economic relations between the two countries were disrupted and, as of 2025, have yet to reach their full potential in terms of trade and investment.

Since 2004, a Joint Economic Committee has provided the institutional framework for intergovernmental collaboration, with the sixth round scheduled for 2022. Several agreements covering health, agriculture, manufacturing, and energy have been signed over the years, yet these have not yielded significant results.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, trade relations between India and Hungary have been steadily growing over the past 15 years. As of 2024, bilateral trade reached \$1.3 billion, with Indian exports to Hungary totaling \$843 million, and Hungarian exports to India amounting

Hungary's trade relations with India



to \$428 million.⁵⁸ Hungary exports mechanical and electrical machinery to India. India exports chemicals, including packaged medications, electronics, and machinery, to Hungary.⁵⁹

Still, India accounts for only 0.23% of Hungary's overall trade volume, and India's exports to Hungary represent just 0.08% of its total trade volume. This places the Hungary-India trade relationship amongst the least meaningful ones in the region. In addition, there is a trade surplus on India's side. The expected EU-India free trade agreement could perhaps provide the necessary impetus for growth of the trade relationship.

We see a slightly brighter picture when it comes to FDI between India and Hungary. In the early 2010s, India was considered the largest greenfield investor in Hungary, with notable projects such as the Apollo Tyres tire manufacturing plant, which was established in Gyöngyöshalászi in 2014.⁶⁰ Samvardhana Motherson's manufacturing plant, which produces bumpers, opened in Kecskemét in 2015.⁶¹ This trend has shifted in recent years, with other Asian partners, primarily Chinese and Korean companies, investing in automotive and electronics manufacturing facilities.⁶²

Extant relations are centered around the automotive and services industries. Apollo Tyres and Samvardhana Motherson are Indian manufacturing companies that build components in Hungary.⁶³ Cognizant and Tata Shared Services are amongst the larger SSCs in Hungary. It is estimated that Indian companies employ over 10,000 people in Hungary, with potential for further growth. SMR Motherson is currently expanding its production in Hungary to better serve the BMW factories.⁶⁴

The most successful Hungarian companies in India are active in the fast-moving consumer goods and pharmaceutical sectors. Hell Energy, the leading energy drink and packaged coffee manufacturer in Hungary, has been exporting energy drinks to India since 2018, and it has become the number one canned energy drink brand during this period.⁶⁵ The Hungarian Richter Gedeon and Indian Themis Medicine set up a joint venture in Gujarat in 2006. The entire manufactured

product is then imported back to Hungary. Despite these successful examples, Hungarian investment in India has remained low, at \$32 million between 2000 and 2024.⁶⁶

Tourism emerges as one of the leading industries in terms of connecting with India. In 2023, 21,280 Indian tourists visited Hungary, ranking it second in the region, after Poland, which is significantly larger.⁶⁷ This is the result of a slow but steady growth in popularity, as Hungary rose from 14th to 11th among the most popular Schengen locations between the periods of 2014-2019 and 2020-2023.⁶⁸ The industry is gaining traction after the COVID slump, with Hungary striving to become a primary destination, rather than a stopover, for Indian tourists. It also seeks to attract large-scale events in the MICE sector, destination weddings and leisure tourism. The latter two aspects are facilitated by Hungary's growing presence in both Hollywood and Bollywood films, which spark curiosity among India's middle classes.⁶⁹ On the other hand, India is still not a particularly popular tourist destination for Hungarians, although Orbán's recent vacation in India sought to change this perception.⁷⁰ He framed his trip as a visit to the fastest-growing future partner and an emerging global power.⁷¹ Nevertheless, Hungarian news outlets tend to focus on security concerns surrounding travel rather than India's attractions.

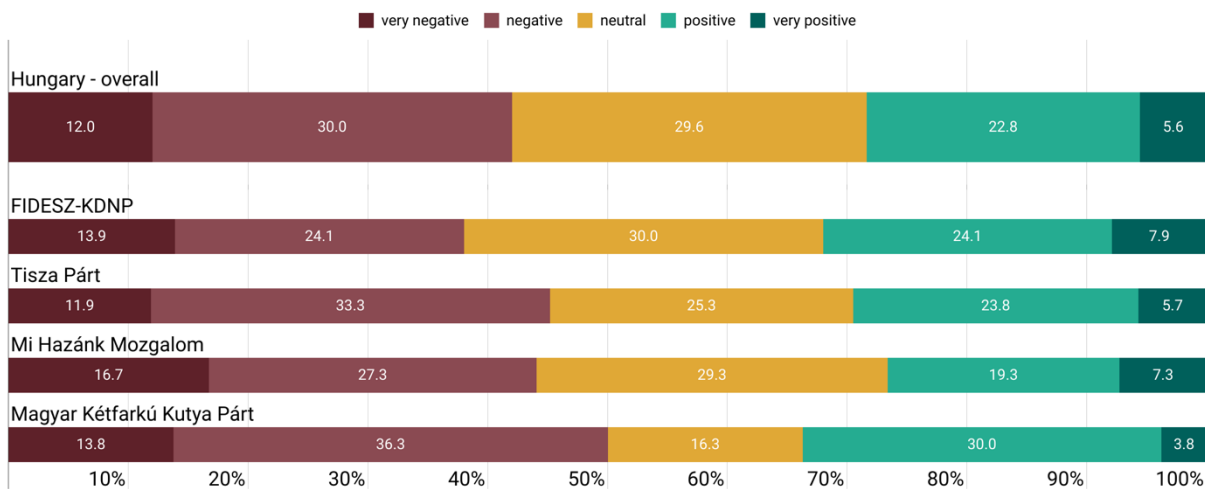
There are certain strategic areas which could generate further cooperation between the two countries. During his 2019 visit to Hungary, Jaishankar highlighted five areas of potential collaboration between the two countries: film production, digitalization, water management, solar energy and pharmaceuticals.⁷² Filmmaking could be a particularly important avenue of cooperation. The Hungarian filmmaking ecosystem is robust and offers significant tax breaks for international productions, which could serve the Indian film industry, which is always on the lookout for new locations.⁷³ This, in turn, would be beneficial for the tourism sector as well, since Indian films often serve as advertisements for locations, significantly influencing the choices of Indian holidaymakers.⁷⁴ The expected 2025 launch of a direct flight between Mumbai and Budapest by the low-cost Hungarian carrier company, Wizz Air, which has been in talks for the past few years, could also aid in strengthening relations.⁷⁵

Civil society relations

During the socialist era in Hungary, cultural and economic relations were strong between the two countries. A Hungarian Cultural Center was established in Delhi in 1978, and regularly showcases Hungarian art and culture to a small but ardent Indian audience.⁷⁶ Governmental and educational institutions have popularized Indian culture in Hungary. The Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade regularly organizes workshops and conferences centered around India, sometimes in cooperation with Indian think tanks, such as the Observer Research Foundation. The Department of Indology at Eötvös Loránd University has been a significant hub for India studies, although its scope remains primarily academic. The Indo-Hungarian Friendship Society aims to promote scholarship and scientific outreach activities, whereas the Amrita Sher-Gill Cultural Center is operated by the Indian Center for Cultural Relations, a division of the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, there is a growing interest in yoga and Ayurveda in Hungary. However, these practices are not necessarily affiliated with governmental organizations.

While recent years have seen the diversification of cultural events related to Indian culture, these largely remain tied to the capital city and major cities in Hungary, with most Hungarians being unfamiliar with Indian culture. Nevertheless, with globalizing labor relations, Hungarians are increasingly encountering Indian citizens. The Indian diaspora in Hungary currently comprises approximately 8,700 people, many of whom work as professionals in multinational corporations and the manufacturing sector, as well as an additional 1,200 Indian students studying in Hungarian universities.⁷⁷ In 2013, the Hungarian government initiated a state-funded educational

Public opinion on India in Hungary



Data: Survey - Public opinion in Visegrad Four countries on global affairs (CEIAS)

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exchange program called Stipendium Hungaricum, aiming to attract international students to study in Hungary. In 2023, 200 places were offered to Indian students.⁷⁸

Additionally, there is a growing number of Indian-origin blue-collar workers. No official statistics are available regarding their numbers, and it is possible that they engage in temporary patterns of migration.⁷⁹ Hungary is a traditionally monocultural country with no recent history of international immigration, so rapid globalization in terms of human mobility coupled with the government's anti-immigration rhetoric might pose challenges for local immigrant communities in the future. Moreover, it is in stark contrast to the xenophobic public discourse and the anti-immigration rhetoric of the Hungarian government. Large-scale national campaigns have been conducted to influence public opinion against immigration and migrant workers, resulting in tensions between locals and immigrants, which can be problematic concerning the growing Indian diaspora in Hungary.⁸⁰

Despite this, Hungarian participants in the CEIAS survey held a more positive opinion of India, Indians, and Indian culture in 2025 than they did in 2020. In 2020, 45.5% of the respondents viewed India in a negative light, which decreased to 42% by 2025. Some 43.5% of Hungarians consider India a strong economy, and they find the cultural aspect of India more attractive than its foreign policy or environmental impact, but this is potentially influenced by the fact that when it comes to reporting on India, Hungarian media outlets tend to focus on news concerning economic achievements, security concerns and unusual incidents.⁸¹

What's next?

Despite recent years being less dynamic in terms of India-Hungarian relations, the current geopolitical and economic changes may provide an opportunity for increased and mutually beneficial cooperation. The similarities in current strategic thinking, such as the prioritization of perceived national interests, coupled with a pragmatic approach to international alliances, could create a shared ideological platform between India and Hungary in an increasingly multipolar world.

Additionally, the trade relationship may benefit from the anticipated EU free trade agreement. Strategic fields of cooperation, such as manufacturing, filmmaking, renewable energy sources, and tourism, are sectors that hold significant promise. The Indian diaspora, comprising both white-collar and blue-collar workers, is expected to grow in the coming years. However, the Hungarian government's strong anti-immigrant rhetoric needs to be reevaluated to avoid challenges.

The India-Hungarian relationship holds great potential. However, a firm commitment from both parties to structured cooperation is necessary, especially on the Indian partner's side, to ensure a high-level commitment to nurturing the relationship. Currently, Hungary seems to hold secondary importance in the region for India compared to Poland.

It remains to be seen how the India-Hungary relationship fares within the V4 forum, as inter-bloc relationships are also influenced by leadership dynamics among the members, and bilateral tensions can spill over. The upcoming elections in Hungary in 2026 may alter Hungary's current foreign policy trajectory, prioritizing the maintenance of India-Hungary ties as a member of the bloc, rather than on bilateral grounds.

The time is ripe: Advancing the new India-Poland strategic partnership

Antonina Łuszczkiewicz-Mendis

Key takeaways

- In August 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Poland, elevating India-Poland relations to the status of a strategic partnership.
- However, the full potential of India-Poland relations remains largely untapped, as evidenced by the fact that it took 45 years for an Indian prime minister to visit Poland again.
- While some argue that India's neutral stance on the Ukraine conflict may negatively affect its relations with Poland in the coming years, Warsaw may choose to overlook New Delhi's close ties with Russia to strengthen India-Poland relations with a focus on trade and economy.
- Despite challenges in expanding bilateral trade and investment, Poland's rapidly growing Indian diaspora could play a crucial role in enhancing Indo-Polish relations.

"There is no conflict of interest between our countries. We have always understood each other well despite the distance, varying traditions and history." So stated Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk at a press conference during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "historic" visit to Poland in 2024.⁸² Indeed, there appears to be no fundamental conflict of interest between these two democracies. Historically, their relations have been cordial, as exemplified by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Poland in 1955.⁸³ The visit received extensive coverage in the Polish press, with front-page headlines proclaiming, "Long live the friendship between the Indian and Polish nations."⁸⁴ However, the political transformation in Poland beginning in 1989, coupled with India's economic reforms in the 1990s, led to a weakening of India-Poland ties. With India's growing interest in Central and Eastern European (CEE) affairs, an opportunity has now emerged to revitalize India-Poland relations. However, there is still a range of political and economic challenges that need to be addressed.

Political relations

Modi's visit to Warsaw in August 2024 generated significant attention, marking a pivotal moment in India-Poland relations. Its significance rested on two key factors: it coincided with the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and India; and bilateral ties were, after a long time of anticipation, officially elevated to a strategic partnership.⁸⁵

During his brief visit, Modi engaged with key Polish political leaders, including President Andrzej Duda and Prime Minister Donald Tusk. On the sidelines of the visit, Polish Foreign Minister

Radosław Sikorski met with his Indian counterpart, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. Following these meetings, two official documents were published: the India-Poland Joint Statement “Establishment of a Strategic Partnership”⁸⁶ and the Action Plan (2024–2028) for the Implementation of the India-Poland Strategic Partnership.⁸⁷ The latter outlined several key areas of cooperation, including defense, trade, agriculture, energy, green technologies, infrastructure, pharmaceuticals, and mining.⁸⁸

Speaking in Hindi, Modi emphasized the historic significance of the occasion, expressing gratitude for the opportunity to visit Poland at the beginning of his third term in office. He further underscored that India-Poland relations are rooted in shared democratic values and a commitment to the rule of law.⁸⁹

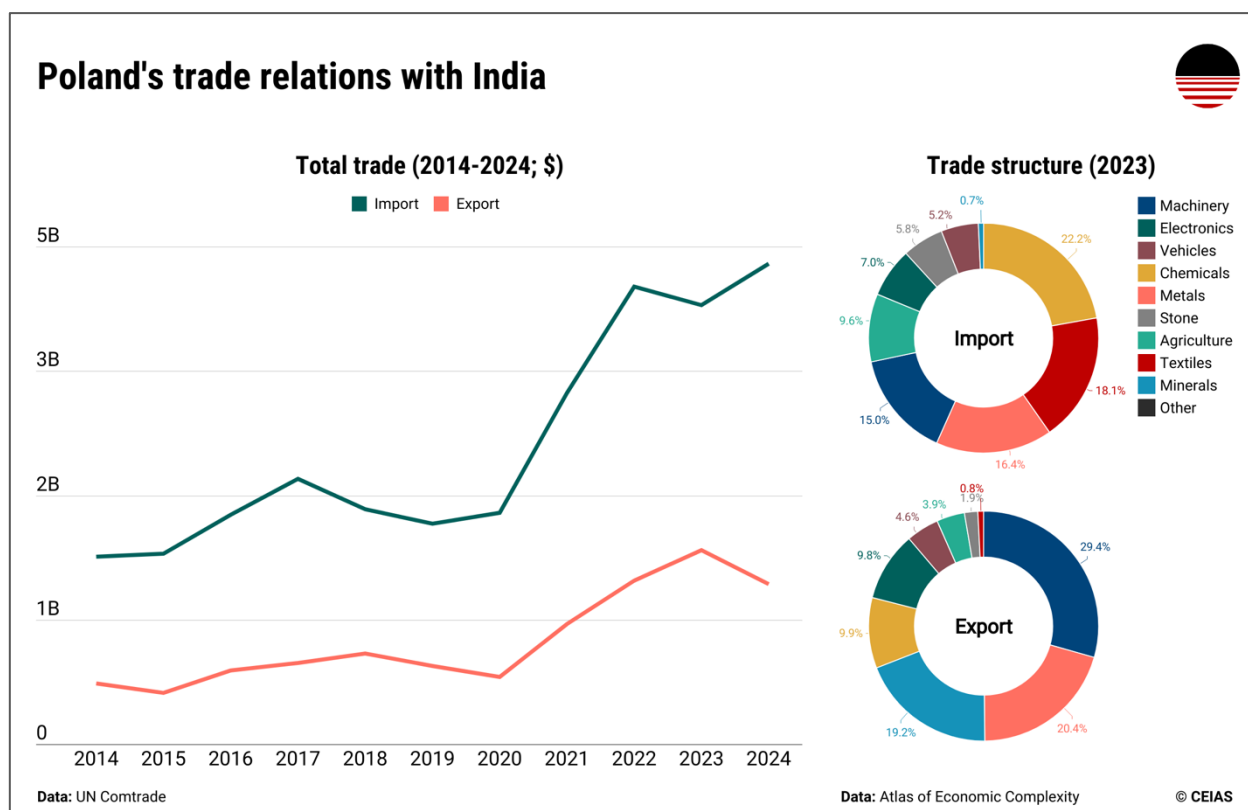
Modi’s visit was generally perceived by the Polish media and expert community as a positive development for India-Poland relations.⁹⁰ However, a closer analysis reveals that there are not that many substantive reasons for overwhelming enthusiasm. For starters, it was the first visit by an Indian prime minister to Poland in 45 years—the last being Prime Minister Morarji Desai’s visit in 1979. On the Polish side, the most recent high-level visit occurred in 2010, when Prime Minister Tusk paid a state visit to India. Consequently, 2024 marked the first visit by an Indian prime minister to democratic, post-1989 Poland, which, in itself, suggests that bilateral relations have not been a strategic priority for either New Delhi or Warsaw.

Moreover, some Polish experts argue that Modi’s visit to Poland was primarily shaped by his broader geopolitical agenda, exceeding the CEE context: his primary objective was to visit war-torn Ukraine in an effort to enhance India’s credibility as a neutral yet powerful global actor⁹¹ and a potential mediator in future peace negotiations.⁹² Given Poland’s geographical location, some Polish experts thus perceived his visit as incidental, occurring simply because Poland was an unavoidable transit point on his route to Ukraine.⁹³

Nonetheless, the elevation of bilateral ties to a strategic partnership has the potential to catalyze further agreements. Among the notable existing agreements between the two countries was a deal on audio-visual co-production,⁹⁴ signed in July 2012, and the treaty on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters,⁹⁵ signed in April 2022. However, some agreements require revision and modernization. For instance, the agreement concerning cultural relations, signed in March 1957, was initially intended for a five-year term but has remained technically in force for nearly 70 years due to the absence of formal termination by either party.⁹⁶ While it may be argued that maintaining such agreements intact rather than terminating them is sufficient, it would be more effective to update them to reflect the realities and standards of 2025.

Economic exchange

As of 2024, the total value of Polish imports from India was \$4.4 billion, while exports to India totaled \$1.5 billion.⁹⁷ The primary sectors of Polish exports include machinery and mechanical devices, mineral products (primarily coke and semi-coke), base metals, electrical equipment, optical instruments and apparatus, as well as rubber and rubber-related products.⁹⁸ India’s top export categories to Poland comprise textiles and textile articles, base metals and related products, chemical industry products, machinery and mechanical appliances, electrical and electro-technical equipment, footwear and headgear, transport equipment, as well as plastic and rubber products.⁹⁹ Regarding India’s foreign direct investment in Poland, the IT sector is particularly notable. Indian companies operating in Poland, including Genpact, Infosys, KPIT-Infosystems, HCL, Tata Consultancy Services, Wipro, L&T Tech, and Zensar Technologies, provide jobs for approximately 10,000 professionals.¹⁰⁰ As for Polish investments in India, notable are the companies from the packaging industry (CanPack), hygiene and sanitary products (TZMO),



components for the automotive and rail industry (Maflow, MB Pneumatyka, Elimen, Polmor), as well as companies developing IT/ICT services (Billennium, Transition Technologies).

However, Poland faces several challenges in its economic relations with India. Although India is the second-largest target market for Polish investments in Asia, the relationship remains largely underdeveloped.¹⁰¹ For comparison, the trade volume between Poland and India is approximately ten times smaller than that between Poland and China.¹⁰² Moreover, Poland runs a significant trade deficit with India.¹⁰³ This may be due in part to the fact that the Indian market is often perceived as challenging for Polish businesses, owing to differences in business culture and practices, as well as a less liberal economic system characterized by complex bureaucratic procedures.¹⁰⁴

The Polish perspective on India-Poland economic relations has been succinctly summarized by Piotr Świtalski, currently chargé d'affaires ad interim to India. He argues that trade relations between the two countries remain significantly below their economic potential. Additionally, Poland's export structure is heavily dominated by commodities such as coke, retort coal, and iron scrap, resulting in limited diversification. Furthermore, India has historically maintained protectionist economic policies, and despite the liberalization efforts introduced by Prime Minister Modi, administrative and financial challenges persist. These obstacles continue to dampen the enthusiasm of potential Polish investors and trade partners.¹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, there are many ways to strengthen India-Poland relations. During his meeting with Modi, Polish Prime Minister Tusk emphasized Warsaw's commitment to increasing trade with India.¹⁰⁶ One potential avenue for collaboration is Poland's participation in modernizing India's Soviet-era military equipment.¹⁰⁷ Another promising sector is green technologies.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, Poland has the potential to serve as a hub for food processing, leveraging its advanced technological capabilities.¹⁰⁹

From Poland's perspective, Indian migrants could help address labor shortages while also laying the groundwork for a more substantial Indian trade presence in the country.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, a potential EU-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA), that is currently being negotiated, could provide another significant boost to economic ties. Although negotiations remain complex, there appears to be a determination on both sides to reach a successful agreement.¹¹¹

Civil society relations

During his 2024 visit to Poland, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted several key people-to-people connections that underpin Indo-Polish relations. In addition to expressing gratitude to Poland for assisting Indian students stranded in Ukraine when the Russian invasion began in 2022, he emphasized the significance of Polish Indology studies as a strong foundation for India-Poland cooperation.¹¹² Notably, the study of Indology at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland's oldest university, dates to 1860.¹¹³

A particularly important announcement made by Modi was the establishment of a program to commemorate Sir Digvijaysinhji Ranjitsinhji Jadeja, with an annual participation of 20 Polish individuals.¹¹⁴ The Maharaja holds a unique place in the history of India-Poland relations, as he provided refuge to hundreds of Polish citizens (mostly orphans) between 1942 and 1948.¹¹⁵ In recognition of his contributions, Modi laid flowers at the monument honoring the "Good Maharaja," as he is affectionately known in Poland.¹¹⁶ Additionally, he placed a wreath at the Monte Cassino Monument, which commemorates the joint efforts of Indian and Polish soldiers in a World War II battle.

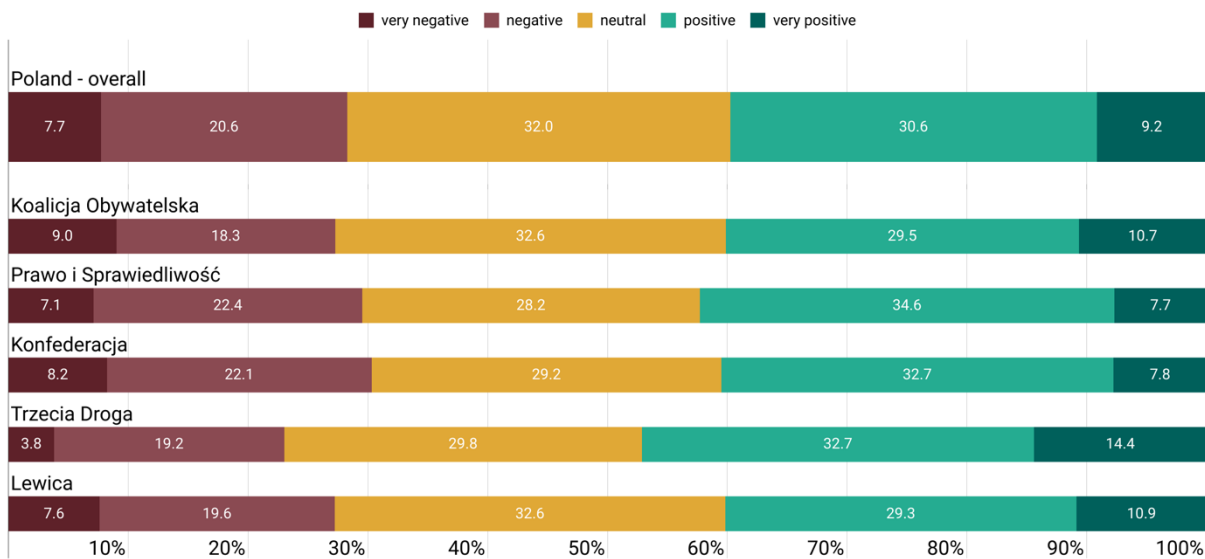
Furthermore, Modi met with representatives of the Indian community in Poland, which has been steadily growing. The number of Indian citizens working in Poland increased by 23% in 2023 alone.¹¹⁷ In 2024, a total of 33,928 work permits were issued for Indians, ranking them among the largest recipient groups.¹¹⁸ However, the number of work permits issued does not directly correspond to the number of foreign nationals who ultimately arrive and reside in Poland, as some individuals either choose not to migrate or are unable to obtain the required visa.¹¹⁹ According to data from a Polish governmental migration portal, in 2024, there were 23,081 Indian citizens residing in Poland (those with a resident card).¹²⁰ By mid-July 2025, the number had risen to 24,782.

As of mid-2024, Indians accounted for 2% of all foreign workers in Poland.¹²¹ Moreover, 87.5% of insured Indian residents in Poland were men, the highest percentage among all foreign nationalities.¹²² Additionally, the Indian diaspora in Poland is notably young: among all foreign residents, Indians constitute the youngest demographic, with 87.5% falling within the 25–49 age bracket, while only 2.8% are aged 50 or older.¹²³

According to a 2024 survey of economic immigrants to Poland from Asia and Latin America, 60% stated that their current job in Poland aligns with their qualifications and that they intend to remain with their Polish employers for an extended period.¹²⁴ However, respondents identified several challenges, including lengthy visa procedures, bureaucratic hurdles, and language barriers. Despite these difficulties, 52% reported being able to communicate in Polish at work, while 43% actively pursued learning the language.¹²⁵

Indians are also playing an increasingly significant role in student life in Poland. Among non-European students, they represent one of the largest groups, with approximately 3,000 students enrolled as of 2023.¹²⁶ Moreover, several Polish universities participate in student exchange programs with Indian institutions: for example, the Jagiellonian University in Krakow has agreements with Manipal Academy of Higher Education as well as Techno India Group and Sister Nivedita University,¹²⁷ whereas the University of Warsaw offers 30 slots yearly for its students to

Public opinion on India in Poland



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visit O. P. Jindal Global University, Birla Institute of Management Technology, Parul University, Manipal University, Jadavpur University, UPES, and Adamas University.¹²⁸ Similarly, Poland has witnessed a growing influx of Indian tourists. The number of Indian visitors rose by 41,4% between 2022 and 2023, increasing from 25,000 to 36,000.¹²⁹ While these figures may not appear striking in absolute terms, the overall upward trend is noteworthy.

Since the end of World War II, Poland has been a largely homogeneous society in terms of culture and religion. Consequently, the increasing presence of Indian immigrants may require a period of adjustment for the Polish population. This conclusion may be supported by a survey conducted by the Polish Economic Institute, which found that Polish public opinion is evenly split between positive and negative attitudes toward hiring Indian workers, as well as other migrants from the “Far East” (a term used in the survey to include individuals from countries such as India and the Philippines). While Poles tend to be more favorable toward EU citizens, their attitude toward migrants from the Far East remains more positive than their perception of individuals from the Middle East or Africa.¹³⁰

A recent survey conducted by the CEIAS indicates that Poles hold a relatively positive or neutral attitude toward Indians. According to the findings, 39.7% of respondents expressed positive or very positive views, while 28.3% reported negative or very negative opinions, and 32% remained neutral.¹³¹ Notably, the proportion of positive views among Poles is the highest among the V4 countries.

What's next?

Polish scholars and think tank experts generally regard India-Poland relations as an underutilized area of diplomatic and economic engagement. In terms of potential, some analysts even consider Poland's relationship with India to be the most neglected.¹³² While the global community is actively seeking to strengthen ties with India, Poland appears to have shown comparatively less interest in doing so.¹³³ Conversely, India is perceived as “waiting to be approached,” placing the

onus on Poland to adopt a more proactive behavior.¹³⁴ A crucial step in this direction would be for Poland to formulate a clear “India strategy” or, more broadly, a comprehensive “Indo-Pacific strategy.”¹³⁵

Geopolitical fluctuations pose another challenge for India-Poland relations in the years to come. Some analysts argue that India’s neutral stance on the war in Ukraine, along with its positive relations with Russia, could influence its future ties with Warsaw.¹³⁶ However, the Indo-Polish relationship may be shaped even more significantly by India’s broader engagements with Washington and the European Union. Notably, the West’s increasingly close ties with India have remained largely unaffected by New Delhi’s neutral stance on the Ukraine conflict. This suggests that Poland’s approach to India could follow a similar trajectory, as Warsaw may seek alternative partners to reduce its trade deficit with China.¹³⁷

To strengthen Indo-Polish relations, it is essential to create greater incentives for engagement on both sides. Notably, India’s global strategic ambitions could benefit from the vacuum left by CEE’s growing disappointment with China, particularly regarding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-CEE cooperation platform, known originally as 16+1.¹³⁸ The cooling of transatlantic relations following President Donald Trump’s return to the White House presents another strategic opportunity for India to position itself as a reliable and democratic partner for European countries. Modi’s visit to Poland marked an important step in this direction, as it not only increased India’s visibility in Poland but also enhanced Poland’s prominence in India.¹³⁹

India is a crucial partner for Poland, being the world’s largest democracy, a global IT hub, and an emerging superpower. Notably, young Indian immigrants could help address labor shortages in the Polish job market. Conversely, Poland holds strategic significance for India as a member of the European Union, the largest economy in CEE, and a country experiencing dynamic economic growth. Additionally, with the potential for stronger ties with the Nordic-Baltic Eight countries¹⁴⁰ as well as its membership in the V4, Poland may play a more significant role not only in its bilateral relations with India but also as a participant in broader regional platforms. This could serve as an effective way for middle- and small-sized countries of Central and Eastern Europe, particularly those in the V4, to support one another and enhance their visibility and relevance in the Indian government’s strategic thinking.¹⁴¹ Finally, Poland’s role in the Weimar Triangle, alongside France and Germany, and its recent recognition as a “Fourth Musketeer” in European security, together with the UK, Germany, and France, further elevates its importance. Strengthening bilateral relations would thus be mutually beneficial for both India and Poland.

Still distant partners: Slovakia–India relations lack strategic vision

Vladimíra Ličková

Key takeaways

- Despite strong ties stemming from modern history and recent high-level visits, bilateral relations between India and Slovakia remain underutilized.
- Bilateral engagement is limited to political engagements on the sidelines of the multilateral forums and lacks strategic depth and direction.
- Economic cooperation is growing but faces barriers such as trade imbalances, protectionism, and limited investment, requiring targeted policy action.
- The perception of Indians among Slovaks is relatively neutral, reflecting limited knowledge about India and the South Asian region.

India and Slovakia, though geographically distant, have developed a multifaceted partnership grounded in historical ties, economic pragmatism, and shared strategic interests. Diplomatic relations were formally established in 1993 following the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia—a process that remains positively regarded by Indian policymakers. India's enduring esteem for this event, shaped by its own historical trauma of partition, provides a unique anchor in bilateral relations.

Over the past 30 years, ties have evolved from Cold War-era defense cooperation to a broader agenda including technology, green energy, and geopolitical coordination. Trade is growing each year, reaching a record \$1.4 billion in 2024, and high-level political engagements have become more frequent.¹⁴²

Yet, the relationship remains underleveraged. Unlocking its full potential will require sustained and proactive efforts from both parties. This chapter provides insights into the political determinants, trade dynamics, and the low-profile relations between India and Slovakia. It also highlights potential areas of cooperation, challenges, and barriers that make this relationship a low-profile one, and offers a set of policy recommendations for further upgrading the ties.

Political relations

India-Slovakia relations date back to Czechoslovakia's role as a key arms supplier to India during the 1960s and 1980s. After Slovakia gained independence in 1993, diplomatic relations were formalized, leading to the reciprocal opening of embassies in New Delhi (in 1993) and Bratislava (1995). The level of diplomatic representation has since reflected decent, but stable, engagement. In addition to its embassy, Slovakia operates three Honorary Consulates in India: in Mumbai (since 2004), Bangalore (2017), and the recently reopened office in Kolkata (2025).

Similar to India's engagement with other V4 countries, the early 2000s marked a period of slowdown in bilateral relations, as Slovakia was focusing on its accession to the European Union, while India began to open up its economy. A strategic shift occurred in the late 2010s when India's Tata Motors invested €1.4 billion in Jaguar Land Rover's Nitra plant (2018)¹⁴³, marking a turning point. Another milestone was the first-ever standalone visit by India's External Affairs Minister, Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, to Bratislava in June 2022¹⁴⁴. Albeit scheduled alongside the GLOBSEC Forum, Dr. Jaishankar's meeting with then-Prime Minister Eduard Heger and then-Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok was a key event, reflecting diplomatic reciprocity following Slovakia's active participation in Operation Ganga, which facilitated the evacuation of over 1,400 Indian students from Ukraine in early 2022.¹⁴⁵

While the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted in-person diplomacy in 2020 and 2021, high-level visits have since resumed. However, a pattern remains - with most high-level Indian visits to Slovakia occurring on the margins of multilateral forums. Then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Rastislav Káčer visited New Delhi in March 2023 to attend the Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship geopolitical conference, and then-Economy Minister Karel Hirman made a working visit to India during the same month. Both ministers concluded meetings with their counterparts and other key officials.¹⁴⁶ In 2024 and 2025, Foreign Minister Juraj Blanár visited India to attend the Raisina Dialogue, where he met with his counterpart, S. Jaishankar, on the sidelines of the conference. In both cases, Blanár was accompanied by a delegation of more than 20 business representatives, and in 2025, also by the Finance Minister, L. Kamenický. In late March 2025, Robert Zsembera, State Secretary of the Ministry of Education, and representatives from 14 Slovak universities participated in the international academic fair organized by the Asia-Pacific Association for International Education in New Delhi, where they met with India's Minister of State for Education, Sukanta Majumdar.¹⁴⁷

An exception to the otherwise predominantly low-profile trend was the standalone visit by Indian President Droupadi Murmu to Slovakia in April 2025, the first presidential visit since 1996.¹⁴⁸ Together with the reopening of Slovakia's Honorary Consulate in Kolkata in March 2025, the visit offered an opportunity to elevate bilateral engagement.¹⁴⁹ Beyond its symbolic importance, the visit was also marked by substantive outcomes. Notably, the two sides signed their first-ever Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of defence for co-development and manufacturing next-generation technologies for light tanks.¹⁵⁰ Two additional memoranda were signed for the training of diplomats, the exchange of diplomats, and cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises.¹⁵¹

Given recent developments—including changes in the US administration and the subsequent imposition of tariffs, growing skepticism within Slovakia's current government toward the EU, and its eastward turn, as well as policy continuity in India under Prime Minister Modi's third consecutive term—this is a timely moment for Bratislava and New Delhi to deepen bilateral ties. In this light, during a meeting with Indian President Droupadi Murmu in 2025, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico extended an invitation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit Slovakia.¹⁵² For India, Slovakia could serve as a strategic entry point into Central Europe's industrial and innovation sectors. On the other hand, Slovakia should engage more actively with India as a major economic and geopolitical partner in Asia—one that offers opportunities beyond its current focus on China.

Strategic imperatives

India is a dominant power in South Asia, an often-overlooked region in Slovak foreign policy, and a key actor in the Indo-Pacific region. It is the world's fifth-largest economy, boasting a young and expanding workforce, in contrast to Slovakia's aging population and persistent labor shortages. While India's fertility rate is declining, it still enjoys a demographic advantage over Europe. This

dynamic could benefit Slovakia, particularly in addressing its growing labor shortages. In the longer term, it may also foster deeper societal ties.

However, the imbalance in Slovakia's engagement with the region is stark: 14.5% of Slovak trade is with Asia, of which just 0.4% is with India, compared to 4.8% with China.¹⁵³ India faces a similar challenge, as its trade deficit and dependence on China continue to deepen.¹⁵⁴ These dynamics underscore the strategic value of diversifying economic ties and lessening exposure to China not only in the case of Slovakia but also in the broader EU context.

Additionally, India is the world's second-largest arms importer.¹⁵⁵ It also has a growing military budget and aspirations to become a hub for defense manufacturing, which offers potential for enhancing co-production capacities as well as joint research and development in defense technologies—an area with a strong precedent in historical cooperation.¹⁵⁶ Finally, Slovakia currently lacks a comprehensive strategy for the Indo-Pacific region, including a country-specific approach to India. Addressing this gap should be a policy priority.

Domestic political drivers

Slovakia's engagement with India can be characterized by low political salience but general acceptance across the political spectrum, with more active interest primarily in the area of economic cooperation. While most parties adopt a pragmatic, interest-driven approach to foreign policy, value-based distinctions do exist, particularly among opposition parties such as Progressive Slovakia, which advocate for closer alignment with EU and transatlantic norms and priorities. In contrast, the ruling SMER-SD party promotes a so-called "sovereign, all-azimuth foreign policy," aimed at balancing relations with a diverse range of global partners, particularly those outside the traditional Western sphere. However, this eastward orientation has so far focused predominantly on China and Russia, often reflecting anti-EU sentiment rather than a coherent strategic vision.

India remains notably absent from the practical implementation of this foreign policy. Since the start of the 9th parliamentary term in October 2023, the number of parliamentary friendship groups has decreased from 33 to just 13, effectively terminating all non-European partnerships—including the group for India relations.¹⁵⁷ This has eliminated a valuable informal diplomatic channel that could otherwise support bilateral engagement.

Moreover, India is largely absent from Slovakia's political discourse, as no major political party addresses India in a meaningful way in its foreign policy manifesto. This stands in contrast to developments at the EU level, where India is receiving growing attention, including the planned adoption of a new EU-India Strategic Agenda in June 2025.¹⁵⁸ This discrepancy underscores the underrepresentation of India in Slovak foreign policy strategic thinking, despite the broader European trend toward deeper engagement with New Delhi.

Institutional framework

While the bilateral institutional framework between Slovakia and India is relatively robust, with over 20 agreements in place, some legacy agreements from the Czechoslovak era remain under review because of unfinished negotiations. Key agreements and memorandum of understanding (MoU) in force include:¹⁵⁹

- 1994 Joint Economic Committee Agreement.
- 1994 Foreign Office Consultations.
- 1996 Cultural Cooperation Agreement.

- 1996 Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement.
- 2004 Agreement on Economic Cooperation.
- 2004 Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation.
- 2015 MoU on Technical Standards and Conformity Assessment.
- 2017 MoU on EU-India Horizontal Air Services Agreement.
- 2023 MoU on the Exchange of Technical Information and Cooperation in the Regulation of the Safe Use of Nuclear Energy for Peaceful Purposes.

The Joint Economic Committee (JEC) between India and Slovakia was established in 1994, with the first session held in Bratislava in May 1995. Since then, the JEC has convened regularly, alternating between New Delhi and Bratislava approximately every two years. The 12th session took place in New Delhi in February 2025.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Slovakia remains the only V4 country without a visa waiver agreement with India for holders of diplomatic passports. Recent practice by Czechia and Poland, which signed such agreements with New Delhi in 2018 and 2015, respectively, shows that these waivers apply exclusively to holders of diplomatic passports. A similar approach has been proposed by the Slovak side, which now awaits a response from its Indian counterparts.

Moreover, a persistent concern across the V4 region – and more broadly within the EU – is India’s unilateral termination of bilateral investment treaties (BITs) in 2016, which included protections for foreign investments.¹⁶¹ Ensuring a constructive and open dialogue on the status of future investment protection mechanisms is therefore essential for rebuilding trust among investors.

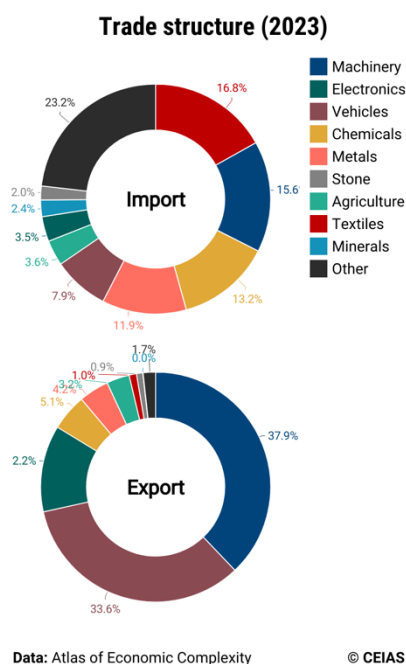
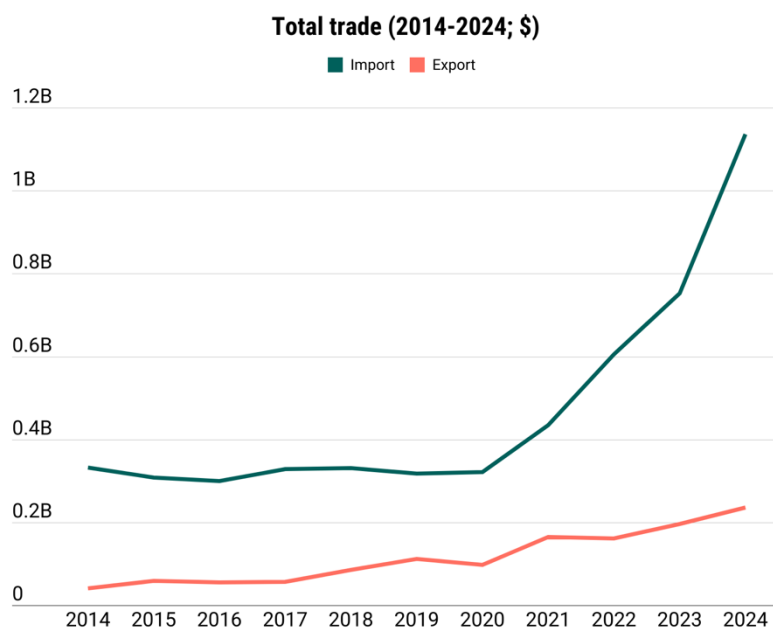
At the EU level, efforts to address this gap were restarted in 2022, when the EU and India relaunched negotiations for the three separate tracks: a free trade agreement (FTA), an investment protection agreement (IPA), and an Agreement on Geographical Indications. While FTA negotiations have been regular, and in 2025, following the European Commission’s visit to New Delhi, a significant push was made to advance talks, the IPA has progressed more slowly.¹⁶²

Economic exchange

Economic relations are seemingly the most dynamic aspect of bilateral exchange. The trade between India and Slovakia has grown steadily in recent years, rising from \$599 million in 2021 to \$1.4 billion in 2024.¹⁶³ The trade relationship is primarily driven by India’s exports to Slovakia, worth \$1.1 billion in 2024.¹⁶⁴ These are more diversified than Delhi’s imports and include mobile phones, footwear, garments, automotive parts, and pharmaceuticals. Notably, India is the world’s third-largest pharmaceutical producer, accounting for approximately 20% of the global generic drug market.¹⁶⁵ Slovakia’s exports, on the other hand, are primarily comprised of automotive exports; passenger vehicles alone account for nearly a third of Slovakia’s total exports to India. This is followed by machinery and industrial goods, reflecting Slovakia’s long-term focus on a somewhat narrow economic output.

Despite positive trends in trade dynamics, two persistent issues stand out. First, the trade balance is heavily skewed against Slovakia, with a deficit of more than €800 million in 2024. Second, bilateral trade remains marginal in both countries’ overall trade portfolios. India accounts for only 0.6% of Slovakia’s total trade, while Slovakia represents just 0.1% of India’s trade. By comparison, Slovakia conducts about 5% of its trade with China, and India’s trade with China nears 10%.¹⁶⁶ Given both countries’ stated intentions to reduce economic overreliance on any trading partner

Slovakia's trade relations with India



and move toward greater diversification, there is a strong strategic rationale to elevate bilateral economic ties. A significant step toward this quest, supported also by the Slovak government, would be finalizing the long-negotiated EU-India FTA.

Economic exchange is further supported by regular business delegations, predominantly from Slovakia to India, facilitated by the Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency.¹⁶⁷ These missions often accompany political visits but also take place independently. Slovakia's legacy of defense cooperation with India provides a valuable precedent for building commercial partnerships in manufacturing, particularly as India pursues defense self-reliance and strengthens its development and production capacities, positioning Slovak-India cooperation as complementary to the aims of the "Make in India" policy.

While cooperation in traditional sectors, such as defense, automotive, meteorology, and industrial manufacturing, remains strong and serves as a good stepping stone, growing interest is emerging in newer areas, including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, recycling technologies, media technology, human resources, and even academic collaboration. Strengthening dialogues and materializing cooperation in these fields will be key to sustaining momentum and further cultivating ties.

Nevertheless, several systemic challenges persist that continue to hinder progress in trade. On the Indian side, protectionist policies such as Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-reliant India) require foreign companies to move production to India and establish joint ventures with Indian partners. Combined with complex bureaucratic procedures and specific conventions of each territory (which vary from state to state in India), as well as the absence of a bilateral or EU-wide investment agreement, these regulations hinder investment and project implementation. Moreover, high import duties, especially the 15% tariff on combustion-engine vehicles (HS Code 8708), pose an additional obstacle to leveling the trade imbalance.¹⁶⁸

For Slovakia, limited market size, higher labor and operational costs, and fewer fiscal incentives make it a less competitive destination for Indian investors compared to its V4 neighbors. These asymmetries provide room for both governments to address trade barriers and create more favorable trade and investment conditions.

Investment relations

Indian investment in Slovakia is led by a flagship €1.4 billion investment by Tata Motors in the Jaguar Land Rover plant in Nitra, accompanied by the opening of Tata Consultancy Services' (TCS) Slovak headquarters in Bratislava.¹⁶⁹ Other significant Indian investments include the acquisition of a 9% stake in Slovak EV battery manufacturer InoBat by Indian company Amara Raja (an investment of around €30 million¹⁷⁰) and the acquisition of Kinex Bearings' two plants supplying rail, industrial, and textile sectors by National Engineering Industries in 2020.¹⁷¹

Slovak investments in India are more diversified, including Microstep's operations in Bangalore and trading with meteorological technology;¹⁷² Envien Group's partnership with Zuari Industries in developing and operating an ethanol (used for oil blending) distillery in Uttar Pradesh, which is yet to start operations;¹⁷³ Grand Power's light weapons manufacturing site in Tamil Nadu;¹⁷⁴ VRM's cooperation with Hindustan Aeronautics in state-of-the-art virtual reality simulators for air force training based in Bangalore;¹⁷⁵ Edgar Baker opening a subsidiary in Uttar Pradesh focusing on higher-skilled human resource services in 2022;¹⁷⁶ and Tatrabagonka Poprad's acquisition of a 26% stake in Kolkata-based Jupiter Group, which specializes in rail freight cars.¹⁷⁷ Notably, Jupiter's director, Vivek Lohia, was appointed Honorary Consul in 2024 and has headed Slovakia's newly inaugurated honorary consulate in Kolkata since March 2025.

Labor mobility

To address domestic labor shortages, in March 2023, the Slovak government approved an increase in the so-called "national (D) visas" to ease the process for admitting more workers from third countries to the transportation sector and professions with a labor shortage. The amendment has expanded the list of selected countries, including India, and increased the maximum number of national D visas that can be issued annually from 2,000 to 5,000.¹⁷⁸ India, thanks to its young population, quality education, and widespread use of English, which helps minimize language barriers and eases integration, is an attractive source of workforce for many employers. This is reflected in the year-on-year growth in the number of workers from India in Slovakia, which increased by 108%, from 3,691 in March 2024 to nearly 8,000 in March 2025.¹⁷⁹

Civil society relations

There are two Indian friendship societies in Slovakia: the Association of the Indian-Slovak Friendship and the India Klub. Although they partner with the Indian Embassy in Bratislava, their outreach is somewhat limited. The Indian diaspora in Slovakia exceeds 8,000, including students studying in Slovakia and researchers affiliated with the Slovak Academy of Sciences. The majority of Indian nationals in Slovakia are migrant workers. However, only a handful of Slovaks are spread across India, with no official statistics providing specific details on their numbers.

There is a noticeable academic presence of Indian nationals in Slovakia, particularly at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, which in 2024 hosted a sizable number of Indian researchers—significantly more than the number of Slovak scholars working in India. As of 2024, there were nearly 379 Indian university students, including PhD candidates.¹⁸⁰ The majority of these students are based at the Technical University of Košice, primarily due to the university's proactive efforts to attract Indian students. Although university students from India account for only 1% of all foreign

students in Slovakia, they are more likely to stay in the host country after completing their studies than other international students.¹⁸¹ This is a positive development, especially in light of Slovakia's ongoing challenges with brain drain and attracting a young workforce. Additionally, an agreement on a cultural exchange program for the period 2023–2026 was signed between India and Slovakia in March 2023.¹⁸² However, to fully realize this potential, stronger and more structured civil society bridges are needed.

Tourism from Slovakia to India is low—in fact, the lowest of all the V4 countries. In 2018 and 2019, 4,662 and 5,214 Slovaks visited India, respectively.¹⁸³ Further data is not available, which indicates that tourism from Slovakia is very insignificant. Conversely, in 2023, 9,514 Indian citizens visited Slovakia.¹⁸⁴ Although the number is not high, constituting only 0.5% of the overall Slovak inward tourism, year-on-year growth was recorded at 69%. This growing trend is a positive sign, although numbers have not recovered from the setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, around 12,000 Indians visited Slovakia.¹⁸⁵

Aside from students and researchers, there are 7678 Indian nationals working in Slovakia, the vast majority of whom are men, as of March 2025.¹⁸⁶ Workers from India constitute as much as 8.5% of foreign workers in Slovakia, making them the third-largest group (after Ukrainians and Serbs). Most are employed as machine and equipment operators, skilled workers, craftsmen, unskilled laborers, specialists, or in service and trade sectors. In terms of education, around 80% of the Indian diaspora in Slovakia have completed secondary education, followed by 15% with higher education, and a smaller proportion with only elementary education.¹⁸⁷

This demographic and occupational profile reveals a deeper, long-standing issue within Slovakia's economic structure, particularly given its heavy reliance on manufacturing, notably in the automotive industry. While the automotive sector can pose a high-performing and export-driven part of the economy, its labor-intensive nature contributes to a pressing demand for a large workforce. Given Slovakia's demographic trends and limited domestic pool of workforce, this creates an opportunity to attract and integrate migrant workers from India.

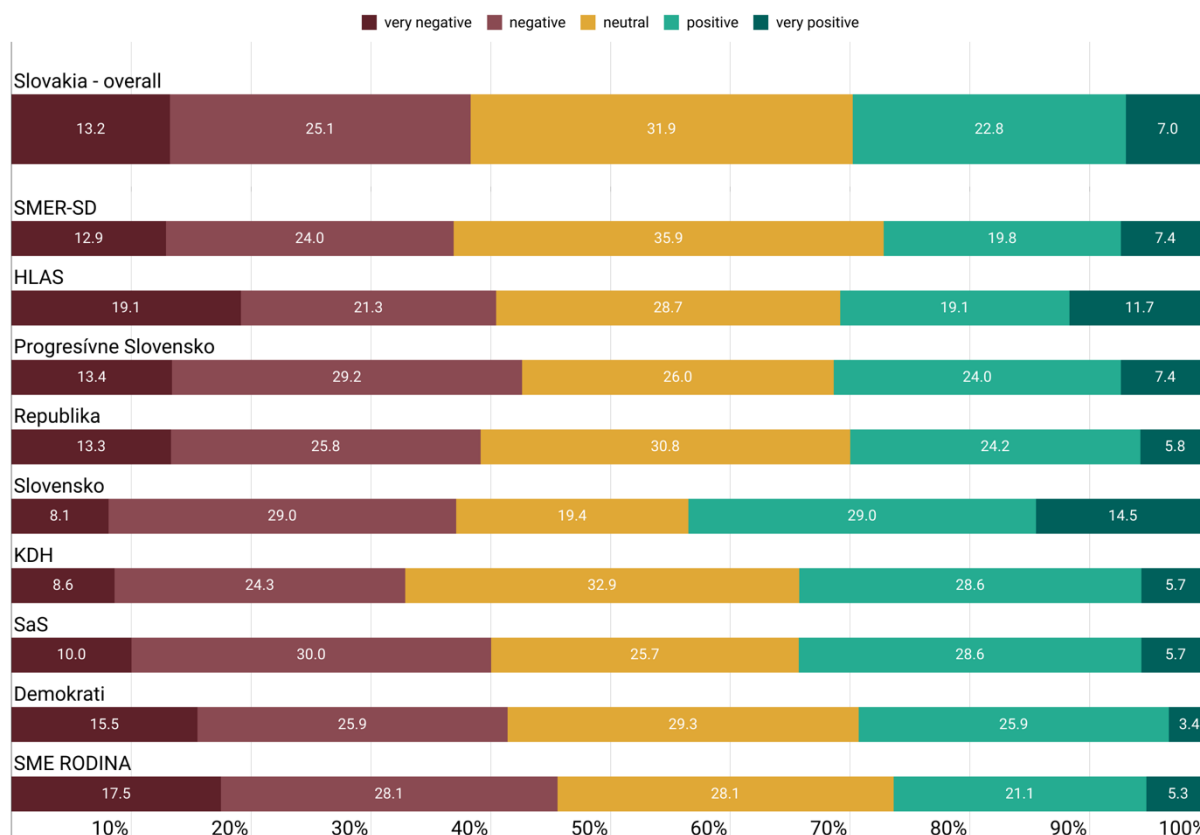
Public perceptions of India in Slovakia

A recent public opinion survey conducted by CEIAS reveals a slight positive trend in awareness and views toward India over the past five years.¹⁸⁸ In 2020, 42% of Slovaks viewed India negatively, and a further 2.6% viewed it very negatively, compared to 38.4% in 2025. Positive and very positive views of India increased from 2020 to 2025 by 6.3 percentage points (up to 29.8%), while the percentage of people showing a neutral stance decreased by 2.6 percentage points (to 31.9%). When it comes to Indians as a group of people, Slovakia, although being the second most positive in terms of its views, also displays the greatest share of neutrality. These perceptions are likely a reflection of a relatively small Indian diaspora concentrated in larger cities (mainly Bratislava) and limited knowledge about India and the South Asian region among Slovaks in general.

Examining voter perceptions across Slovak political parties, attitudes toward India among Slovak voters exhibit only moderate variation across party lines. Overall, voters from all major Slovak political parties tend to lean slightly more toward negative perceptions of India, though the differences are not stark.

Across all parties, the combined share of "very negative" and "negative" views slightly outweighs the combined share of "positive" and "very positive" views. This pattern suggests a generally cautious or skeptical stance toward India among the Slovaks, regardless of their political affiliation.

Public opinion on India in Slovakia



Data: Survey - Public opinion in Visegrad Four countries on global affairs (CEIAS)

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SME RODINA voters are the most negative (45.6% have negative opinions of Indians), followed by voters of Progresívne Slovensko (42.6%). KDH and SaS voters are more balanced, with their positive and negative perceptions nearly equal (around 33–34% positive to 33–40% negative). A significant proportion of voters across all parties maintain a neutral stance, ranging from 19.4% (Progresívne Slovensko) to 35.9% (SMER-SD). This again suggests a lack of a clear opinion or limited awareness about India among Slovak voters. It also reflects India's absence from the foreign policy strategies and broader political discourse of Slovak political parties. Interestingly, despite rhetorical differences among parties, particularly the anti-immigrant stances of SMER-SD, Republika, and SME Rodina, the collected data do not indicate major polarization.

When asked about political values, Slovak respondents exhibit high levels of neutrality in their assessments of both India's foreign policy and political values, with 58.2% rating India's foreign policy as neither positive nor negative and 60.2% also viewing India's political values in neutral terms. This high neutrality, the highest among the V4 countries, suggests a widespread lack of deeper awareness about India's foreign policy positions and domestic politics.

Regarding India's potential role in Ukraine–Russia peace agreement, an aggregated 57% of Slovaks (the lowest percentage among the V4 countries) think that India has a low potential to contribute to a Ukraine-Russia peace agreement that is fair to Ukraine. This is likely driven by public awareness of India's traditionally close ties with Russia, which undermines its image as a neutral broker in this conflict.

Climate action is also viewed with considerable skepticism. Some 52.8% of Slovaks view India's contribution to combating climate change as negative (the second-highest negativity rating after Czechia). In comparison, only 8.5% of Slovaks consider India's performance in climate action to be positive. This is very likely a reflection of the frequent media references to India's pollution levels and its ranking among countries with the most polluted air.

When asked about India's economic might, Slovak respondents are the second most skeptical (after Czechia) in perceiving India as economically strong: 30.3% rated India's economy as weak, and only 35.3% viewed it as strong. Some 34.4% view India's economic might as neither weak nor strong. This is particularly noteworthy, given Slovakia's frequent business delegations to India, which seem to have had a limited impact on public awareness. In contrast, Slovaks show a relatively high recognition of India's military might, with 31.4% rating it as militarily strong or very strong, the second-highest rating in the V4. This is likely to reflect an awareness of India's nuclear capabilities and its active border tensions with China and Pakistan, which contribute to its image as a significant military power.

Finally, regarding India's cultural attractiveness, Slovak views are evenly split, with 31.3% positive, 33.1% neutral, and 35.6% negative. This balanced distribution indicates ambivalent and somewhat undecided cultural perceptions. Interestingly, Slovaks are the second most likely, among the other V4 countries, to view India as culturally attractive. However, they are also the second highest in thinking it unattractive, highlighting again a rather polarized and inconsistent public image of Indian culture.

In conclusion, the data underline limited awareness, neutrality, and inconsistency in Slovak public perceptions of India. While India's military strength is somewhat recognized, there are major gaps in understanding its foreign policy, values, and economic standing. Cultural views remain ambivalent, suggesting a need for greater cultural diplomacy and public engagement on both sides.

What's next?

The relations between Slovakia and India have historically been on a good track, but their potential is unfortunately being underutilized. A set of steps is required on both sides to advance bilateral ties.

Firstly, it is essential to enhance political engagement by initiating official, high-level visits that are recognized by both sides as bilateral in nature, rather than limited to meetings on the sidelines of multilateral forums. The 2025 visit of the Indian President to Slovakia was a valuable milestone, but it should not remain an isolated gesture. Slovakia should use the visit as a stepping stone for conducting reciprocal high-level visits. As for parliamentary diplomacy, there is no parliamentary friendship group. Recreating it would be a welcoming signal.

This also concerns clarifying Slovakia's Indo-Pacific strategy. It is necessary to conclude an overall strategy paper that is substantive and addresses both traditional and key emerging regions and partners in Asia. This would further strengthen the diplomatic presence with a clear purpose and strategic direction. Although the recent opening of new embassies in Asia (in the Philippines and Malaysia) is commendable, without adequate resourcing and follow-up, these steps risk remaining symbolic. As the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs itself emphasizes, diplomacy (and not just economics) begins at home.¹⁸⁹ This should be translated into appropriate support for Slovakia's diplomatic missions, particularly through adequate staffing. Many embassies, including the one in India, are often under-resourced, with diplomats required to manage multiple agendas. This accumulation of responsibilities undermines the

effectiveness of Slovakia's foreign representation and limits its ability to develop deeper relations.

Secondly, enhancing economic diplomacy and eliminating obstacles by addressing structural impediments on both sides by reducing bureaucratic barriers and aligning investment frameworks, including reviving a Bilateral Investment Protection Agreement, evaluating tax policies and incentives to improve its competitiveness, as well as actively supporting and helping accelerate a speedy conclusion of the EU-India FTA, should be a priority.

Thirdly, both sides could increase public awareness and knowledge exchange by expanding academic and cultural diplomacy through existing people-to-people ties, such as those between Indian students and researchers in Slovakia, and by establishing reciprocal scholarships, university exchange programs, and dual-degree partnerships. These steps can be done within the India-V4 framework. A point for consideration is moving beyond cultural stereotypes. Although yoga and Indian cuisine offer a cultural foothold and stable grounding, public narrative about India needs to be reframed, both by India itself and within its partner countries, to reflect its geopolitical weight, technological progress, and regional leadership. In this sense, supporting and broadening the Slovak strategic discourse on India could be a low-hanging fruit for the near future.

Next, there is a need to resolve outstanding bilateral agreements, including addressing subtle but practical issues such as finalization of visa waivers for diplomatic passports. Slovakia remains the only V4 country without a visa waiver agreement with India for holders of diplomatic passports. Aligning with the agreements signed by Poland and Czechia in 2015 and 2018, respectively, Slovakia in 2019 proposed an agreement that included holders of diplomatic passports only. India, on the other hand, would like to extend the visa waivers to all holders of diplomatic and official service passports, which it has in place with Hungary. In line with recent practice, a pragmatic consensus should be accepted for visa waiving for holders of diplomatic passports only.

Lastly, despite internal tensions, the Visegrad Group can continue to serve as a valuable diplomatic tool in fostering closer ties with New Delhi. Member countries should lead the efforts to establish a formal V4+India track, modeled after existing formats with Japan, South Korea, and the Nordic countries. India's interest in Central Europe is indisputable. India's recent outreach to Poland and Slovakia, through conducting visits by Prime Minister Modi and President Murmu, respectively, and statements by Foreign Minister Jaishankar in 2019, underscore New Delhi's openness to deeper Central European ties. Building on this shared interest, using existing V4 communication channels and regional formats could prove to be an effective way to coordinate a joint Central European visit for Indian officials. A V4-India research cooperation format, modeled after the similar initiative of V4-Japan Joint Research Projects, which focuses on enhancing joint research projects and intensifying scientific and technical cooperation in the field of materials research, could positively impact and deepen the development of joint research activities.

India and Visegrad: Cooperation in a turbulent world

Swati Prabhu

Key takeaways

- Central European countries can tap into India's economic growth to expand their strategic outreach in the Indo-Pacific.
- India's interest in formulating a special V4 forum would most likely revolve around its intention to garner special points of entry and influence in the EU.
- Establishing dialogue on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and innovation can help address issues of climate adaptation, clean energy technologies and increasing resilience for India and V4.

India's rise as a political and economic heavyweight is increasingly evident.¹⁹⁰ With gross domestic product (GDP) growth projected between 6.5% and 7% for 2024-25,¹⁹¹ India is firmly positioning itself as a global contender alongside China and the United States.¹⁹² The World Bank's India Development Update has underscored this trajectory, forecasting that India could become the world's third-largest economy by 2027, overtaking Japan and consolidating its position as the fastest-growing major economy.¹⁹³

his growth narrative carries significant geopolitical and regional implications, particularly for Europe. As the continent grapples with the ongoing geopolitical and developmental fallout of the Russia-Ukraine war, its strategic calculus is shifting. While global aid reached a record \$223.7 billion in 2023, OECD data shows that nearly 9% of that assistance was directed toward Ukraine.¹⁹⁴ The European Union (EU) alone has committed over €134 billion in military, humanitarian, and financial support.¹⁹⁵

In this context, the EU-India strategic partnership is acquiring renewed urgency, not just to bolster economic cooperation but also to reinforce shared interests in global governance, connectivity, and security. Analysts argue that the war in Ukraine offers India a window of opportunity to deepen its engagement with Europe, particularly Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, including the Visegrád Four (V4) and the Baltic states.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, amid growing concerns about China's coercive trade practices via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Russia's revisionist geopolitics, Brussels is actively seeking trusted partners in Asia. India, in this landscape, is increasingly viewed as a credible, like-minded alternative.

Historically, India's engagement with Europe has primarily focused on major powers such as France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. During the Cold War, New Delhi's relations with the CEE states were often seen through the prism of Indo-Soviet ties. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, India's diplomatic energy remained focused on Western Europe, while the V4 countries integrated more fully into the EU and NATO.¹⁹⁷ This mutual neglect persisted for years due to a lack of political will on both sides.

However, the post-1990s era of globalization opened new economic and political avenues for cooperation. While India largely viewed "the West" as synonymous with Western Europe, and the V4 countries saw "Asia" primarily through the lens of China, Japan, and South Korea, this narrow framing has gradually eroded. In recent years, India has increasingly been recognized as a rising middle power—politically stable, economically promising, and underexplored as a strategic partner.¹⁹⁸

Since returning to office in 2019, the Modi government has actively sought to correct this imbalance.¹⁹⁹ India's foreign policy has expanded its outreach beyond traditional alliances, re-engaging with under-prioritized regions. This shift has been expressed in policy speeches, such as that of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in 2021, who outlined a broad vision for Indian diplomacy. It is time, he said, to "engage America, manage China, cultivate Europe, reassure Russia, bring Japan into play, draw neighbors in, extend the neighborhood and expand traditional constituencies of support."²⁰⁰

That said, India's neutral position on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, especially its continued purchase of Russian oil, has raised eyebrows in the West, including in the CEE countries. Yet, this approach is consistent with India's long-standing non-alignment policy and reflects a careful balancing act: maintaining ties with Moscow without alienating Western partners.²⁰¹ This is also closely tied to its efforts to balance Chinese influence. This balancing is also driven by India's strategic imperative to counter Chinese influence across Asia and beyond.

Nor has India shied away from articulating its independent worldview. In 2022, Jaishankar asserted that Europe must "grow out of the mindset that Europe's problems are the world's problems, but the world's problems are not Europe's problems."²⁰² This remark, later cited by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the 2023 Munich Security Conference, underscores India's evolving relationship with Europe—not as a subordinate partner but as an assertive, sovereign actor.²⁰³ Despite EU discomfort over India's stance on Ukraine, cooperation has expanded. The EU–India Trade and Technology Council was launched, and in 2025, the College of Commissioners visited India, symbolizing a pragmatic shift in Europe's posture toward New Delhi. At the sub-regional level, interest in V4–India relations is also gaining traction. For both sides, this engagement reflects a shared recognition of the need to diversify strategic partnerships, tap into new markets, and establish cooperative frameworks in key sectors, including energy and digital connectivity, in an increasingly multipolar world.²⁰⁴

Political cooperation

India's diplomatic engagement with the V4 countries has gained notable momentum during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenure. Analysts attribute this growing strategic interest in Central Europe in part to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's long-standing familiarity with the region. A fluent Russian speaker with working knowledge of Hungarian, Jaishankar began his diplomatic career in Hungary (1990–1993) and later served as Ambassador to the Czech Republic (2000–2004). His deep understanding of Central European politics and society informs an effort to establish a more autonomous and targeted relationship with the region.²⁰⁵ Currently, the Ministry of External Affairs' Central Europe Division manages relations with 30 countries. However, given the region's diversity and the increasing complexity of India's engagement, there is a growing case for reconfiguring this structure, segmenting it into more specific sub-regions.

High-level visits by Indian leaders gained momentum after the 2010s, marking a more deliberate and strategic outreach to the V4 countries. While the COVID-19 pandemic caused a temporary hiatus in such engagements, a renewed push has been evident since 2020. Notably, Prime Minister Modi's visit to Poland in 2024 led to the elevation of bilateral ties to the level of a Strategic Partnership. This was followed by President Droupadi Murmu's visit to Slovakia in 2025.

Ministry of External Affairs' (MEA) Central Europe Division

At present, the Central Europe Division of India's Ministry of External Affairs is responsible for 30 countries:

- Five Scandinavian countries: Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland
- Three Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania
- The Visegrád Four (V4): Poland, Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia
- Three Eastern Balkan countries: Bulgaria, Romania, and Moldova
- The Western Balkans/former Yugoslav states: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania
- Three Alpine nations: Austria, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein
- Four Mediterranean countries: Greece, Cyprus, Malta, and Turkey
- The Holy See (Vatican City)

India cannot afford to overlook the growing challenge posed by China in global geopolitics. Beijing's strategic outreach into Europe, particularly through platforms such as the China-CEE Cooperation format (17+1), launched in 2012, and the BRI since 2013, has served to secure its broader regional interests. In parallel, and partly in response, India has steadily expanded its engagement with the V4, driven by both economic and geopolitical considerations.

In this context, India's interest in cultivating a dedicated V4 forum likely stems from its broader strategy to gain meaningful entry points and influence within Europe and the European Union. For example, in 2019, then-Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz emphasized the need to "actively shape the EU-India agenda for the benefit of both Poland and India."²⁰⁶ This aligns with India's global ambitions, which include securing trusted partners in multilateral platforms such as the United Nations Security Council, the Conference of Parties (COP) negotiations, and the Nuclear Suppliers Group. These efforts reflect India's desire to diversify civil nuclear cooperation, facilitate a low-emission energy transition, and strike a balance between its geoeconomic and geopolitical goals.

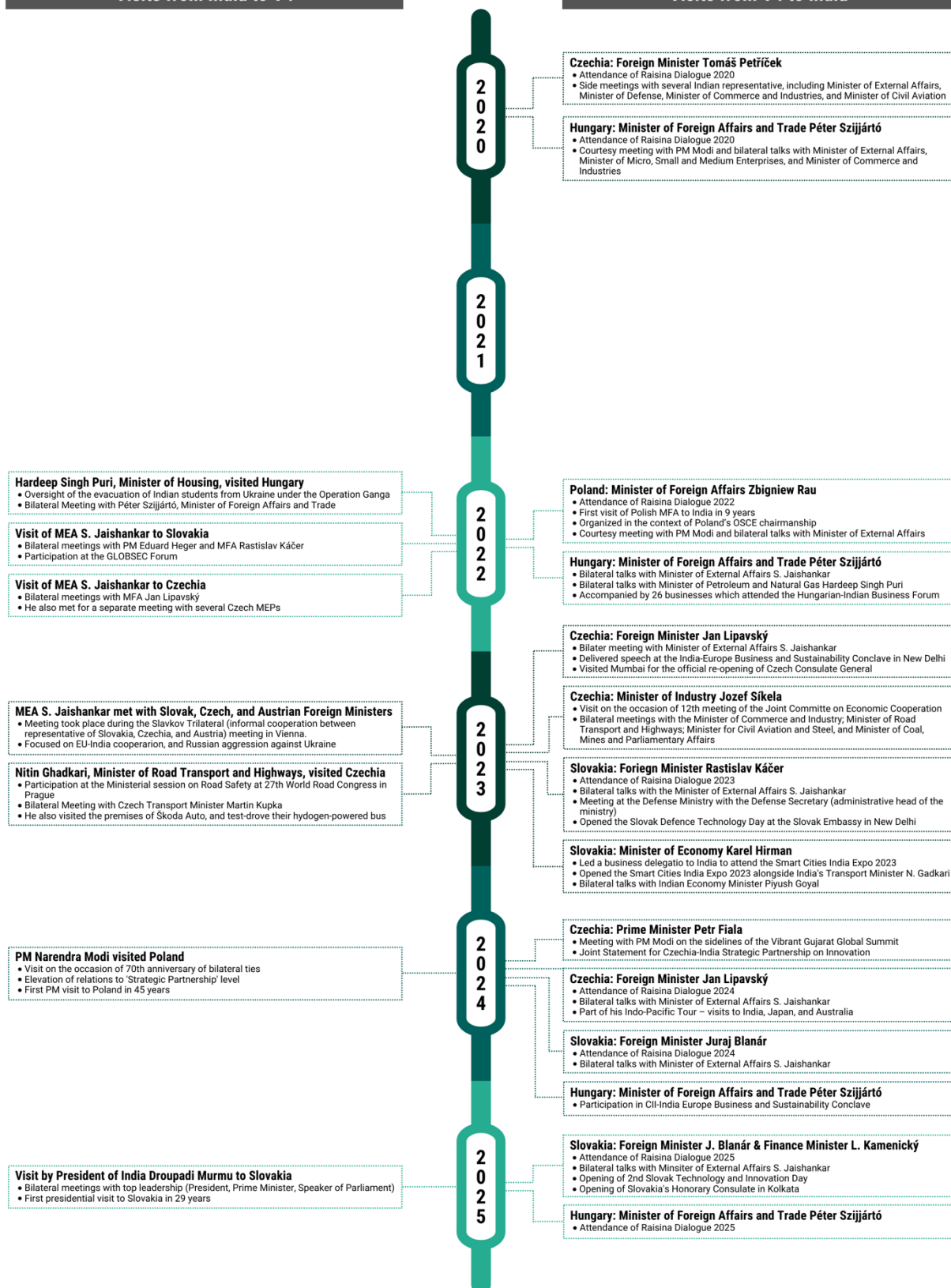
India's aspirations have been recognized by some V4 countries, particularly Poland and Czechia. In January 2024, India and Czechia elevated their bilateral ties through a Joint Statement on a "Czechia-India Strategic Partnership on Innovation". A Strategic Partnership is a step below a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, but nonetheless significant.²⁰⁷ The partnership focuses on trade, defense, cybersecurity, clean energy, sustainable urbanization, agriculture, and scientific mobility.²⁰⁸ Similarly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's landmark visit to Poland in August 2024 resulted in a Joint Statement upgrading bilateral relations to a Strategic Partnership, encompassing cooperation in technology, agriculture, connectivity, mining, energy, and environmental protection.²⁰⁹

V4-India high-level interactions (2020-2025)



Visits from India to V4

Visits from V4 to India



Data: Compiled by authors from open sources

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Although India has maintained cordial ties with Slovakia and Hungary since the 1990s, strategic partnerships with these countries have yet to materialize. Given that India's emergence as a major global economic player has accelerated only in the past decade, its current push to diversify partnerships through strategic pacts and free trade agreements (FTAs) is a relatively recent development. Strategic partnerships with Slovakia and Hungary are therefore likely to emerge over time, in step with this evolving trajectory.

India's upgraded partnerships with Poland and Czechia come at a timely moment. As the EU's interest in the Indo-Pacific and global connectivity deepens, Czechia stands out as the only V4 country to have released a dedicated Indo-Pacific Strategy thus far—one that explicitly identifies India as a democratic and like-minded partner.²¹⁰ This may well prove to be a defining feature of India's closer engagement with Czechia compared to other V4 members.

Economic exchanges

The V4 countries have undergone rapid economic transformation over the past few decades. According to the Polish Economic Institute, between 1991 and 2019, the value of their exports increased more than 19-fold, while imports rose over 16-fold.²¹¹ Their share of global exports rose from 1% to 3.6%, and their share of global imports from 1.1% to 3.4%. As a bloc, the V4 represents the fifth-largest economy in Europe and the 12th-largest in the world. Their average GDP growth (approximately 5%) has consistently outpaced the EU average (around 4%) on an annual basis.²¹²

India's trade ties with individual V4 countries predate its independence and today span a diverse array of sectors beyond the hallmark automotive industry for which the region is widely known.

India's economic relations with Czechia date back to the 1930s, when the Czech shoe company Bata established operations in Batanagar, West Bengal.²¹³ Today, trade encompasses a wide range of sectors. India exports smartphones, pharmaceutical compounds, mechanical components, and automotive parts to Czechia. Czech investments in India account for approximately 7% of all Czech foreign investments. Over 30 companies, including Tatra Trucks, Škoda Auto, and Bonatrans, are active in India, operating in the transport, energy, metallurgy, and finance sectors.²¹⁴ Indian firms, such as Infosys, Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, and Mileta Hořice, have invested in Czechia across various sectors, including IT, electronics, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and automotive. The Indo-Czech Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation (JCEC), established in 2010, has played a pivotal role in institutionalizing these ties. Czech defense firms have also been supplying military equipment to India since 2003. The 2024 signing of a Strategic Partnership on Innovation has opened new avenues in emerging technologies, including AI, Big Data, space, and cybersecurity.

India's trade with Slovakia has seen robust growth. In 2024, India's imports from Slovakia rose by 20.4% to \$235.7 million, while exports surged by 51.1% to \$1.1 billion.²¹⁵ Although Indian investments in Slovakia remain modest compared to those in Czechia or Poland, they include major players such as Tata Motors (which owns Jaguar Land Rover), Tata Consultancy Services, and Dhoot Transmission, an Aurangabad-based manufacturer of wiring harnesses.²¹⁶ Slovak investments in India are evident in sectors such as energy, freight transport, defense technology, and precision instruments.

India-Poland trade and investment relations are extensive. Indian IT firms, such as Genpact, Infosys, HCL, TCS, Wipro, L&T Tech, and Zensar Technologies, have a strong presence in Poland, collectively employing around 10,000 Polish nationals.²¹⁷ Polish firms are also actively engaged in India. For instance, TZMO, Can Pack, and Polmor have established operations, while SECO/WARWICK and Solaris have pursued joint ventures. Solaris partnered with India's JBM Auto

to manufacture electric buses, while EKOLOG constructed a solid waste management facility for Bengaluru airport in 2016. Polish IT firm Billenium began operations in India in 2017, marking a significant milestone in the growing tech collaboration between the two countries.

India and Hungary collaborate across sectors including pharmaceuticals, science and technology, and entrepreneurship. Indian companies such as Apollo Tyres, SMR Automotive, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Sona BLW, and IT firms like TCS, Wipro, Cognizant, and Tech Mahindra are all active in Hungary.²¹⁸ In fact, India was Hungary's largest greenfield investor in 2014 and third-largest in 2015. Bilateral trade centers on machinery, electronics, organic chemicals, plastics, and iron and steel products.

While India enjoys a positive trade balance with the V4, there remains untapped potential for further economic cooperation—especially within the broader India-EU framework. For years, analysts have pointed to an East-West divide within the European Union, suggesting that Brussels has historically overlooked the interests and economic potential of its eastern member states.²¹⁹ In some respects, India's relations with the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, including the V4 and Baltic states, have mirrored this neglect.

Bridging this divide will require Brussels to more fully integrate the CEE countries into its political and economic agenda. In this regard, India-EU FTA negotiations represent a major opportunity, not just for Brussels and New Delhi, but also for the V4, whose leaders increasingly see India's global rise as an opportunity to forge mutually beneficial partnerships in an era of geopolitical flux. Deepening economic cooperation across sectors such as pharmaceuticals, clean tech, manufacturing, and mobility solutions—and strengthening the industrial base on both sides—could become the foundation of an enhanced V4-India economic partnership.

Civil society and academic cooperation

People-to-people connectivity remains a cornerstone in strengthening global partnerships, and in the case of India and the V4 countries, it plays a crucial role in enhancing mutual understanding and collaboration. As of May 2025, the Indian diaspora in the V4 is notable in both size and presence, with approximately 8,700 Indians residing in Hungary, over 8,000 in Slovakia, nearly 11,000 in Czechia, and around 24,000 in Poland. While there has been no comprehensive official perception study of the V4 or Central Europe conducted in India to date, academic interest in the region is on the rise. Leading institutions, such as Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), and prominent think tanks—including the Indian Council of World Affairs, the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), the Vivekananda International Foundation, and the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses—have engaged with Central European themes through research, publications, and dialogue.

Scholarly articles, as well as teaching and research on V4 and Central Europe, have also gained momentum in recent years in India. JNU has been a consistent academic hub for Central European studies, offering a dedicated course on Central Europe since 2013. However, outside JNU, East European studies have struggled to take root within India's university system in any sustained way. A promising model for this is the International Visegrad Fund, established by the V4 governments in 2000, which supports regional cooperation among civil society organizations. While the Fund's activities are currently focused on intra-CEE cooperation, expanding its scope to include partnerships with Indian scholars, students, and policymakers could help foster a more robust mutual understanding and enhance people-to-people engagement.

What's next?

Given the evolving global trade landscape and the untapped potential between India and the V4, both partners must deepen their economic engagement. With the V4 countries having established expertise in automobiles, electronics, heavy machinery, and advanced manufacturing, India stands to benefit by aligning this with its own industrial ambitions, particularly through the “Make in India” initiative. The resurgence of protectionism and the threat of escalating trade wars, particularly under the second Trump administration, pose a risk to existing trade patterns. Against this backdrop, India must prioritize strengthening its manufacturing sector to sustain export-driven growth. Collaboration with the V4, known for its industrial precision and integration into European value chains, can help India bridge technology gaps and accelerate domestic production capacity.

Furthermore, India's capabilities in ICT and digital services can complement the V4's ambition to transition to Industry 4.0. Deeper collaboration on emerging technologies, automation, and smart manufacturing can foster mutually beneficial innovation ecosystems. Boosting Indian investments into the V4 will be vital in this process. At the policy level, advancing economic connectivity through the EU–India FTA, reducing trade barriers, and leveraging the EU–India Trade and Technology Council and Global Gateway initiatives will be essential. The FTA negotiations, therefore, carry strategic weight for the future of India–V4 economic cooperation.

Both India and the V4 are committed to sustainable development but face divergent challenges. As climate finance commitments by the global North remain insufficient, India, speaking from the Global South, plays a crucial role in highlighting issues of climate adaptation and equitable transition financing. This makes a compelling case for launching a V4–India Sustainability Forum to address problems over climate adaptation (and not just mitigation), renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power, clean energy technologies, and broader energy infrastructure.

Digital technologies are the backbone of modern economies. India's globally recognized progress in building digital public infrastructure across various sectors, including health, finance, and education, offers valuable lessons. However, India still faces challenges in ensuring robust cybersecurity, data privacy, and surveillance protections. Further, the strategic importance of artificial intelligence (AI) in addressing long-term development issues, from infrastructure optimization to healthcare access, makes AI collaboration a priority. In a post-pandemic world where supply chain diversification away from China and the US is crucial, an India–V4 partnership on AI, cybersecurity, and digital trust frameworks can support shared technological resilience.

Indian interest in the V4 region has grown, in part due to the increasing popularity of Central European locations in Indian cinema and tourism. Prague, Budapest, Bratislava, and Warsaw are now regular fixtures on the Indian travel circuit. However, awareness of the V4 as a political or economic bloc remains limited in India. To change this, V4 countries should actively promote their collective identity and relevance within Indian media and academia. Indian academia should also focus its research more on the region to broaden the scope of relations. Furthermore, people-to-people contact should be positively encouraged by increasing connectivity, the frequency of flights, and the ease of visa formalities, especially in the eastern region of India, such as Kolkata.

India's emergence as a trusted development partner—especially among the Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States, and Pacific Island Countries—has enhanced its reputation across the Global South and gained significant attention from the Global North. Its ability to deliver low-cost, high-impact development solutions offers strategic opportunities for cooperation with the V4. Joint development programs can enable targeted initiatives in infrastructure, health, agriculture, and digital transformation. Such collaboration would allow the V4 states to expand their presence in the Indo-Pacific region, which is increasingly shaped by the

US–China rivalry, while India could benefit from enhanced European support for its Indo-Pacific vision.

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**Visegrad Four and India:
Searching for collaboration agenda amid global geopolitical upheaval**

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