

HERALDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

DIPLOMACY IN ACTION IN NEW WORLD ORDER



Heralding new partnerships: Diplomacy in Action in New World Order



India's foreign engagements have entered a new phase of dynamism and purpose, driven by its commitment to strategic autonomy and multilateral cooperation. In recent years, India's relations with global powers have deepened, through strategic initiatives and partnerships; India has led with purpose and pragmatism. Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi's ambitious transcontinental journey spanning Cyprus, Canada, and Croatia in a single sweep must be viewed through the prism of India's ongoing "Westward Rebalancing." While in Canada,

Modi participated in the G7 summit, his visit to Cyprus and Croatia is largely being seen through the angle of strategic messaging and exploring new vistas for cooperation across sectors. Modi's trip to Cyprus and Croatia, both members of the European Union (EU), has come after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar visit to France, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, and the EU within a month. This highlights the growing importance of India-EU ties. This is not merely a matter of clocking air miles or ticking off capitals on a diplomatic itinerary. Rather, it reflects a conscious recalibration of India's foreign policy priorities, driven by the imperative to diversify partnerships, secure new geostrategic footholds, and consolidate India's role in emerging economic and security architectures.

India's Mediterranean Pivot:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visits to Cyprus and Croatia mark a deliberate evolution in India's diplomatic playbook—subtle yet strategic, calibrated yet assertive. These engagements are not isolated photo-ops but rather nodes in a widening arc of influence that reflects New Delhi's aspirations to entrench itself deeper into the Mediterranean and Adriatic realms. With both countries emerging as maritime pivots, the visits must be interpreted as a statement of India's rising ambitions to shape and co-author the evolving architecture of the Indo-European geo-economic corridor, particularly in light of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)—a transformative multimodal trade and connectivity initiative designed to link India with Europe via the Middle East, bypassing traditional chokepoints such as the Suez Canal. Positioned as a counterweight to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).



At the heart of this diplomatic foray lies a three-pronged logic: diversification of India's European engagements beyond the traditional power centers, building hedges against the Turkey-Pakistan nexus, and embedding India within the strategic arteries of the European Union's soft underbelly.

Cyprus and the Diplomacy of Depth

In Cyprus, Modi's visit carried historical, symbolic, and strategic undertones. As the first Indian Prime Minister to visit in over two decades, the timing was anything but arbitrary. With Ankara's increasingly abrasive regional posture and its growing defense ties with Pakistan, India's embrace of Nicosia functions as both a diplomatic rejoinder and a calculated tilt in the Mediterranean chessboard. Cyprus geopolitically sandwiched between European and Middle Eastern theatres—is both a gatekeeper and a stakeholder in the larger Euro-Asian realignment.

More than mere symbolism, this visit underscored India's willingness to amplify ties with nations that have endured strategic isolation. Modi's presence in Nicosia subtly invoked the Cyprus-Turkey divide, where India's support for reunification under UN resolutions parallels its own sensitivities vis-à-vis Kashmir, an unstated yet resonant message for Ankara. Importantly, the offer of a Kashmiri silk carpet to the Cypriot president was no random gesture; it was a cultural and geopolitical signal intertwined in diplomatic fabric—India's claim to sovereignty and civilizational continuity presented as soft power.

Furthermore, by signing a strategic roadmap on innovation, trade, and defence cooperation, India leverages Cyprus's unique position within the European Union. As a member of the EU but outside the Schengen zone and NATO's core command, Cyprus provides India a docking point for influencing European trade flows without the political baggage of continental power politics.

Croatia: Adriatic Synergies and EU Outreach

Modi's visit to Croatia must be seen in the continuum of building an Adriatic flank to India's Mediterranean strategy. Much like Cyprus, Croatia is a relatively less saturated diplomatic terrain, yet it offers outsized returns. Its location on the Adriatic coast provides India a potential end-point alternative or complementary route for the IMEC, circumventing chokepoints while fostering bilateral access to Central and Southeastern Europe.

India and Croatia's expanding engagement particularly in pharmaceuticals, shipbuilding, and tech-driven manufacturing points to growing economic complementarity. What makes Croatia doubly important is its dual identity: a small state with an EU voice. In a bloc where unanimity often trumps size, cultivating Croatia (as with Cyprus) enhances India's voice on critical trade negotiations with the EU, such as the long-stalled India-EU Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA).

Beyond this, Croatia's geostrategic infrastructure particularly the Port of Rijeka, which is undergoing massive modernization with EU support—holds immense value. Rijeka can serve as a critical logistics hub for India's maritime outreach, connecting the Adriatic coast to Central Europe's industrial heartland via the Trans-European Transport Network. For Indian exporters and logistics firms, access to such corridors could diversify trade routes and reduce dependence on congested chokepoints like the Suez Canal or traditional Western European ports. IMEC, by establishing an economic land bridge from Indian ports to the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and onward to Europe via rail and maritime links, exemplifies this ambition. It enhances India's connectivity to European markets while reducing dependency on volatile maritime chokepoints and offering a democratic, infrastructure-led counter to Beijing's BRI.

Additionally, Croatia's active participation in the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), a regional platform for connectivity and infrastructure spanning the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas—offers India an entry point into future-proof energy, digital, and transport networks. Given India's growing investments in renewable energy diplomacy and digital public infrastructure, engaging with the 3SI through Croatia

can open new channels of cooperation in clean energy pipelines, LNG terminal access, and cross-border digital services.

A Counterweight to the Turkey-Pakistan Axis

The overlapping message of both visits is clear: New Delhi is cultivating relationships that check the spread of Ankara's ambitions. Turkey, under Erdoğan, has amplified its military and ideological alignment with Pakistan. From backing Islamabad's Kashmir narrative in international forums to supplying combat drones and defence equipment, Turkey has emerged as a problematic actor for Indian strategic interests. By fortifying ties with Cyprus, Turkey's ideological and territorial adversary—and with Croatia, India is creating a semi-circle of influence encircling Ankara's western maritime flank.

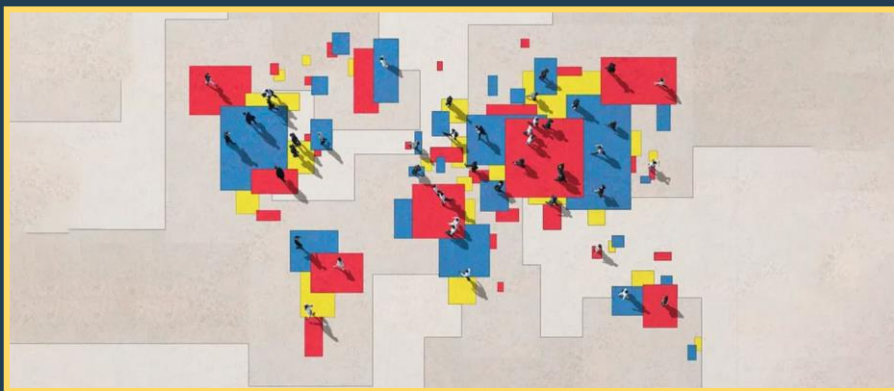
This triangulation becomes even more potent when one factors in India's deepening strategic embrace of Armenia and Greece. Together, this informal quartet India, Cyprus, Greece, Armenia—could evolve into a geopolitical bloc that challenges the Ankara-Islamabad narrative while reinforcing India's own Indo-European corridor outreach. In this way, the visits are part of a broader mosaic, one where diplomacy is used to reshape maritime access, secure continental corridors, and shape regional balances.

Economic Strategy and the Mediterranean Trade Tapestry

Cyprus and Croatia, while relatively minor trading partners today, are doorways to much larger economic ambitions. Cyprus offers banking, legal, and shipping channels into EU markets, while Croatia provides industrial, technological, and logistical links into the Balkans and beyond. India's vision of becoming a central actor in the reconfiguration of global supply chains—post-COVID and amid Red Sea instabilities requires anchoring into stable and strategically located European ports. These visits are the necessary prelude to infrastructure diplomacy and economic integration, whether through free trade zones, maritime logistics hubs, or digital technology exchanges.

Moreover, Cyprus holds the potential to become a base for India's forward logistics or even a future maritime node, should the UK relinquish its sovereign base areas. The mere mention of such prospects sends a clear signal to NATO and the EU: India is prepared to shoulder responsibilities in regions once monopolized by Western actors. From intelligence sharing to naval logistics and cyber cooperation, the Cyprus-Croatia dual axis represents a long-term bet on embedded influence.

Reflection and Recommendation:



Hon'ble Prime Minister's recent tour stands as a vivid demonstration of India's growing diplomatic agility and strategic foresight in an era of global uncertainty. Rather than a routine exercise in bilateral engagement, this visit

was a carefully choreographed statement of intent, one that sought to recalibrate India's position across three crucial vectors: the Mediterranean, Central Europe, and the Transatlantic West. The sequencing and substance of the tour revealed a nuanced understanding of the shifting geopolitical landscape, leveraging both historical goodwill and emerging opportunities. A key takeaway from this diplomatic

odyssey is India's ability to blend symbolism with substance. The visit underscored how even smaller states, when strategically located or institutionally influential, can serve as critical nodes in India's broader foreign policy architecture.

Looking ahead, several recommendations emerge for sustaining and amplifying the gains of this tour. First, India should prioritize the operationalization of the new action plans and agreements, ensuring that high-level commitments translate into tangible outcomes across defence, technology, and economic cooperation. Second, leveraging Cyprus's EU presidency will be critical for advancing long-standing goals such as the India-EU Free Trade Agreement and securing regulatory access for Indian businesses. Third, expanding maritime and energy collaboration through joint naval exercises, port partnerships, and participation in regional energy projects will be vital for securing India's interests in the Mediterranean and Central Europe. Fourth, India must continue to cultivate strategic partnerships that serve as counterweights to adversarial alignments, using diplomatic, economic, and security tools to reinforce its position in key regions. Finally, deepening soft power engagement through cultural, educational, and people-to-people initiatives will help anchor these strategic relationships in societal goodwill, making them more resilient to political fluctuations.

This approach reflects not just tactical engagement but a diplomacy guided by logos, reasoned principles rooted in coherence, continuity, and strategic clarity. It also gestures toward a shared telos: a long-term vision grounded in sovereignty, stability, and mutual respect, hallmarks of a responsible global actor committed to shaping a multipolar world order.
