



NEW GLOBAL  
PARTNERSHIP OF  
UKRAINE



UKRAINE X INDIA

END OF  
THE FREE FALL  
OF SOVIET LEGACY?



INTERNATIONAL  
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“Ukraine-India: End of the Free Fall of Soviet Legacy?”

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# Ukraine-India: End of the Free Fall of Soviet Legacy?

*Olga Vorozhbyt*

## *Summary*

*India has been Ukraine's biggest partner in South Asia for thirty years. However, proactive relations between India and Ukraine date back to the time of the Soviet Union. Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine has had a substantial impact on traditional areas of Ukraine-India cooperation, including the economy, education, and military industry. Before the full-scale war, India had been a major importer of Ukrainian agricultural and machine-building products. Both industries have been heavily affected by Russia's shelling. At the same time, the full-scale invasion forced the two countries to revise the political aspect of their relations and seek new points of contact in the available context.*

*India's traditional neutrality, as illustrated by its stance on the Russian aggression against Ukraine, and its multivector foreign policy allow New Delhi to increase trade with Russia while also calling for peace. For Ukraine, this stance is unacceptable. Despite this, the Ukrainian leadership seeks to develop bilateral relations with India.*

*Ukraine's post-war recovery, war experience and a shared aspiration for reforming international organisations – even with divergent goals – could become important common themes for bilateral relations in addition to trade, joint military industry projects, and education. At the same time, both countries need to expand their knowledge of each other in order to strengthen Ukraine-India relations. This awareness has decreased substantially in the past 30 years, and the lack of contacts has increased due to Ukraine's primary focus on European and Euro-Atlantic integration and India's choice of Russia as the key partner in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union.*

*India's 2022-2023 G20 presidency showed how influential it is becoming in the international arena. Ukraine's Foreign Policy Strategy defines India as an "important partner" in Asia, where priorities include cooperation in military technology, high-tech, alternative energy, pharmaceutical industry, healthcare, education, tourism, and infrastructure projects. The main themes India and Ukraine could potentially share include the reform of the UN, postwar reconstruction and investment, exploitation of natural resources, education, and the experience of war against a bigger opponent, including naval warfare.*

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# INTRODUCTION

Over the past 30 years, the bilateral relations between Ukraine and India have had their highs and lows. Despite being geographically distant, India and Ukraine have always had active trade and people-to-people contacts, thanks to Indian students in Ukraine. At the same time, Ukraine has made some serious mistakes in these thirty years. While prioritising European and Euro-Atlantic integration, Ukraine's diplomacy has been focusing much less on non-Western countries as they have made serious progress, including economically, in these decades. India is one of these countries. On its part, New Delhi has prioritised cooperation with Russia as the successor of the Soviet Union while focusing much less on former Soviet republics.

Since the beginning of the Russian aggression in 2014, India's position has been of strategic neutrality. At the same time, India's interpretation of its neutrality has been criticised repeatedly, given its expanding economic cooperation with Russia after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 through the purchase of discounted Russian oil and continued military-technical cooperation with Russia.

Before the war, India had been a major importer of Ukrainian agricultural and machine-building products – both industries were hit hard by Russian shelling. As a result, bilateral trade has decreased following the full-scale invasion. At the same time, postwar reconstruction offers India new opportunities for investment in Ukraine.

International rankings will have India as a global growth leader for at least another three years. It may become the third-biggest economy in the world by 2030.<sup>1</sup> This forecast, and the fact that India has one of the world's highest shares of young people, should become a strong argument for Ukrainian policymakers and entrepreneurs in favour of intensifying relations with New Delhi. Also, India is a G20 member, and this year's presidency shows how influential it has become as a global actor.

Despite Ukraine's huge human and economic losses, its resilience in the war against a much stronger enemy and its important fighting experience could be useful for India, given China's growing assertiveness in the region. The postwar reconstruction and the urgency of reform in international institutions, including the UN, to address their dysfunction are other potential points of interest in bilateral relations.

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<sup>1</sup> Nandan Mandayam, India to become world's third-largest economy by 2030 says S&P Global Ratings report, The Print, 05.12.2023, <https://theprint.in/india/india-to-be-worlds-third-largest-economy-by-2030-sp-global-ratings/1872809/>

# UKRAINE-INDIA COOPERATION AFTER 1991

## *Political contacts*

India recognised Ukraine's independence on December 26, 1991. On January 17, 1992, Ukraine and India signed the Protocol on Establishing Diplomatic Relations. In May 1992, India opened its embassy in Ukraine. Ukraine opened its embassy in New Delhi in February 1993. This can be considered as a starting point for bilateral relations between the independent Ukraine and India.

Importantly, the relations Ukraine and India started developing after 1991, dating back to the period of the Soviet Union. Ukrainian engineers had contributed substantially to the development of India's industrial potential through cooperation with Indian professionals on the construction of steelworks in Bhilai and Bokaro and equipment manufacturing plants in Ranchi, Durgapur, and Haridwar.

Ivano-Frankivsk Oil and Gas University researchers worked as consultants at the Petroleum Institute and the Institute of Drilling Technology in India. This cooperation is often forgotten today. It is believed instead that only Russia helped India with its economic and industrial development. However, it was Ukrainian professionals who contributed proactively to this progress.

The analysis of over 30 years of Ukraine-India relations shows that they peaked during the presidency of Leonid Kravchuk in Ukraine. Ukraine's first president went on the first official visit to India in March 1992 before Ukraine opened its embassy there.

A number of factors contributed to the proactive development of relations between Kyiv and New Delhi in the early years of Ukraine's independence:

- India began to diversify its foreign policy and strengthen its partnership with countries in the West, including the US, in the late 1980s;
- As a result of its difficult economic position following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia failed to meet its commitments to India, including the commitment to supply components for MiG-29 jets and other armaments of Soviet origin. Representatives of the Indian defence sector were visiting former Soviet states in search of such components in the early 1990s. While India had a license to produce some Soviet jets, it was insufficient to have all the necessary tools and equipment. They hoped Ukraine would help them improve the situation.

During the first visit of a Ukrainian president to India on March 27, 1992, Ukraine and India signed the Agreement on Friendship and Cooperation that laid the legal foundation for deepening their bilateral relations. In Art. VII of the Agreement, the parties agreed to set up an intergovernmental Ukrainian-Indian Joint Commission for

Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical, Industrial, and Cultural Cooperation (the agreement on the establishment of the commission was signed in 1994). It has been the key government entity that sets the agenda for Ukraine-India trade and economic cooperation. During that visit, the parties signed several trade, R&D and education agreements that impacted the development of their bilateral relations in the future. In the past 30 years, Ukrainian presidents visited India five times. Ukrainian ministers of foreign affairs visited India just five times, too.

Leonid Kravchuk's presidency can be considered the most productive period in Ukraine-India relations. It was then that the high- and top-level visits took place: Ukraine's President Kravchuk visited India in 1992, and India's President Shankar Dayal Sharma visited Ukraine in 1993. In 1992, India's Defense Minister visited Ukraine.

The relations between Kyiv and New Delhi were downturned after Ukraine signed a big contract to supply tanks to Pakistan in 1996. In fact, this was not the only decision that cooled down Ukraine-India relations at that period. In 1998, Ukraine supported all UN resolutions that condemned India's nuclear weapons testing and joined economic sanctions imposed on it for this reason. Russia condemned the testing of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan in the UN debates but called economic sanctions unjustified. Overall, Ukraine was politically indifferent about South Asia during Leonid Kuchma's presidency.

His second term as president opened a new stage in bilateral relations. He visited New Delhi in 2002. However, India and Russia had already resumed fairly productive relations by then, which impacted Ukraine's dialogue with India in one way or another. In addition, a certain degree of political ostracism against Kuchma after the murder of journalist Georgiy Gongadze kept India's representatives from being too proactive.

In the early 2000s, over 70% of India's military equipment was of either Soviet or Russian origin. This made India an attractive market for Ukraine. The Ukrainian side officially declared the resumption of the top-level political dialogue and the opening of promising cooperation as the outcome of Leonid Kuchma's visit to New Delhi. However, Indian media reported that Ukraine and India also discussed military exports. Following Leonid Kuchma's visit, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Anatoliy Zlenko visited India in 2003. During his visit, he reported that Ukraine had stopped the shipments of military equipment to Pakistan<sup>2</sup> and would like to cooperate in the military sphere with India again. Two months later, India's Defense Minister George Fernandes visited Ukraine. His visit focused on importing Ukrainian military equipment and technology to India.

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<sup>2</sup> Ukraine has stopped supply of weapons to Pakistan: Minister, 12.08.2003, [https://zeenews.india.com/news/south-asia/ukraine-has-stopped-supply-of-weapons-to-pakistan-minister\\_116092.html](https://zeenews.india.com/news/south-asia/ukraine-has-stopped-supply-of-weapons-to-pakistan-minister_116092.html)

The mid-2000s saw the establishment of Ukraine-India parliamentary contacts. In December 2003, Ukraine's Parliament Speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn visited India for the first time. This was the first visit of Ukraine's parliament speaker to India and the only one to date.<sup>3</sup>

Under the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko, in June 2005, India's President Abdul Kalam visited Ukraine. They agreed to strengthen economic, scientific, and educational cooperation. Importantly, economic contacts between the two countries expanded in the subsequent years. Kalam's visit was very intense – developing high-tech and educational cooperation with Ukraine was important for him as a nuclear and aerospace scientist. This is why he met with Ukraine's renowned scientist Volodymyr Horbulin, who was then counsel to President Kuchma, and visited the Pivdenmash (Southern Engineering Plant) in Dnipro.<sup>4</sup>

After his visit, the Speaker of the Indian Parliament was scheduled to visit Ukraine in 2006, but the visit was postponed for unknown reasons. The same happened when Speaker Meira Kumar planned to visit Ukraine in 2014. Viktor Yushchenko never visited India even though President Kalam invited him.

The next – and the last – top-level visit from Ukraine took place in December 2012<sup>5</sup> when President Viktor Yanukovich visited India. Under the presidency of Petro Poroshenko, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin visited India in October 2017.

At the same time, India is a parliamentary republic. Subsequently, the prime minister holds all executive power. Even so, no Indian prime minister has ever visited Ukraine. Indira Gandhi was the only Indian prime minister to have come on an official visit to Ukraine back in 1982.

Under the presidency of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, top-level meetings between Ukraine and India have taken place twice. Both were at the sidelines of major events: the COP26 summit in Glasgow on November 2, 2021<sup>6</sup> and after the beginning of the full-scale invasion at the G7 meeting in Hiroshima, Japan, on May 20, 2023.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Verkhovna Rada Speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn is on an official visit to India, 02.12.2003, Parliament of Ukraine, <https://www.rada.gov.ua/print/1002.html>

<sup>4</sup> Kalam visits missile factory in Ukraine, 03.06.2005, [https://zeenews.india.com/news/nation/kalam-visits-missile-factory-in-ukraine\\_220853.html](https://zeenews.india.com/news/nation/kalam-visits-missile-factory-in-ukraine_220853.html)

<sup>5</sup> State visit of the President of Ukraine to India, Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of India, 06.12.2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20231020120048/https://www.mea.gov.in/media-advisory.htm?dtl/20910/State+visit+of+the+President+of+Ukraine+to+India>

<sup>6</sup> Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the President of Ukraine H.E. Mr. Volodymyr Zelenskyy on the sidelines of COP26 in Glasgow on 2 November 2021. Prime Minister website, 2.11.2021, <https://www.narendramodi.in/bilateral-meeting-between-prime-minister-narendra-modi-and-president-volodymyr-zelensky-of-ukraine-558225>

<sup>7</sup> Simone McCarthy, Ukraine's Zelensky and India's Modi hold first face-to-face since Russian invasion, CNN, 20.05.2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/05/20/asia/zelensky-modi-meet-g7-japan-hiroshima-intl-hnk/index.html>



Apart from that, Ukraine's Deputy Foreign Minister, Emine Dzhaparova, visited India in April 2023.<sup>8</sup> During her two-day visit, she met with India's Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture, Meenakshi Lekhi, and Deputy Foreign Minister Sanjay Verma. In July 2023, India's Deputy Foreign Minister, Sanjay Verma, visited Kyiv.

After a 13-year break, Kyiv hosted the ninth round of political consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and India on July 13, 2023, with India's Deputy Foreign Minister Sanjay Verma and Ukraine's Deputy Foreign Minister Emine Dzhaparova presiding.<sup>9</sup> That round of political consultations was a breakthrough. From 2000 to 2010, such political consultations had been taking place every two years or every year, while the last two rounds were 13 years apart.

In terms of stages in Ukraine's relations with India, an important stage was in the early 1990s under the presidency of Ukraine's first President, Leonid Kravchuk, when Ukraine had a chance and was building efficient working relations with India. During the first term of the second president, Leonid Kuchma, in 1994-1999, Ukraine signed a contract with Pakistan and condemned India's nuclear weapons tests along with other UN states – this was the lowest point in bilateral relations. During the presidency of the fifth president, Petro Poroshenko, bilateral trade was developing robustly. This was partly thanks to the proactive work of the Intergovernmental Ukrainian-Indian Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical, Industrial, and Cultural Cooperation. Its latest sixth meeting took place in 2018.

In recent years, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba have both highlighted the need to develop bilateral cooperation with major global actors, including India. In 2021, Ukraine approved its first Foreign Policy Strategy that defined India as an "important partner" in Asia, where Ukraine's priorities include military and technical cooperation, high-tech cooperation, alternative energy, pharmaceutical industry, healthcare, education, tourism, and infrastructural projects.<sup>10</sup> In 2021, Ukraine developed its Asia Foreign Policy Strategy, placing India as an important actor. The full-scale Russia-Ukraine war resulted in some changes in the list of promising areas of cooperation. But some of these areas remain relevant.

Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada has a group for interparliamentary relations with India. Some MPs from this group have visited India in recent years. These include Sviatoslav Yurash, Yulia Klymenko and Vadym Halaichuk.

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<sup>8</sup> Ukraine's deputy foreign minister visits India, AlJazeera, 10.04.2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/10/ukraines-deputy-foreign-minister-visits-india>

<sup>9</sup> The ninth round of political consultations between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and the Ministry of External Affairs of the Republic of India was held in Kyiv, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 13.07.2023, <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/u-kiyevi-proveli-devyatij-raund-politichnih-konsultacij-mizh-ministerstvami-zakord-onnih-sprav-ukrayini-ta-respubliki-indiya>

<sup>10</sup> Foreign Policy Strategy of Ukraine, President of Ukraine official website, 26.08.2021, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/4482021-40017>

## *Economic cooperation*

Trade and economic cooperation between Ukraine and India has played an important role in their bilateral relations since the beginning of Ukraine's independence. Before Russia's full-scale invasion, India was the second biggest export destination for Ukraine in Asia, following China, and the fifth biggest export market for Ukrainian goods, as 4% of all Ukrainian exports headed to India. The full-scale invasion affected Ukraine's capacity to export. However, India remained one of Ukraine's top trade partners in 2022. Their total trade amounted to US \$2.58bn. Fats and oils were the primary exported items. At the same time, Ukraine's exports in 2022 halved compared to 2021, hitting US \$772.2mn. A comparison of the past six years before the war shows that Ukraine-India trade peaked at US \$3.6bn in 2021 and was the lowest at US \$2.7bn in 2020.

Military and technical cooperation was one of the key areas of economic cooperation between the two countries before the full-scale invasion. It dates back to the Soviet period. For example, Ukraine's state enterprise Zoria-MashProject signed an over US \$100mn contract to deliver two gas turbine units for the Indian Navy. However, Ukraine's instability due to Russia's invasion forced India to look for other ways to get gas turbine units for its Navy. New Delhi hopes to develop its own production with the support of the US, among others.<sup>11</sup>

The aerospace industry was another important bridge in bilateral cooperation before the full-scale invasion. Since 2009, Ukraine and India have had a big project upgrading AN-32 planes of the Indian Air Force worth US \$400mn. Ukraine was supposed to upgrade its 105 aeroplanes. While the contract was fulfilled with some delays,<sup>12</sup> Ukraine and India agreed to resume the program.<sup>13</sup>

Less than a month before the full-scale invasion, Serhiy Bychkov, Director General at the state enterprise Antonov, said in an interview that the company was negotiating with the Indian side the establishment of joint production of aeroplanes based on AN-32 in India.<sup>14</sup>

Pharmaceutical products are one of India's major export items to Ukraine. In 2020, the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ukraine imported over US \$126mn worth of Indian

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<sup>11</sup> Ajeyo Basu, India looking to partner up with US for warship engines, First Post, 01.06.2023, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/india-looking-to-partner-up-with-us-for-warship-engines-12675792.html>

<sup>12</sup> Reuben F. Johnson, Antonov Struggles To Complete Indian An-32 Upgrade, AIN, 02.04.2015, <https://www.ainonline.com/aviation-news/defense/2015-04-02/antonov-struggles-complete-indian-32-upgrade>

<sup>13</sup> Sandeep Unnithan, Ukrainian delegation visit to speed up stalled An-32 upgrade programme, India Today, 07.06.2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/ukrainian-delegation-india-visits-an32-upgrade-programme-ste-iaf-1544628-2019-06-07>

<sup>14</sup> Antonov is talking about producing a new version of AN-32 in India, Uprom, 17.02.2022, <https://uprom.info/news/avia/antonov-vede-peregovory-pro-vyrobnycztvo-novoyi-versiyi-litaka-an-32-v-indiyi/>

pharmaceutical products, second only to Germany. In previous years, too, India had been among the top three exporters of such goods to Ukraine, preceded by Germany and France. The total share of Indian pharmaceutical producers in Ukraine's market grew from 2016 to 2020 and reached 5.7% in 2020.<sup>15</sup> In 2020, India was the second biggest exporter of medicines to Ukraine, worth US \$173mn. Some of India's top pharmaceutical companies, including Ranbaxy, Sun Group, and Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, have been operating in Ukraine for many years.

Ukrainian entrepreneurs have been expanding investment opportunities in India. In 2023, Intellias, a Ukrainian IT company, reported opening a new development centre in Pune. It was planning to hire nearly 100 IT professionals for its office. New Products Group, one of Ukraine's biggest producers of non-alcoholic beverages, operates in India. It sells energy drinks there.

Ukraine's postwar reconstruction can serve as a serious impetus for bilateral economic relations. One reason is the need to rebuild homes for people whose houses or apartments were destroyed. Real estate development could be one of the key areas for Indian investment.

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<sup>15</sup> India as the world's pharmacy: A strong and reliable partner for Ukraine, 2021, <https://www.ipma.ua/news/events/1685/>

# RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR AND INDIA'S POSITION

Since the annexation of Crimea and the start of the Russia-Ukraine war in Donbas in 2014, India has officially been following its neutrality policy. Before the full-scale invasion, the official New Delhi essentially refrained from commenting on the Russia-Ukraine war and the annexation of Crimea. The only time an Indian official commented on the war was in the press conference on March 6, 2014, when Shivshankar Menon, then-National Security Advisor to the Government of Manmohan Singh, expressed hope<sup>16</sup> that "whatever internal issues there are within Ukraine" they are settled peacefully and that various interests are reconciled. He mentioned "legitimate Russian interests," among other things. The official statement<sup>17</sup> on the website of India's Foreign Minister published on the same day did not mention the phrase about Russia's "legitimate interests", although it did mention the hope that "whatever internal issues" would be settled. Even so, New Delhi's position was seen as pro-Russian both in Kyiv and Moscow. Apart from that, the illegitimate "prime minister" of Crimea and representative of the occupation authorities, Sergei Aksionov, visited India as part of the Russian delegation in 2014. Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko commented on this, among others. He noted that India was putting money first by inviting the leader of Crimean separatists, Sergei Aksionov.<sup>18</sup> What he meant was that India was prioritising financial benefits from cooperation with Russia over international law.

India's neutrality in the international arena dates back to the Cold War and the proactive efforts of the Non-Aligned Movement. Then, India refrained from criticising the Soviet Union, among others, for its invasion of Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Afghanistan in 1979. Therefore, refraining from harsh criticism of Moscow for the Russian war against Ukraine is a continuation of that policy to some extent. At the same time, India's current Foreign Minister, S. Jaishankar, notes that his policy is based on what he defines as a plurilateral approach. This approach can be interpreted as cooperation with what seems like unlikely partners for the common good. In one of

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<sup>16</sup>Transcript of media briefing by National Security Advisor (March 06, 2014), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of India, 07.03.2014, <https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/23042/Transcript+of+media+briefing+by+National+Security+Advisor+March+06+2014>

<sup>17</sup> Recent developments in Ukraine, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of India, 06.03.2014, <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/23041/Recent+developments+in+Ukraine>

<sup>18</sup> Poroshenko criticizes India for the arrival of Crimea "prime minister" with Putin, Radio Svoboda, 12.12.2014, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/26741183.html>

his interviews, he mentioned that India is managing its difficult relationship with China, so other conflicts could, too, be solved with dialogue.<sup>19</sup>

India's dependence on Russian weapons is an important factor influencing its position. While India is decreasing its imports of Russian weapons, the current rate of this dependence makes it hard for India to quit it completely in the short run. In their comments, Indian experts often mention that India is "surrounded" by unfriendly neighbours, so it should be prepared to defend its sovereignty, and it depends on Russian weapons for this for now. Still, they point out that a debate is taking place behind closed doors in India about how sustainable relations with Russia can be.<sup>20</sup>

India's colonial past, too, strengthens the anti-Western rhetoric of its representatives. Part of society interprets the Russia-Ukraine war as a war of NATO (the West) against Russia. At the same time, all positive legacies of the Soviet Union in India, including industrial development and help and support internationally, are seen exclusively as accomplishments of Russia rather than as contributions of all Soviet republics where Ukrainian professionals played an important role. In order to change this, Ukraine needs to recover a positive image from the past in the Indian memory.

If to speak about the situation within the international organisations, so India abstained from voting on the UNGA resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine No68/262 passed on March 27, 2014.

India voted against the resolution on the Situation of human rights in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, between 2016 and 2021. It changed its position after Russia's full-scale invasion – ever since India has abstained in these votes. In 2018-2021, India abstained in the voting on the UNGA resolution on the Problem of the militarisation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.

Overall, India abstained in the voting for Ukrainian resolutions in 2022-2023, including UNGA resolutions on Aggression against Ukraine (02.03.2022), Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine (24.03.2022), Suspension of the rights of membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council (7.04.2022), Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations (12.10.2022), Furtherance of remedy and reparation for aggression against Ukraine (14.11.2022), Situation of human rights in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine (15.12.2022), and

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<sup>19</sup> Europe 'mischaracterising' India's position in Ukraine conflict: Jaishankar, Business Standard, 03.01.2022, [https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/europe-mischaracterising-india-s-position-in-%20ukraine-conflict-jaishankar-122060300888\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/europe-mischaracterising-india-s-position-in-%20ukraine-conflict-jaishankar-122060300888_1.html)

<sup>20</sup> Swasti Rao: "There is a lot of debate behind closed doors in India about how sustainable relations with Russia can be", Tyzhden, 15.03.2023, <https://tyzhden.ua/svasti-rao-za-zachynenymy-dveryma-v-indii-tochytsia-bahato-dyskusij-pro-te-naskilky-stijky-my-mozhut-vidnosyny-z-rosiieiu/>

Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine (23.02.2023). The only resolution that mentions the condemnation of the Russia-Ukraine war but is not focused on it directly that India supported at the UN is the UNGA resolution on Cooperation between the United Nations and the Council of Europe, adopted on April 26, 2023.

After the full-scale invasion, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi commented on the war in Ukraine repeatedly. In his interview for The Wall Street Journal before he visited the US in June 2023, he said, "Some people say that we are neutral. But we are not neutral. We are on the side of peace."<sup>21</sup> During his meeting with President Putin in Samarkand in September 2022, he mentioned that it was "not the time for war": "We have talked to you many times over the phone on the subject that democracy and diplomacy, and dialogue are all these things that touch the world," he said.<sup>22</sup> India has not joined the Crimea Platform meetings.

At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Narendra Modi had numerous telephone conversations with presidents Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Vladimir Putin. The evacuation of Indian students from the areas that ended up in active warfare was an important topic for those conversations. At that time, over 18,000 students from India were studying in Ukraine. In Operation Ganga, in February-March 2022, over 23,000 Indian citizens were evacuated from Ukraine.<sup>23</sup>

Following its neutral status, India provided no military assistance to Ukraine. However, it has sent humanitarian help,<sup>24</sup> including medicines, sleeping bags, blankets, and tents. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, New Delhi has delivered fourteen packages of humanitarian assistance. The latest package arrived in August 2023.<sup>25</sup> Despite the rhetoric of Indian leaders, the growth of over 250% in India's trade with Russia over 2022-2023, the first year of the full-scale invasion, compared to previous years, has forced Ukrainian policymakers and government officials to interpret India's "neutral" stance differently. "When India buys [discounted] Russian oil, it should understand that this discount is paid for with Ukrainian blood. Every barrel of

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<sup>21</sup> "We Are Not Neutral...": What PM Modi Said On Russia-Ukraine Conflict, NDTV, 20.06.2023, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/indias-position-on-russia-well-understood-by-world-pm-modi-as-us-visit-begins-4136318>

<sup>22</sup> Rishabh Pratap, Larry Register and Heather Chen, Indian leader Narendra Modi tells Putin: Now is not the time for war, CNN, 17.09.2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/09/17/world/modi-putin-russia-ukraine-war-rebuke-intl-hnk/index.htm>

<sup>23</sup> Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi virtually met stakeholders involved in Operation Ganga launched for evacuation of Indians from Ukraine, Prime Minister's Office, 15.03.2022, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1806335>

<sup>24</sup> India hands over 14th consignment of humanitarian aid comprising essential medic, Health World, 03.08.2023, <https://health.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/industry/india-hands-over-14th-consignment-of-humanitarian-aid-comprising-essential-medicines-to-ukraine/102395131>

<sup>25</sup> India hands over 14th consignment of humanitarian aid comprising essential medic, India Times, 03.08.2023, <https://health.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/industry/india-hands-over-14th-consignment-of-humanitarian-aid-comprising-essential-medicines-to-ukraine/102395131>

the Russian oil India receives contains a substantial share of Ukrainian blood," Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba commented on India's increased buying of Russian oil. In turn, representatives of India use their "moral duty to the Indians"<sup>26</sup> as the rationale for their decision to purchase Russian oil since people cannot afford expensive fuels in a country where GDP per capita is US \$2,000. Apart from that, India pays for the Russian oil in rupees. The only way Russia can use this revenue is by accumulating it or investing it in India,<sup>27</sup> something that Russian officials have been reluctant to do. They need money for domestic consumption, including weapons production, while they can only use the rupees they receive as investment in the Indian economy.

### *The dynamics of India-Russia relations since 2014*

In order to better understand India's position on the Russia-Ukraine war, it is important to analyse the dynamics of the Russia-India dialogue and cooperation that have had a serious impact on the shaping of India's policy, in addition to the knowledge about India's special positioning as neutral.

Since 2010, Russia-India relations have been qualified as a "specially privileged strategic partnership."<sup>28</sup> From 2000 to 2021, the leaders of Russia and India had their annual summits. December 2022 was the first time India announced that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would not attend the annual summit with Vladimir Putin in Moscow due to "scheduling issues."

The supply of weapons is one of the key elements in the cooperation between the two countries. Russia is a key defence partner for India. However, India is gradually decreasing its dependence on Russia in terms of weapons. According to SIPRI, Russia accounted for 69% of India's total imports of weapons in 2012-2016 and 46% from 2017 to 2021. France, Israel, and the US are the key partners that are helping India diversify its supply of weapons.<sup>29</sup>

The purchase of five Russian S-400 systems worth US \$5.4bn in 2018 was one of the biggest defense contracts lately. Before Russia delivered the first system in late 2021, there were debates in India and the US that New Delhi might end up under sanctions due to this contract. Before, Turkey had been sanctioned for buying the same systems. For India, the US House of Representatives did not impose sanctions

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<sup>26</sup> Jaishankar justifies India's decision to buy Russian oil: 'It is my moral duty to get Indians the best deal', India Express, 17.08.2022,

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/jaishankar-justifies-india-decision-to-buy-russian-oil-8094692/>

<sup>27</sup> Gabriel Gavin, India has Russia over an oil barrel, Politico, 14.09.2023,

<https://www.politico.eu/article/india-has-russia-kremlin-over-crude-oil-barrel/>

<sup>28</sup> Bilateral Relations: India-Russia Relations, Embassy of India in the Russian Federation,

<https://indianembassy-moscow.gov.in/bilateral-relations-india-russia.php>

<sup>29</sup> India is cutting back its reliance on Russian arms, the Economist, 14.04.2022,

<https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2022/04/14/india-is-cutting-back-its-reliance-on-russian-arms>

for the purchase of S-400.<sup>30</sup> India has received three systems and is expecting to get two more.

While India does not support sanctions against Russia, New Delhi has cancelled several defence contracts with Russia since the beginning of the war. On April 16, 2022, India's Air Force quit its plans to purchase 48 Mi-17 V5 helicopters from Russia.<sup>31</sup> On May 17, 2022, the government announced that it was suspending negotiations to buy 10 Russian Ka-31 helicopters. On August 15, 2022, Rubin, a Russian marine engineering company, quit a bid to build six submarines for the Indian Navy, saying that the proposal was unrealistic.<sup>32</sup>

Russia is negative about India's rapprochement with democratic partners in the region, including as part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue that includes Australia, Japan, and the US. The Quad initiative was revived in 2017, given China's growing assertiveness, which clearly worries India. At the same time, Indian analysts see the rapprochement of Russia and China following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine as a very dangerous trend where Russia is essentially turning into China's junior partner.<sup>33</sup>

From 2010 to 2020,<sup>34</sup> trade between Russia and India ranged between US \$8bn and \$11bn, except for the downturn in 2015-2016. The unprecedented growth to over US \$45bn in 2022-2023<sup>35</sup> is the result of India's record-breaking purchase of Russian oil, diesel, coal, artificial fertilisers, and metals. Before 2022, Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, were India's key partners as it bought oil from them. In 2022-2023, Russia became the main oil supplier, increasing its share in India's imports from 0.2% before February 2022 to 45% in June 2023 with nearly 2.2mn barrels daily.

When it comes to the structure of Russia-India trade in 2022-2023, oil accounted for the lion's share of India's imports from Russia at US \$31bn, followed by coal and briquettes at US \$4.8bn, fertilisers at US \$3.04bn, petroleum products at nearly US \$3bn, semiprecious stones at US \$1.19bn, and vegetable oils at US \$1bn.<sup>36</sup> This shows

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<sup>30</sup> US Congress recommends sanctions waiver for India on purchase of Russian S-400 air defense, Anadolu Agency, 15.07.2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/us-congress-recommends-sanctions-waiver-for-india-on-purchase-of-russian-s-400-air-defense/2637588>

<sup>31</sup> Matthew Stein, India Takes a Step Away from the Russian Defense Industry, Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, 31.07.2023, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3475660/india-takes-a-step-away-from-the-russian-defense-industry/>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Harsh V. Pant: "The problem of China is growing in India, and this problem is inseparable from how India approaches many issues today," Tyzhden, 22.08.2023, <https://tyzhden.ua/kharsh-v-pant-v-indii-zbilshuietsia-problema-kytaiu-i-tsia-problema-neviddilna-vid-toho-iak-i-ndiia-pidkhodyt-do-bahatokh-pytan-sohodni/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.indianembassy-moscow.gov.in/overview.php>

<sup>35</sup> Old friends: On Russia-India bilateral ties and the Ukraine issue, The Hindu, 20.04.2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/old-friends-the-hindu-editorial-on-russia-india-bilateral-ties-and-the-ukraine-issue/article66756088.ece>

<sup>36</sup> India Russia Trade, India Brand Equity Foundation, October 2023, <https://www.ibef.org/indian-exports/india-russia-trade>



that bilateral trade has reached this scale exclusively due to purchasing a record-breaking amount of Russian oil.

## *Strengthening cooperation with the US and European countries and the factor of Ukraine*

Prime Minister Modi's four-day visit to the US in June 2023 can qualify as one of the most productive bilateral visits lately. While China was the elephant in the room in the meetings between the delegations, the aspect of Ukraine featured in their official communication, too. Item 25 of the Joint Statement focused on Ukraine entirely. Highlighting the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on the developing countries, among others, the leaders of India and the US called for respect for international law, the UN Charter, territorial integrity and sovereignty. "Both countries concurred on the importance of post-conflict reconstruction in Ukraine," the Statement says.<sup>37</sup>

On July 13-14, 2023, France's President Emmanuel Macron welcomed India's Prime Minister Modi in Paris as warmly as US President Joe Biden. The visit took place on the biggest national holiday in France, so it had a great symbolic significance. While visiting India for the G20 summit, President Macron said that France and India were expanding defence cooperation. While still in Paris, Prime Minister Modi mentioned that India was purchasing Scorpene French submarines and 26 Rafale fighter jets.<sup>38</sup> Also, France and India actively cooperate in nuclear energy (Moscow is another important partner for New Delhi). France is building India's largest nuclear power plant in Jaitapur, the state of Maharashtra.

## *India and Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Peace Formula*

During their meeting at the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan, on May 20, 2023, Volodymyr Zelenskyy invited Prime Minister Modi to join the Ukrainian Peace Formula presented at the G20 in Indonesia, in 2022. Prime Minister Modi told President Zelenskyy that he was willing to help, and the war was a matter of humanism and human values for him, and that he personally would "do everything within our means" to help solve it.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Joint Statement from the United States and India, White House, 22.06.2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/22/joint-statement-from-the-united-states-and-india/>

<sup>38</sup> Modi and Macron Agree on 25-Year Plan to Deepen Cooperation, Bloomberg, 14.07.2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-07-14/modi-and-macron-agree-on-25-year-plan-to-deepen-cooperation>

<sup>39</sup> Zelenskyy invites India PM Modi to join Ukraine's peace formula, Reuters, 20.05.2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/zelenskyy-invites-india-pm-modi-join-ukraines-peace-formula-2023-05-20/>

Importantly, the idea of India as a possible mediator in the Russia-Ukraine war has been gaining traction both in the government and opposition in India since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. This idea was supported in many speeches in the debate at Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Parliament of India, on April 5, 2022, when representatives of various parties expressed their vision of India's position in the conflict. Shashi Tharoor, an Indian National Congress MP, mentioned this in his speech and his further publications in the local media. Ram Madhav, former National General Secretary of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, expressed similar opinions in his article.<sup>40</sup> The reference in support of this option used most often by both policymakers and analysts in India is its experience of mediation in the 1950s Korean War.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, the statements by official representatives of India vary. On May 8, 2023, Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar said in response to a question about possible mediation that the situation was not conducive to mediation between Russia and Ukraine.<sup>42</sup> On June 23, 2023, Prime Minister Modi reiterated at the press conference with Joe Biden that India was ready to contribute to restoring peace:<sup>43</sup> "We are completely ready to contribute in any way we can to restore peace. Under India's G20 presidency, we emphasise the spirit of one earth, one family, one future."

Unlike India, the final text of the final declaration passed after the G20 meeting in New Delhi in September 2023 faced a lot of criticism in Ukraine. Ukraine's MFA criticised its point on the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The declaration mentioned the ruinous impact of the war but failed to mention Russia as an aggressor in the war.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, representatives of Ukraine said openly that President Zelenskyy was prepared to address G20 summit attendees,<sup>45</sup> as he had done during

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<sup>40</sup> Ram Madhav writes: How India needs to deal with the Ukraine question, India Express, 12.07.2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/how-india-needs-to-deal-with-the-ukraine-question-8023368/>

<sup>41</sup> Can India Mediate in the Russia-Ukraine War? South Asian Voices, 25.04.2023, <https://southasianvoices.org/can-india-mediate-the-russia-ukraine-war/>

<sup>42</sup> Still not conducive for India to mediate on Ukraine war: EAM, India Times, 08.05.2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mysuru/still-not-conducive-for-india-to-mediate-on-ukraine-war-eam/articleshow/100069574.cms>

<sup>43</sup> India ready to contribute in any way to restore peace in Ukraine: PM Modi, Business Standard, 23.06.2023, [https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/india-ready-to-contribute-in-any-way-to-restore-peace-in-ukraine-pm-modi-123062300043\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/india-ready-to-contribute-in-any-way-to-restore-peace-in-ukraine-pm-modi-123062300043_1.html)

<sup>44</sup> MFA expresses disappointment with the weak text of G20 declaration and proposes its version, Suspilne, 09.09.2023, <https://suspilne.media/569223-u-mzs-visloveli-rozcaruvanna-slabkim-tekstom-deklaracii-g20-ta-zaproponovali-s-vij-variant/>

<sup>45</sup> Ukraine minister leaves Delhi in a spot, says Zelenskyy happy to address G20 meet, India Express, 12.04.2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/ukraine-minister-leaves-delhi-in-a-spot-says-zelenskyy-happy-to-address-g20-meet-8551378/>

the presidency of Indonesia. However, India's officials, including its Foreign Minister<sup>46</sup>, pointed out officially that they were not expecting Ukraine.

At the same time, India attended all meetings of foreign ministers and security advisors for President Zelenskyy's Peace Formula in Copenhagen, Jeddah, and Malta. Ukraine's Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak repeatedly spoke on the telephone with Kumar Doval, National Security Advisor to India's Prime Minister, in February, June, August, October and November 2023.

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<sup>46</sup> India's foreign minister Jaishankar confirms Ukraine has not been invited to G20 summit, WION, 08.06.2023, <https://www.wionews.com/india-news/indias-eam-confirms-ukraine-has-not-been-invited-to-g20-meeting-602040>

# POTENTIAL COMMON THEMES FOR INDIA AND UKRAINE

## *Reform of the UN*

Both countries are interested in a substantial reform of the UN, even if each has their own different reasons. When he spoke at the UN Security Council meeting on September 20, 2023, President Zelenskyy described his version of the reform. His proposal focused on three important steps, including veto power, accountability to nations of the world, and a system to prevent aggression with early response to certain actions.<sup>47</sup> "Ukraine considers it unjust when billions of people do not have their permanent representation in the Security Council. The African Union must be here permanently. Asia deserves broader permanent representation – it cannot be considered normal when nations like Japan, India or the Islamic world remain outside the permanent membership of the Security Council," President Zelenskyy said.

For India, the issue of the UN Security Council reform has been on the table for a while now, and its positive experience of the G20 presidency has fueled this ambition further. Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar mentioned this priority after the G20 summit concluded: "What would happen if they do not reform? People will find solutions outside. And this is a message the UN has to understand."<sup>48</sup> Therefore, both countries can potentially share an interest in this aspect.

## *Postwar reconstruction and investment*

The postwar reconstruction will require serious human resources and financial investment. It can help boost trade between countries and strengthen people-to-people communication. During the Soviet Union, Ukrainian engineers contributed proactively to the development of Indian industry. This experience remains in the Indian memory to this day, even if it is often seen through the lens of the perception of Russia as the successor of the Soviet Union, and the positive experience is attributed exclusively to the Russians. New contacts can strengthen people-to-people communication and help people remember the past. First and foremost, however, Indian businesses will be interested in the postwar reconstruction of Ukraine.

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<sup>47</sup> UN reform is unlikely but Russia can be put in its place, Ukrinform, 22.09.2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3764855-reforma-oon-ce-navrad-ale-postaviti-rf-na-misce-mozna.html>

<sup>48</sup> Jaishankar presents strong case for for permanent seat for India on UN security council, the Hindu, 17.09.2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/jaishankar-presents-strong-case-for-for-permanent-seat-for-india-on-u-n-security-council/article67319105.ece>

## *Natural resources*

Ukraine has abundant natural resources, including lithium, a critically important element of green transition. According to different data, lithium deposits in Ukraine almost match those of Portugal, the country with the largest lithium deposits in the world. In Ukraine, however, not a single lithium mine is operating due to the lack of investment. This is one of the elements that could interest Indian businesses. Apart from that, Ukraine has commercially significant deposits of 117 out of 120 most used industrial minerals, according to various data.<sup>49</sup>

## *The experience of warfare in the Black Sea*

Given China's growing assertiveness, any experience of active warfare could be interesting for India. Ukraine's experience is especially valuable, especially the aspect of the Black Sea warfare. Ukrainian Armed Forces have been hitting marine targets in Crimean ports successfully since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. The development and application of assault drones is another important aspect. The creative use of military technology against a much bigger enemy is another important element of Ukraine's experience for India.

## *Education*

Indian students have been studying in Ukraine since the Soviet time. 90% of Indian students study medicine in Ukraine. While most of the 18,000 prewar students continue their studies in Ukrainian universities – mostly online and offline in the three regions in Western Ukraine – new students are not joining Ukrainian universities because of security risks. For many Indian families, medical education in Ukraine was an opportunity to give their children a university degree. The Indian press brings up this issue from time to time, but it remains unresolved.

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<sup>49</sup> The green treasure chest buried in Ukraine, Financial Times, 24.07.2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/ad32d42e-d75e-4344-9e51-623616b2b0e3>





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