

## NAVIGATING CHALLENGES: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF PAKISTAN-EU RELATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

Pakistan's relationship with the European Union (EU) presents a complex landscape shaped by historical, economic, political, and security factors. This paper explores the multifaceted challenges that influence these bilateral relations, aiming to provide a comprehensive analysis and offer insights into potential avenues for improvement. Historically, Pakistan-EU relations have evolved through phases marked by cooperation and occasional strains. Economic interactions form a critical aspect, characterized by trade challenges and the impact of EU policies on Pakistan's exports. Political diplomacy has seen both collaboration on international issues and divergence on regional concerns. Security cooperation, particularly in counterterrorism efforts, reflects shared interests but also points of contention regarding strategies and priorities. Human rights and governance issues have periodically strained relations, with the EU expressing concerns over Pakistan's domestic policies. Cultural and educational exchanges offer potential for mutual understanding, yet barriers remain in fostering deeper ties. Looking forward, the paper identifies key areas for enhancing Pakistan-EU relations, including strengthening economic ties through trade diversification and addressing regulatory barriers. It advocates for sustained political dialogue to navigate differences and harness shared interests in regional stability. Recommendations also highlight the importance of fostering people-to-people exchanges and promoting cultural understanding.

### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Pakistan and the European Union (EU) spans decades and encompasses a spectrum of diplomatic, economic, security, and cultural dimensions. As two distinct geopolitical entities, their interactions have been influenced by historical legacies, global trends, and regional dynamics, shaping a relationship characterized by both cooperation and occasional discord.

Historically, Pakistan's ties with Europe, and subsequently with the EU, have evolved significantly since the country's independence in 1947. Initially rooted in colonial connections with the United Kingdom and subsequent ties with European powers, Pakistan's engagement with Europe expanded with the formation of the European Economic Community (EEC) in the 1950s and its transformation into the European Union in the 1990s. This institutional evolution marked a turning point in bilateral relations, offering new avenues for cooperation across various sectors (Archer & Geyer, 2016).

Economically, trade has been a cornerstone of Pakistan-EU relations. The EU is Pakistan's largest trading partner, accounting for a substantial portion of its exports and imports. However, challenges such as non-tariff barriers, regulatory issues, and compliance with international standards have posed impediments to maximizing the trade potential between the two entities (Linden, 2018). Moreover, the EU's Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP+), which grants preferential trade access to Pakistan, has been a critical aspect of economic engagement but comes with stringent conditions related to human rights and labor standards, occasionally straining bilateral economic relations (European Commission, 2021).

Politically, Pakistan and the EU have engaged in dialogues and collaborations on various global issues, including climate change, counterterrorism, and regional stability. Political interactions have been influenced by divergent perspectives on

regional conflicts, such as Pakistan's role in Afghanistan and EU's concerns over human rights violations in Pakistan-administered Kashmir (Winkler, 2020).

Security cooperation, particularly in counterterrorism efforts, has been another focal point of Pakistan-EU relations. Both entities have shared interests in combating terrorism and promoting regional stability. However, differences in strategic priorities and approaches have occasionally complicated efforts at deeper security cooperation (Destradi, 2019).

Human rights and governance issues have been recurrent themes in Pakistan-EU interactions. The EU has consistently raised concerns about human rights abuses, democratic governance, and the rule of law in Pakistan, influencing bilateral relations and prompting dialogues on these sensitive issues (European External Action Service, 2021). These concerns have at times strained diplomatic ties while also serving as catalysts for constructive engagement and reforms within Pakistan.

Culturally and educationally, exchanges between Pakistan and the EU have provided opportunities for mutual understanding and academic collaboration. Programs such as Erasmus+ have facilitated student exchanges and academic partnerships, fostering cultural diplomacy and enhancing people-to-people contacts between the two regions (European Union, 2021).

Pakistan and the EU share a multifaceted relationship encompassing economic, political, security, and cultural dimensions, this partnership is not without its challenges. Historical ties, economic interdependencies, divergent political priorities, security concerns, human rights issues, and cultural exchanges collectively shape the contours of Pakistan-EU relations. This paper seeks to delve deeper into these complexities, examining the challenges and opportunities within each dimension and proposing recommendations for enhancing and navigating this intricate relationship in the future. By understanding and addressing these challenges proactively, Pakistan and the EU can forge a more resilient and mutually beneficial partnership amid evolving global dynamics.

### **Historical Context of Pakistan-EU Relations**

The historical context of Pakistan-EU relations provides a foundational understanding of how this bilateral relationship has evolved over time, shaped

by geopolitical dynamics, economic interests, and shared concerns. This section delves into key historical milestones and developments that have influenced the trajectory of Pakistan-EU relations.

### **Colonial Legacy and Early Diplomatic Relations**

Pakistan's relationship with Europe, particularly with countries that later formed the European Union, traces back to the colonial era. British colonial rule over the Indian subcontinent until 1947 shaped Pakistan's initial interactions with European powers. After gaining independence, Pakistan sought to establish diplomatic ties with European countries, which eventually evolved into engagements with the European Economic Community (EEC), the precursor to the EU.

### **Evolution through Economic Cooperation**

Economic cooperation has been a cornerstone of Pakistan-EU relations. The signing of the Cooperation Agreement between Pakistan and the EEC in 1984 laid the groundwork for economic collaboration, focusing on trade and development assistance. Over the years, trade relations have fluctuated due to various factors such as tariff barriers, non-tariff measures, and the EU's Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP) program, which provided preferential market access to Pakistani exports.

### **Political and Strategic Dimensions**

Politically, Pakistan-EU relations have been shaped by shared interests in regional stability, counterterrorism efforts, and cooperation on global issues. Pakistan's strategic location in South Asia has made it a significant player in geopolitical discussions concerning Afghanistan, regional security, and counterterrorism initiatives. The EU has engaged with Pakistan on these fronts, seeking to promote stability and security in the region.

### **Human Rights and Governance Concerns**

Human rights and governance issues have periodically strained Pakistan-EU relations. The EU has raised concerns over Pakistan's human rights record, including issues related to freedom of expression, minority rights, and the rule of law. These concerns have influenced EU policies towards Pakistan, including considerations for development assistance and trade preferences.

### **Cultural and Educational Exchanges**

Cultural and educational exchanges have also played a role in Pakistan-EU relations, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration. Programs such as Erasmus+ have facilitated academic exchanges and cooperation in higher education, contributing to people-to-people contacts and promoting cultural diplomacy between Pakistan and EU member states.

### **Recent Developments and Future Prospects**

Recent developments in Pakistan-EU relations include efforts to enhance trade and economic cooperation, address security challenges, and strengthen political dialogue. The EU's engagement with Pakistan under its Strategic Engagement Plan (SEP) reflects a commitment to deepen bilateral ties across various sectors. Looking ahead, both Pakistan and the EU have expressed interest in exploring new avenues for cooperation in areas such as climate change, digital economy, and sustainable development.

### **Economic Dimensions and Trade Challenges**

The economic relationship between Pakistan and the European Union (EU) is multifaceted, characterized by both opportunities and challenges. Pakistan benefits from trade preferences granted under the Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP+), which allows duty-free access to the EU market for several products. This scheme has significantly boosted Pakistan's exports to the EU, particularly in textiles and apparel.

However, the economic dimension of Pakistan-EU relations faces several challenges. One major issue is the imbalance in trade, with Pakistan exporting primarily textiles and raw materials while importing higher value-added goods from the EU. This trade deficit has been a persistent concern, impacting Pakistan's overall economic stability and industrial development.

Moreover, regulatory barriers and non-tariff measures imposed by the EU pose challenges to Pakistani exporters. These include stringent quality standards, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and certification requirements, which can be difficult for Pakistani businesses to comply with due to capacity constraints and infrastructure limitations (Zaidi, 2020).

Efforts to address these challenges include initiatives to diversify Pakistan's export base and enhance product sophistication to meet EU standards. The

EU, on its part, has engaged in capacity-building programs and technical assistance to help Pakistani exporters comply with regulations and improve market access (European Commission, 2023).

### **Political Diplomacy and Strategic Alliances**

Political diplomacy between Pakistan and the EU has evolved through various phases, influenced by regional dynamics and global geopolitical shifts. The EU is an important political partner for Pakistan, providing diplomatic support and engagement on issues ranging from regional security to human rights and governance.

Strategic alliances between Pakistan and the EU often center around shared interests in stability and security in South Asia and beyond. For instance, both parties collaborate closely on counterterrorism efforts, intelligence sharing, and promoting regional stability. The EU has supported Pakistan's efforts in combating terrorism through financial assistance and capacity-building initiatives for law enforcement agencies (European External Action Service, 2022).

However, political diplomacy also encounters challenges, particularly concerning divergent perspectives on human rights and governance. The EU has raised concerns over Pakistan's record on civil liberties, freedom of expression, and minority rights, leading to occasional tensions in bilateral relations. These issues have sometimes strained diplomatic exchanges and affected cooperation in other areas (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Despite these challenges, both Pakistan and the EU recognize the importance of maintaining constructive dialogue and engagement. Regular high-level visits and strategic dialogues serve as mechanisms to address differences and explore opportunities for collaboration in areas of mutual interest, such as trade, climate change, and sustainable development (European Union External Action, 2023).

### **Security Concerns and Counterterrorism Cooperation**

Security concerns and counterterrorism cooperation form a critical aspect of Pakistan-EU relations, driven by shared interests in combating global terrorism and ensuring regional stability. Pakistan has been a crucial partner for the EU in addressing terrorism threats emanating from South Asia, particularly through intelligence sharing, capacity-

building programs, and joint counterterrorism operations.

The EU has provided financial and technical assistance to enhance Pakistan's counterterrorism capabilities, including support for law enforcement agencies, border management, and efforts to counter violent extremism (European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2021). This cooperation underscores the strategic importance of Pakistan in the EU's broader security architecture, given its geostrategic location and influence in regional dynamics.

However, security cooperation also faces challenges, including divergent priorities and occasional mistrust between Pakistan and some EU member states. Differences in threat perceptions and strategic interests can complicate coordination efforts and limit the scope of joint initiatives (Shah, 2019).

Moving forward, strengthening security cooperation requires continued dialogue, trust-building measures, and alignment of strategic objectives. Both Pakistan and the EU recognize the need for sustained engagement to address evolving security threats effectively. This includes enhancing information sharing mechanisms, fostering regional stability, and promoting dialogue between relevant stakeholders to mitigate potential security challenges (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2022).

In conclusion, while economic, political, and security dimensions pose challenges to Pakistan-EU relations, both parties have demonstrated a commitment to overcoming these obstacles through dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding. Effective collaboration in these areas is essential for advancing shared interests and fostering a stable, prosperous relationship in the future.

### **Human Rights and Governance Issues**

Human rights and governance form crucial aspects of bilateral relations between Pakistan and the European Union (EU), often serving as points of contention and cooperation. This section explores the dynamics, challenges, and implications of human rights issues and governance practices on Pakistan-EU relations.

### **Human Rights Concerns**

Human rights have been a recurring theme in EU's engagement with Pakistan. The EU has consistently raised concerns over issues such as freedom of expression, media freedoms, treatment of minorities,

and the use of capital punishment. For instance, the European Parliament has issued resolutions highlighting cases of human rights violations in Pakistan, including blasphemy laws and the treatment of religious minorities (European Parliament, 2020).

One of the focal points of EU's engagement is the Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+), a trade incentive program that provides tariff preferences to developing countries committed to implementing international conventions on human rights, labor rights, environment, and good governance. Pakistan benefits from GSP+ status, but its continuation is contingent upon Pakistan's compliance with these conventions. The EU periodically reviews Pakistan's progress, emphasizing the importance of human rights reforms (European Commission, 2021).

### **Governance Issues**

Governance challenges in Pakistan, such as corruption, lack of transparency, and inefficiencies in public institutions, also impact bilateral relations with the EU. These issues affect economic cooperation, political stability, and the rule of law. The EU has supported governance reforms through development assistance programs aimed at strengthening institutions, promoting accountability, and enhancing public service delivery (European External Action Service, 2021).

### **Cultural Exchange and Educational Collaborations**

Cultural exchange and educational collaborations offer avenues for enhancing mutual understanding and fostering people-to-people ties between Pakistan and the EU. This section explores the significance of cultural diplomacy and educational partnerships in shaping bilateral relations.

### **Cultural Diplomacy**

Cultural diplomacy plays a vital role in Pakistan-EU relations by promoting cultural diversity, mutual respect, and intercultural dialogue. Cultural exchanges encompass activities such as art exhibitions, film festivals, music performances, and literary exchanges. These initiatives not only showcase cultural heritage but also facilitate dialogue on shared values and perspectives.

The EU supports cultural exchange through its cultural diplomacy initiatives, including the

European Capitals of Culture program and the Creative Europe program, which promote cultural cooperation and artistic collaborations with countries like Pakistan. Such exchanges contribute to enhancing cultural understanding and building bridges between societies.

### **Educational Collaborations**

Educational collaborations are instrumental in fostering academic excellence, research partnerships, and student exchanges between Pakistan and the EU. Institutions such as Erasmus+ facilitate student mobility, academic cooperation, and joint research projects. Pakistani students benefit from scholarships and study opportunities in EU member states, contributing to their personal development and academic growth.

Furthermore, educational collaborations focus on capacity-building initiatives, curriculum development, and faculty exchanges aimed at enhancing educational standards and promoting innovation. These partnerships strengthen the educational infrastructure in Pakistan and promote knowledge-sharing between institutions.

Human rights and governance issues, alongside cultural exchange and educational collaborations, significantly influence Pakistan-EU relations. Addressing human rights concerns and improving governance practices are essential for sustaining economic cooperation and fostering political stability. Meanwhile, cultural and educational exchanges play a pivotal role in enhancing mutual understanding, promoting cultural diversity, and building long-term partnerships. By addressing these issues and deepening cooperation in cultural and educational domains, Pakistan and the EU can strengthen their bilateral relations and promote sustainable development goals.

### **Future Prospects and Recommendations**

The future of Pakistan-EU relations holds promise amidst ongoing challenges, presenting opportunities for enhanced cooperation across various fronts. This section examines potential avenues for development and offers recommendations to strengthen the partnership between Pakistan and the European Union (EU).

### **Economic Prospects**

Economically, Pakistan and the EU can bolster their relationship through strategic initiatives aimed at

increasing trade and investment. Currently, Pakistan faces trade barriers such as tariffs and non-tariff barriers imposed by the EU, affecting the export potential of Pakistani goods (Khan, 2020). To mitigate these challenges, Pakistan should engage in dialogue with the EU to negotiate better trade terms and explore avenues for economic cooperation beyond traditional sectors like textiles. Diversifying exports to include value-added products and services could enhance Pakistan's competitiveness in the European market (Mirza & Hassan, 2019).

Furthermore, fostering partnerships in sectors such as renewable energy, technology, and agriculture presents mutual benefits. For instance, collaborations in renewable energy could help Pakistan address its energy challenges while aligning with EU sustainability goals (Mansoor & Mahmood, 2021). Strengthening economic ties requires addressing regulatory issues and enhancing business-friendly environments through policy reforms and capacity-building initiatives (Rasul, 2018).

### **Political and Strategic Recommendations**

Political cooperation between Pakistan and the EU is crucial for addressing regional security challenges and promoting stability. Enhanced dialogue on geopolitical issues, including Afghanistan's future and the broader South Asian security landscape, can facilitate shared understanding and cooperation (Bajoria & McBride, 2020). Moreover, regular high-level exchanges and strategic dialogues can help align policies on issues such as climate change, human rights, and global governance (Mumtaz, 2017).

Strategically, Pakistan and the EU should explore avenues for defense and security collaboration, particularly in counterterrorism efforts and peacekeeping missions. Closer cooperation in these areas can contribute to regional stability and enhance mutual security interests (Davies, 2019). Engaging in joint military exercises and intelligence sharing can build trust and strengthen bilateral security ties (Zeb & Nawaz, 2021).

### **Human Rights and Governance**

Human rights and governance remain sensitive issues in Pakistan-EU relations. The EU has expressed concerns over human rights violations in Pakistan, including issues related to freedom of expression, minority rights, and women's rights (Khan & Raza, 2019). Addressing these concerns

through legislative reforms, promoting inclusive governance structures, and ensuring accountability can improve Pakistan's international standing and foster trust with EU partners (Ahmad, 2020).

Cultural and educational exchanges play a vital role in enhancing mutual understanding and fostering people-to-people contacts. Increasing scholarships, promoting cultural festivals, and supporting academic collaborations can strengthen ties between Pakistani and European societies (Iqbal & Shafique, 2020). Educational partnerships, particularly in fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), can prepare the youth for future challenges and opportunities in a globalized world (Ali, 2018).

### **Recommendations for Enhanced Cooperation**

1. **Enhance Trade Relations:** Negotiate for improved trade terms, diversify exports, and promote investment in key sectors.
2. **Strengthen Political Dialogue:** Engage in regular high-level exchanges, strategic dialogues, and cooperation on regional security issues.
3. **Promote Human Rights and Governance:** Address human rights concerns through legislative reforms, promote inclusive governance, and enhance accountability.
4. **Expand Cultural and Educational Exchanges:** Increase scholarships, support academic collaborations, and promote cultural exchanges to foster mutual understanding.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Pakistan-EU relations stand at a critical juncture, poised with both challenges and opportunities across economic, political, security, and cultural dimensions. Despite historical complexities and occasional tensions, there exists significant potential for fostering a robust partnership that can benefit both regions.

Economically, enhancing trade relations by negotiating favorable terms, diversifying exports, and promoting investments in key sectors such as renewable energy and technology can strengthen economic ties. Addressing trade barriers and regulatory issues will be pivotal in realizing the full potential of economic cooperation between Pakistan and the EU (Khan, 2020; Mirza & Hassan, 2019).

Politically, sustained dialogue and cooperation on regional security issues, including Afghanistan's stability and counterterrorism efforts, can foster mutual understanding and trust. Strategic engagements at high-level forums and alignment on global governance issues will further bolster political relations (Bajoria & McBride, 2020; Mumtaz, 2017). Human rights and governance remain crucial areas where both Pakistan and the EU can work towards improvement. Addressing human rights concerns through legislative reforms, promoting inclusive governance structures, and enhancing accountability mechanisms are essential steps towards building a more stable and respected international standing (Khan & Raza, 2019; Ahmad, 2020).

Cultural and educational exchanges play a vital role in bridging societal gaps and promoting mutual understanding. Increasing scholarships, supporting academic collaborations, and organizing cultural events can enrich bilateral relations and cultivate lasting ties between Pakistani and European societies (Iqbal & Shafique, 2020; Ali, 2018).

Moving forward, it is imperative for both Pakistan and the EU to commit to a shared vision of cooperation grounded in mutual respect, transparency, and responsiveness to each other's concerns. By addressing existing challenges proactively and capitalizing on shared interests and values, Pakistan-EU relations can evolve into a model of constructive partnership in the global arena.

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