Pakistan's regional role and political relations with the EU

European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2014 on Pakistan’s regional role and political relations with the EU (2013/2168(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 2 and 21 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to the EU-Pakistan 5-year Engagement Plan of February 2012,
- having regard to the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (11855/2012), as adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 25 June 2012,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 978/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 applying a scheme of generalised tariff preferences, and providing, in particular, for the special incentive arrangement for ‘sustainable development and good governance’ (‘GSP+’),
- having regard to Annex VIII of the above regulation, which lists the UN/ILO conventions on core human and labour rights and those related to the environment and to governance principles which Pakistan has ratified and has agreed to effectively implement,
- having regard to the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on Pakistan of 11 March 2013,
- having regard to its resolution of 7 February 2013 on recent attacks on medical aid workers in Pakistan, its position of 13 September 2012 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council introducing emergency autonomous trade preferences for Pakistan, and its resolution of 15 December 2011 on the situation of women in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to the visit to Pakistan by a delegation from its Subcommittee on Human Rights in August 2013,
- having regard to the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedom while countering terrorism, Ben Emmerson of 18 September 2013, and the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Christof Heyns, of 13 September 2013,

– having regard to UN General Assembly resolution 68/178 of 18 December 2013 on protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism,

– having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Development (A7-0117/2014),

A. whereas Pakistan’s strategic role in the region, its relationship to its neighbours and EU-Pakistan relations are of major and growing importance to the EU, given the country’s pivotal location at the heart of a volatile neighbourhood, its centrality to security and development in Central and South Asia, and its crucial role in combating terrorism, non-proliferation, drug trafficking, human trafficking and other transnational threats, all of which affect the security and well-being of European citizens;

B. whereas parliamentary elections in May 2013 marked the first transfer of power from one elected civilian government to another in the modern history of Pakistan; whereas Pakistan’s democratic process is underpinned by wider societal changes, including a growing urban middle class and an increasingly vibrant civil society and independent media;

C. whereas the country’s political and economic progress is hampered by pervasive internal and regional security problems, such as extremism, sectarian strife, suicide and targeted killings, and lawlessness in the tribal areas, compounded by the weakness of law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system;

D. whereas Pakistan has one of the highest out-of-school populations in the world, with an estimated 12 million children not attending school and about two thirds of Pakistani women and half of Pakistani men being illiterate; whereas the country is still ranked 134th out of 135 countries in the World Economic Forum’s ‘gender gap’ report;

E. whereas, according to the Global Climate Risk Index, Pakistan is among the twelve countries most affected by climate change in the last twenty years, has suffered severe flooding and water shortages and is directly affected by the glacial retreat on the Himalayas and Karakorum ranges;

F. whereas Pakistan is a semi-industrialised, lower middle-income country, with around one third of its population living below the poverty line; whereas Pakistan is ranked in 146th place among the 187 countries listed in the 2012 Human Development Index (HDI), down from 145th place in the listing for 2011; whereas the economic situation of Pakistan has been harmed by successive natural disasters, and whereas a high level of insecurity, instability and widespread corruption in the country weaken its economic growth and limit the government’s ability to develop the state;

G. whereas Pakistan is vulnerable to a wide range of hazards, predominantly floods and earthquakes; whereas the volatile security situation, together with Pakistan’s social challenges, are working as a catalyst in increasing its vulnerability; whereas multiple years of disasters have exhausted the coping strategies of already impoverished communities and severely reduced their resilience to future disasters;
H. whereas Pakistan’s constructive contribution is vital for achieving reconciliation, peace and political stability in its neighbourhood and, most notably, in Afghanistan, especially in the context of the planned withdrawal of NATO combat troops in 2014;

I. whereas Pakistan is one of the largest recipients of EU development and humanitarian assistance, and whereas the EU is Pakistan’s largest export market;

J. whereas Pakistan is an increasingly important partner of the EU in combating terrorism, nuclear proliferation, human and drug trafficking, and organised crime, and in the pursuit of regional stability;

K. whereas the EU and Pakistan have recently chosen to deepen and broaden their bilateral ties, as exemplified by the five-year engagement plan, launched in February 2012, and the first EU-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue, held in June 2012;

L. whereas the aim of the EU-Pakistan five-year engagement plan of 2012 is to build a strategic relationship and forge a partnership for peace and development rooted in shared values and principles;

M. whereas, as from 1 January 2014, Pakistan is now integrated into the EU’s special generalised scheme of trade preferences (GSP+);

N. whereas in September 2012 the Ali Enterprises factory in Karachi, which produces jeans for the European market, was devastated by a fire, resulting in the death of 286 trapped workers; whereas the integration of Pakistan into the GSP+ scheme could boost production in the textile sector and make the improvement of labour rights and production conditions ever more important;

1. Underscores the significance of the May 2013 elections for the consolidation of democracy and civilian rule in Pakistan; encourages Pakistani political elites to use this momentum to further strengthen democratic institutions, the rule of law and civilian control over all areas of public administration, especially the security forces and the judiciary, to promote internal and regional security, to enact governance reforms to revive economic growth, strengthen transparency and the fight against organised crime and alleviate social injustices, and to halt and remedy all human rights abuses;

2. Takes the view, however, that building a sustainable democracy and a pluralistic society – as well as achieving greater social justice, eradicating deep poverty and malnutrition in parts of the country, raising the basic education level and preparing the country for the effects of climate change – will entail deep and difficult reforms of Pakistan’s political and socio-economic order, which remains characterised by feudalistic structures of land ownership and political allegiances and imbalances in priorities between military spending on the one hand and welfare provision, education and economic development on the other, and a dysfunctional revenue collection system that systematically undercuts the state’s capacity to deliver public goods;

3. Supports and encourages the efforts of the Pakistani Government to develop effective means to prevent and monitor the possibility of future natural disasters and for more effective coordination and cooperation of humanitarian aid with local actors, international NGOs and fundraisers;
4. Reiterates that good governance, accountable and inclusive institutions, separation of powers and respect for fundamental rights are important elements to address the nexus of development and security in Pakistan; further believes that elected civilian governments, endowed with democratic legitimacy, devolution of power to the provinces and effective local government are the best means of containing the tide of violence and extremism, restoring state authority in the FATA areas, and ensuring Pakistan’s sovereignty and territorial integrity;

5. Supports, in this context, the intent of the Pakistani Government to enter into a peace dialogue with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), provided this paves the way for a political and lasting solution to the insurgency and a stable democratic order, respecting human rights; appeals to the negotiators, however, to take account of the fact that the level of education – particularly among women – is an absolutely decisive factor for the advancement of societies and to make schooling for girls an essential element in the negotiations;

6. Appreciates Pakistan’s continued commitment to fight terrorism on both sides of its border, and encourages the authorities to take bolder steps to further limit the possibilities for the recruitment and training of terrorists on Pakistan’s territory, which constitutes a phenomenon that is making certain areas of Pakistan a safe haven for terrorist organisations, whose aim is to destabilise the country and the region, most importantly Afghanistan;

7. Notes that the Pakistani Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud was killed by a US-operated drone on 1 November 2013 and that the Pakistani Parliament and the new government have formally opposed such interventions and that limits to the use of drone attacks should be framed more clearly in international law;

8. Calls on the Pakistani Government to fulfil its security obligations and responsibilities by further engaging in the fight against extremism, terrorism and radicalisation, with the implementation of strict and uncompromising security measures and law enforcement, as well as by addressing inequality and socio-economic issues likely to fuel the radicalisation of Pakistani youth;

9. Notes that the Pakistani Government has clearly expressed its opposition to US drone strikes on its territory; welcomes the UN General Assembly resolution which calls for further clarification of the legal framework applicable for the use of armed drones;

10. Welcomes Pakistan’s contribution to state-building and reconciliation processes in Afghanistan, including assistance in facilitating the restart of peace talks; expects Pakistan’s positive attitude to continue in the run-up to Afghanistan’s presidential elections and beyond; expresses concern about geopolitical competition among neighbouring powers over influence in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of NATO combat troops;

11. Sets its hope in Pakistan’s constructive role in promoting regional stability, including when it comes to the presence of NATO and EU Member States in post-2014 Afghanistan, by further advancing the dialogue format of engagement in Afghanistan with India, Turkey, China, Russia and the United Kingdom, and by fostering regional cooperation in the fight against trafficking in people, drugs, and goods;

12. Is encouraged by recent tangible progress in the dialogue between Pakistan and India, especially as regards trade and people-to-people contacts, made possible by the constructive
attitude of both parties; regrets that the dialogue’s achievements remain vulnerable to contingent events, such as ongoing incidents on the Line of Control separating Pakistan-occupied and Indian-occupied parts of Kashmir; asks both governments to ensure appropriate chains of command, accountability of military staff, and military-to-military dialogue, in order to avoid similar incidents in the future;

13. Recognises Pakistan’s legitimate interest in building up strategic, economic and energy ties with China; considers it important that closer Pakistani-Chinese relations reinforce geopolitical stability in South Asia;

14. Notes Pakistan’s pursuit of full membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as a welcome sign of the country’s ambition to become more involved in multilateral initiatives; notes, however, the absence of any formal cooperation mechanism between the SCO and the EU, and points to divergences in their respective normative bases and outlooks on global issues;

15. Is concerned by reports that Pakistan is considering exporting nuclear weapons to third countries; expects the EU and its Members States, despite official denials of the reports, to make clear to Pakistan that the export of nuclear weapons is unacceptable; calls on Pakistan, as a nuclear weapon state, to legally ban exports of all nuclear weapons-related material or know-how and to actively contribute to international non-proliferation efforts; considers that the signing and ratification of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) by Pakistan – as well as India – would demonstrate a strong commitment to peaceful regional co-existence and enormously contribute to the security of the whole region;

16. Believes that the battle against extremism and radicalism is directly linked to stronger democratic processes and reaffirms the EU’s strong interest in, and continued support for, a democratic, secure and well-governed Pakistan, with an independent judicial system and good governance, that upholds the rule of law and human rights, enjoys friendly relations with neighbours and projects a stabilising influence in the region;

17. Recalls that EU-Pakistan relations traditionally developed inside a framework focused on development and trade; appreciates the significant and enduring contribution of EU development and humanitarian cooperation and welcomes the decision to grant Pakistan the benefit of the EU’s GSP+ as from 2014; calls on Pakistan to fully comply with the relevant conditions attached thereto and invites the Commission to guarantee that enhanced monitoring is strictly applied, as provided for under the new GSP Regulation and underlines the fact that cooperation, particularly in the education, democracy-building and climate change adaptation sectors, should continue to receive primary focus;

18. Is convinced that EU-Pakistan relations need to grow deeper and more comprehensive by developing political dialogue, thereby maintaining a relationship of mutual interest amongst equal partners; welcomes, in this context, the adoption of the five-year engagement plan and the commencement of the EU-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue, reflecting the increased weight of political and security cooperation, including on counter-terrorism policy, disarmament and non-proliferation, as well as on migration, education and culture; expects, however, more progress in all areas of the engagement plan;

19. Encourages both the EU and Pakistan to cooperate in the implementation process and to monitor progress on a regular basis by strengthening the dialogue between both parties in the long term;
20. Considers that Pakistan’s democratic transition has engendered an opportunity for the EU to follow a more explicitly political approach in bilateral relations and provision of assistance; believes that EU support to Pakistan should prioritise the consolidation of democratic institutions at all levels, the strengthening of state capacity and good governance, the building of effective law enforcement and civilian counter-terrorism structures, including an independent judiciary, and the empowerment of civil society and free media;

21. Welcomes, in this regard, the already existing comprehensive democracy support programmes in connection with the implementation of the 2008 and 2013 recommendations of the EU election observation missions;

22. Invites the EEAS and the Commission to pursue a nuanced and multi-dimensional policy towards Pakistan that synergises all the relevant instruments at the EU’s disposal, such as political dialogue, security cooperation, trade and assistance, in line with the EU’s comprehensive approach to external action and with a view to preparations for the next EU-Pakistan summit;

23. Asks the EEAS, the Commission and the Council also to ensure that EU policy towards Pakistan is contextualised and embedded in a broader strategy for the region, thereby reinforcing EU interests across South and Central Asia; considers it important that EU bilateral relations with Pakistan and neighbouring countries, in particular India, China and Iran, also serve to discuss and coordinate policies with respect to the situation in Afghanistan, in order to ensure a targeted approach; stresses, in this regard, the need for increased EU-US policy coordination and dialogue on regional issues;

24. Believes that the future of EU-Pakistan relations should also be considered in the context of the EU’s evolving institutional toolbox for engagement with third countries, in particular through the format of strategic partnerships; reiterates its call for a conceptual refinement of the format, and for clearer and more consistent benchmarks to assess, inter alia, whether, and under what conditions, Pakistan might qualify as a strategic partner of the EU at some point in the future;

25. Firmly reiterates that progress in bilateral relations is linked to improvement in Pakistan’s human rights record, in particular as regards eradicating bonded labour, child labour and human trafficking, curbing gender-based violence, enhancing women and girls’ rights, including that of access to education, ensuring freedom of speech and independent media, promoting tolerance and protection of vulnerable minorities by effectively fighting all forms of discrimination; recognises that this requires the end of the culture of impunity and the development of a reliable legal and judicial system at all levels, which is accessible to all;

26. Remains deeply concerned about the quality of education and, in a related manner, the alarming situation of women in many parts of Pakistan; calls for concrete and visible measures to enforce women’s fundamental rights in the society, including the enactment of legislation against domestic violence, steps to improve the investigation and prosecution of honour killings and acid attacks, and a revision of the legislation that facilitates impunity; points to the need to ensure better access to education, better integration of women in the labour market and better maternal healthcare;

27. Reiterates its deep concern that Pakistan’s blasphemy laws – which can carry the death sentence and are often used to justify censorship, criminalisation, persecution and, in certain cases, the murder of members of political and religious minorities – are open to a misuse
that affects people of all faiths in Pakistan; underlines that the refusal to reform or repeal the blasphemy laws creates an environment of persistent vulnerability for minority communities; calls on the Pakistani government to implement a moratorium on the use of these laws, as a first step towards revising or revoking them, and to investigate and prosecute, as appropriate, campaigns of intimidation, threats, and violence against Christians, Ahmadis, and other vulnerable groups;

28. Calls particularly on the Pakistani authorities: to apprehend and prosecute those inciting violence, or who are responsible for violent attacks on schools or minority groups such as Shia, including the Hazara community, Ahmadis and Christians, and to instruct the security forces to actively protect those facing attacks from extremist groups; to enact laws against domestic violence; to end enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions notably in Balochistan;

29. Condemns all attacks on Christians and other religious minorities living in Pakistan and expects Pakistan to intensify its efforts to preserve freedom of religion and belief, including by easing the strict anti-blasphemy legislation and moving towards abolition of the death penalty;

30. Welcomes the adoption in 2012 of the bill to create a National Human Rights Commission and urges the government to set up the commission so that it can start functioning;

31. Notes that the EU is the major export partner for Pakistani goods (22.6% in 2012); takes the view that EU trade-related support to Pakistan should help promote the diversification and development of production modes, including processing, provide assistance to regional integration and technology transfers, help facilitate the establishment or development of domestic productive capacity, and reduce income inequality;

32. Recalls that the EU’s GSP+, which Pakistan benefits from as of 2014, is only granted to countries which have agreed in a binding manner to implement international human rights, labour rights and environment and good governance conventions; underlines notably Pakistan’s obligations under the conventions listed in Annex VIII and reminds the Commission of its obligation to monitor their effective implementation; recalls also that where a country ‘does not respect its binding undertakings’ the GSP+ will be temporarily withdrawn;

33. Calls on the Pakistani authorities to take effective steps towards the implementation of the 36 ILO conventions which the country has ratified in order, notably, to allow labour unions to operate, to improve work conditions and safety standards, to eradicate child labour and to combat the most severe forms of exploitation of the three million female domestic workers;

34. Calls on the Pakistani Government to sign up to the ILO/IFC-led ‘Better Work Programme’, as promised, in order to give added impetus to improvements in health and safety standards for workers; calls on all those directly or indirectly responsible for the factory fire at the Ali Enterprises garment factory, including the Social Accountability auditing company and European retailers involved, to finally pay the survivors of the fire full, long-term and fair compensation;

35. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Government and National Assembly of Pakistan, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High
Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and the governments of the Member States.