Pakistan's regional role and political relations with the EU

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Boris ZALA (S&D, SK) on Pakistan’s regional role and political relations with the EU.

Members noted that 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.

Although parliamentary elections in March 2013 marked the first transfer of power from one elected civilian government to another in the modern history of Pakistan, the country’s political and economic progress is hampered by **pervasive internal and regional security problems** (extremism, sectarian strife, suicide and targeted killings).

Members highlighted that Pakistan is one of the largest recipients of EU development and humanitarian assistance and the EU is Pakistan’s largest export market. The EU and Pakistan have recently chosen to deepen and broaden their bilateral ties, as exemplified by the 2012 EU-Pakistan five-year engagement plan and the first EU-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue. Moreover, as from 1 January 2014, Pakistan is now integrated into the EU’s special generalised scheme of trade preferences (GSP+).

The report stated 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.

Members considered that 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 Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and ensuring Pakistan’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

As regards **drone attacks**, the report noted that the Pakistani Government has clearly expressed its opposition to US drone strikes on its territory. It welcomed the UN General Assembly resolution which calls for further clarification of the legal framework applicable for the use of armed drones.

Members, on the other hand, are concerned by reports that Pakistan is considering **exporting nuclear weapons to third countries**. They called 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.

The report stressed 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. Members considered 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.

The EEAS and the Commission are urged 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. They should also 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.

Members remained deeply concerned about the quality of **education** and, in a related manner, the alarming situation of **women** in many parts of Pakistan. They called 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.

Lastly, they also reiterated their 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. The Pakistani government should implement a moratorium on the use of these laws. Pakistan should also intensify its efforts to preserve **freedom of religion and belief**, including by moving towards abolition of the death penalty.