

Pakistan's Economic Woes Could Worsen if It Does Not Impose the EU's Liberal World View

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*Citing Pakistan's worsening human rights situation, particularly relating to the safety of minorities, women, and journalists, the European Union has raised concerns and put the country's preferred trade status in question. **Luis Garicano**, a Spanish member of the European Parliament, recently visited Pakistan and met with top leaders and members of civil society.*

On November 7, he [tweeted](#):

“Just returned from a fascinating visit to Pakistan. The European Parliament is very concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation, which puts into question the continuation of the preferred trade status of the country (GSP+).”

During his visit to Pakistan, he met with the senior Trade Advisor, Foreign Minister, Trade and Justice Ministers, Attorney General, Speaker of the House, opposition leaders, journalists, civil society and religious minorities. Following the trip, Garicano explained that Europe has zero trade tariffs for many Pakistani goods in exchange for the country's implementation of 27 human rights conventions. This status, which expires in December 2023 and is now up for revision, has led to 31% of all Pakistani exports going to the EU.

“The European delegation wanted to ensure that the Human Rights part of the deal advances. Only with respect to human rights can Pakistan prosper, extremism be defeated and the country attain the level of progress it deserves,” the MEP wrote in a follow up tweet.

Despite the constitution protecting minority rights, he highlighted that “this is not the reality due to blasphemy laws and civil rights suppression. Blasphemy laws are abused to keep minorities on the defensive-any mistake can result in years in prison after a false accusation of blasphemy.”

While talking about women's rights, he said,

"There are huge concerns about forced marriages for young girls, often after forced conversion. Since Islam punishes apostasy with death, once a girl is forced to convert, it is impossible for her to divorce and come back to her home."

Garicano warned that:

"Our message was clear: Pakistan should not take for granted its privileged trade status. The EU has done its part; Pakistan must fulfill its own part."

Considering nearly a third of Pakistan's exports are to the EU, threats against its privileged trade status could unravel the already struggling economy. Although Pakistan has a preferential trade status with the EU and is a major part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, particularly through the \$62+ billion worth of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects, its economy is struggling and thus has hampered efforts to alleviate poverty, develop vital infrastructure outside of CPEC, and improve literacy and water access.

Pakistan has a bloated military budget that in 2019 accounted for 18.43% of the GDP. The vast military funding is needed to maintain Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, support terrorist organizations in Jammu and Kashmir, and for corrupt military leaders to siphon money. Despite this vast military spending, Pakistan still suffers from a [poverty rate](#) of nearly 40%, a [literacy rate](#) of only 60%, a ranking of 92 out of the 116 countries in the [2021 Global Hunger Index](#), and could ["run dry"](#) by 2025 as its water shortage is reaching an alarming level.

Although CPEC is intended to rapidly upgrade Pakistan's infrastructure and strengthen its economy through the construction of a modern transportation network, numerous energy projects, and special economic zones, the benefits are yet to be felt by ordinary Pakistanis. One criticism levelled against CPEC is that although it is rapidly improving Pakistan's transportation network, the majority of workers have been from China. In fact, the prevalence of Chinese workers is so-much-so that they have begun arming themselves to protect themselves from attacks by terrorist organizations and separatist groups like the Balochi militias. After a July 14 bus blast, in which nine Chinese people were killed, Beijing requested an increase in security for CPEC projects.

It was also [recently reported](#) that six major CPEC energy power projects worth \$5 billion did not receive insurance cover from Sinasure, a Chinese insurance company. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan urged his Chinese counterparts to ensure that Sinasure clears about \$13 billion worth of insurance cover in energy and infrastructure projects in Pakistan.

In this way, Pakistan is nearly wholly reliant on a preferential trade status with the EU and on China developing the country under the CPEC banner. However, this exposes Pakistan to foreign influence and interference. In this way, Garicano is lambasting Pakistan for not adhering to the values of the European Union, thus making threats of reversing the country's preferential trade status. At the same time, given Pakistan's economic vulnerabilities, it submits to every demand made by China, including the limited use of local workers.

This also comes as Pakistan's military budget remains bloated, thus limiting resources available for education and poverty alleviation. The economic meltdown is putting Imran

Khan under immense pressure, especially as record inflation – the fourth highest in the world – pushed the price of sugar higher than petrol. The economic situation in Pakistan could become all the worse if they resist efforts by the EU to impose its liberal world view, something that Garicano is threatening to do.

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