



EVENT REPORT

Pakistan at Crossroads: Navigating Challenges in a Volatile Region and the Potential of EU-Pakistan Relations

6 July 2023

Brussels

On 6 July 2023, EIAS and the European External Action Service hosted a panel discussion on the challenges facing Pakistan and the potential of EU-Pakistan relations. The panellists included prominent journalists and analysts who offered insights into the future of Pakistani democracy with potential elections coming this October.

Hamid Mir, Senior Journalist, columnist, and writer for Geo News, The Washington Post, and The Guardian, highlighted the political turmoil in light of upcoming elections in Pakistan. He emphasised the importance of rule of law and the constitution, which impacts the economy and other issues such as climate change and immigration. Mir expressed concerns about the possibility of holding elections within the constitutional timeframe and criticised the role of the judiciary in destabilising Pakistani democracy.

Maria Memon, a journalist and TV anchor at ARY News focused on the issue of climate change in Pakistan and the potential for EU support in mitigating its effects. She emphasised the role of the younger generation in Pakistan, where 75% of people are younger than 30, and called for better representation of women in decision-making processes.

Also addressing the important role of women in Pakistan, Mehmala Sarfraz, a journalist and political analyst, discussed the changing media landscape in Pakistan and the rise of digital media. She highlighted the influence of mainstream media in shaping public opinion and the need for more women's voices and representation in senior, decision-making, positions. Sarfraz also addressed the challenges of disinformation and manipulation of news in the digital era.

Shahbaz Anwaar Rana, an economic and foreign affairs analyst, discussed the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) and its impact on Pakistan. He mentioned that Pakistan has benefited from the scheme, but still faces challenges in terms of labour laws, governance, and the high cost of doing business. Rana also mentioned the ongoing review of the GSP+ and the potential impact of new conditions set by the EU.

The ongoing work with GSP+ was elaborated on by Deren Derya, Head of Division for Afghanistan and Pakistan at the European External Action Service, who emphasised the importance of Pakistan as a partner for the EU. She discussed various areas of cooperation, including development assistance, renewable energy, governance, and regional issues. Derya highlighted the EU's engagement with Pakistan on human rights, migration, and



counterterrorism, and expressed concerns about the challenges Pakistan faces, such as economic crises and the impact of climate change.

During the interactive Q&A session, the panellists addressed questions related to media restrictions, Kashmir, labour rights, disinformation, women's representation, and the upcoming elections in Pakistan. They underlined the importance of democratic institutions, respect for human rights, and the need for inclusive governance to address these challenges.

Overall, the panel discussion shed light on the complex issues facing Pakistan and the potential for EU-Pakistan relations. The speakers highlighted the importance of addressing political instability, climate change, gender inequality, and economic challenges through cooperation and dialogue. They stressed the role of the rule of law, media freedom, and inclusive governance in shaping Pakistan's future.