



PRESS RELEASE

Subject: Statement on Visit to Pakistan of the European Parliament's delegation for relations with South Asia

Islamabad, 20th February, 2015: The EP Delegation for relations with South Asia, chaired by Ms Jean LAMBERT (Greens/UK) visited Pakistan on 17-20 February; Mr Richard Howitt (S&D/UK), Mr Sajjad Karim (ECR/UK) and Mr Michael Gahler (EPP/D), accompanied by Ambassador Lars Gunnar Wigemark, Head of the EU Delegation to Pakistan, participated in the talks.

The 4-day visit featured meetings with PM Nawaz Sharif, Speaker of the National Assembly Sardar Sadiq, as well as members of the Senate and of the National Assembly's EU friendship group. MEPs also met, amongst others, with the Advisor to the PM on Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Commerce, the Interior Secretary, the Chief Minister Punjab, the GSP+ Committee of Punjab and several civil society representatives (prominent lawyers, women leaders, journalists, the business community, and trade unions). Rounding up talks, MEPs had the opportunity to appreciate Pakistan's vibrant cultural scene by participating in the EU-sponsored Lahore literary festival.

While commending the first ever democratic transition in Pakistan from one elected Government to another in 2013, MEPs recalled the value of the recommendations made by the EU Election Observation Mission in order to strengthen the electoral process. Chief Election Observer Michael Gahler MEP underlined the need for reforms to be completed in time for the next elections, and reiterated the EU's commitment, building on the extensive support provided in the past to electoral reforms and on ongoing assistance in strengthening Pakistan's parliamentary institutions.

Since the European Parliament approval of the extension of the GSP+ to Pakistan in late 2013, Pakistan's exports to the EU have already increased by an extra billion USD - an impressive development proving the value of the scheme, welcomed by both the European Delegation and all Pakistani interlocutors. In order for this trend to be further reinforced, MEPs emphasised the need to now ensure tangible progress in implementation of the 27 international conventions Pakistan had subscribed on human rights, labour rights, governance and the environment, as covered by the GSP+ scheme; as an assessment of the state of play will be presented to the European Parliament on 1/1/2016, the EP Delegation encouraged all stakeholders to address possible shortcomings in advance.

Whilst assuring Pakistan of the EU's solidarity and support in the fight against terrorism, MEPs reiterated the EU's constant message of opposing the death penalty. The EP Delegation thus regretted both the recent decision to lift the moratorium on executions in terrorism related cases, and the fact that at least in two cases the condemned were executed for crimes that were of a different nature: both steps were clearly seen as regressive in Human Rights terms. The EP Delegation further underlined that it expected international observers would have full access to the military courts in order to ascertain that the defendants would be afforded the full legal guarantees they would be entitled to, as per binding.

Extensive discussions on human rights and labour issues allowed the EP Delegation to highlight the importance of making progress in areas such as freedom of religion and belief, including the misuse of the blasphemy laws, the rights of women and girls, access to justice and wider justice sector reforms as well as in labour standards, including labour inspections, occupational safety and health and the rights of trade unions to organise. MEPs welcomed the steps taken to establish Pakistan's first National Human Rights Commission, and expressed the hope it would be fully operational very soon.

Reaffirming the value of parliamentary scrutiny in the strengthening of EU / Pakistan relations, MEPs further expressed the hope of welcoming soon in Brussels or Strasbourg their counterparts from the EU friendship group of the National Assembly, for follow-up talks.

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