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RELEX 968
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COTER 161
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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

No. prev. doc.: 13822/18

Subject: Pakistan
- Council conclusions (19 November 2018)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on Pakistan, as adopted by the Council at its 3652nd meeting held on 19 November 2018.

Council conclusions on Pakistan

1. The EU welcomes the holding of the July 2018 general elections despite the challenging environment. The EU commends the improvements that have been made to the electoral legal framework, in line with some of the recommendations of the 2013 EU Election Observation Mission (EOM). The EU, however, regrets that the 2018 EU EOM was not allowed to carry out its mandate adequately. The EU encourages Pakistani authorities to take into consideration the 2018 EU EOM's final report and its recommendations in addressing the shortcomings identified and improving the electoral system.
2. The EU is willing to engage with the new Government of Pakistan to support its efforts in advancing social and economic reforms, ensuring access to education, and addressing poverty and inequality through good governance and the respect of the rule of law.
3. The promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law are core elements of the EU's engagement with Pakistan. The Council urges Pakistan to live up to its international commitments and spare no efforts in this regard. The EU draws particular attention to the freedom of religion or belief, abuses of the blasphemy law, the freedom of expression and media, the shrinking space for civil society, the rights of the people belonging to minorities, and women's and children's full enjoyment of their human rights. The EU encourages the Government to fully observe and protect human rights. A vibrant civil society and academia play a strong role in promoting and supporting a democratic, transparent and accountable society. The EU strongly encourages Pakistan to re-instate the moratorium as a first step towards abolition of the death penalty. The EU will continue to support Pakistan in implementing its human rights obligations fully, strengthening of its democracy and upholding the rule of law.

4. The EU also remains a strong partner of Pakistan in the pursuit of sustainable development. In this context, the EU recognises the important role played by (International) NGOs and their contribution to the larger objective of making Pakistan a society where all voices can find a meaningful space. The EU has taken note with concern of the restrictions imposed on several (I)NGOs working on cooperation projects in Pakistan and encourages the Pakistani Government to find a solution with a view to facilitating their registration and allowing them to carry out their activities.
5. As one of Pakistan's most important trading partners, the EU is persuaded of the need for Pakistan to diversify its exports to maximise the added value of the GSP+ scheme and its positive impact on the country's 's economy. Substantial progress in the implementation of the 27 international conventions within the scope of the GSP+ scheme remains indispensable for continuing coverage under the preferential tariff regime. With regard to trading and investment conditions, the EU encourages Pakistan to address persisting structural challenges and to improve the ease of doing business. Ensuring a level playing field for foreign business and investments in Pakistan should be a priority.
6. The EU wishes to strengthen cooperation in the field of security and defence and notes with satisfaction the resumption of dialogue in this area and the holding of the annual Dialogues on Counter-Terrorism and on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. The Council emphasises the importance of the high-level political commitment of Pakistan to work with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), in particular through the Action Plan to be implemented by September 2019, and to strengthen and implement its policies on counter-terrorism financing and anti-money laundering. The EU also encourages Pakistan to strive for achieving the highest possible standards in nuclear safety and security, as well as play a constructive role in multilateral disarmament discussions, and ratify or join relevant non-proliferation treaties and initiatives, such as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

7. The Council underlines the great importance it attaches to enhanced cooperation with Pakistan in the field of migration, notably with a view to achieving progress on accelerated return and readmission, the reintegration of returnees and the fight against migrant smuggling and human trafficking, as agreed in the EU-Pakistan Readmission Agreement, which should be effectively implemented. Noting the announcement made by the Prime Minister of Pakistan in September 2018, the Council encourages Pakistan to take concrete steps in improving the legal status of Afghan refugees on its territory. The EU supports a comprehensive approach to address the situation of displaced Afghan nationals, which complies with international law and fully respects human rights.
8. The EU looks forward to continuing to work with Pakistan in fostering inclusive regional cooperation, including through SAARC. The EU strongly encourages Pakistan to step up its engagement in constructive initiatives to support peace in Afghanistan and intensify its pursuit of cooperation with neighbouring countries, which would contribute to regional stability. Pakistan must ensure that its territory is not used as a safe haven by terrorist organizations and their networks. The EU welcomes the bilateral engagement between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue between religious authorities from the two countries, and calls for implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS). While primarily focused on Afghanistan's development and governance reforms, the forthcoming Geneva Ministerial Conference on 27/28 November 2018 is a helpful opportunity for Pakistan to reaffirm its political support for peace and stability in Afghanistan. Additionally, the EU calls on Pakistan and India to resume bilateral dialogue in order to settle peacefully all outstanding issues.
9. In line with the Council Conclusions of October 2018 on "Connecting Europe and Asia", the EU looks forward to engaging with Pakistan on sustainable connectivity as a positive contribution to regional stability, prosperity and development. The Council stresses the importance of promoting environmentally, socially and fiscally sustainable as well as comprehensive and rules-based connectivity and delivering quality infrastructure based on international standards.

10. The Council acknowledges the vulnerability of Pakistan to climate change and encourages its Government to step up its efforts to fully and swiftly implement the Paris Agreement.
 11. The EU looks forward to strengthening its framework for engagement with Pakistan, through the signature of the new EU-Pakistan Strategic Engagement Plan (SEP) at the earliest possible occasion. The Council requests the High Representative and the European Commission to regularly report on the implementation of the SEP.
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