

## PAKISTAN-EU TRADE DYNAMICS: AN EXAMINATION OF ECONOMY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE VIEW OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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### Abstract

*This study explores the multifaceted economic and trade relations between Pakistan and the European Union (EU) through the lens of International Relations (IR) theories. Over the years, the EU has emerged as one of Pakistan's largest trading partners, offering significant opportunities for economic growth and development. The Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) status granted by the EU has played a pivotal role in boosting Pakistan's exports, particularly in textiles and agriculture, while fostering compliance with human rights and environmental standards. However, these relations are influenced by complex dynamics, including shifting geopolitical alliances, trade policies, and economic interdependence. Using a blend of liberal and realist IR frameworks, this research examines the evolution of Pakistan-EU economic ties, highlighting key trade agreements, challenges, and their broader implications for regional stability and global commerce. The findings underscore the need for strategic policy adjustments to sustain mutual economic benefits and address emerging global trade challenges, such as climate change and digital transformation. By delving into this critical aspect of international relations, the study aims to provide insights into enhancing cooperation and maximizing the potential of Pakistan-EU economic partnerships.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan, European Union, IR, Economy, Trade, GSP+, Geopolitics etc.

### Introduction

The trade relationship between Pakistan and the European Union (EU) is an essential component of Pakistan's economic and diplomatic engagements. As the EU remains one of Pakistan's largest trading partners, understanding the dynamics of this relationship is crucial. Daud (2024) the trade partnership reflects not only economic exchanges but also the geopolitical and strategic dimensions of international relations (IR). This study explores the challenges and opportunities within the Pakistan-EU trade framework, emphasizing how International Relations theories and practices influence these dynamics. Parvez et al, (2024)

The economy of Pakistan has been greatly benefited in terms of export growth specially the EU trade policies GSP+ scheme. But narrative is not simply import rising, there are challenges to these policies they include broad based compliance and regular production

reviews in order to remain compliant to the EU trade policies. Malik (2020) The EU pair corporations with ethical production and sustainability and they have pressed for reforms in Pakistan's industrial and labor sector though the pace of implementation is slow. It is important to consider the policies mentioned above in a broad manner since they have a dual impact and shape the ways in which Pakistan would strategies to tackle its limitations. Sultana (2013)

One of the significant challenges in Pakistan-EU trade is Pakistan's narrow export base, heavily reliant on textiles and garments, which account for a substantial portion of exports to the EU. This lack of diversification makes Pakistan vulnerable to market fluctuations and competition from other developing economies. Khattak (2020) further, compliance with EU standards, particularly regarding labor rights, environmental protection, and product quality, poses a hurdle for Pakistani exporters. Non-tariff barriers, such as stringent regulatory requirements, further complicate the trade landscape. (Chishti et al, (2008)

### EU Map



### Reference:

<https://tile.loc.gov/image-services/iiif/service:gmd:gmd5:g5700:g5700:ct001356/full/pct:12.5/0/default.jpg>

The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 27 member states located primarily in Europe. SPYCHAŁA, M., & SPYCHAŁA, J. (2024). Geographically, the EU spans a diverse landscape that includes vast plains, mountain ranges like the Alps and the Carpathians, and extensive coastlines along the Atlantic Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, and the Baltic and North Seas. Charron et al, (2024)

The region is characterized by a temperate climate in the west and central parts, transitioning to Mediterranean in the south and continental in the east. Major rivers such as the Rhine, Danube, and Seine play critical roles in trade and connectivity. The EU's strategic location links it to Asia, Africa, and the Americas through its advanced transportation networks and major ports like Rotterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, facilitating its role as a global economic hub. Pop & Stamos (2024)

### Geopolitical Influences on Trade Dynamics

Geopolitics plays a critical role in shaping Pakistan-EU trade dynamics. The EU often links trade preferences, such as the GSP+, to progress in human rights, governance, and sustainable development. Shad (2021) this conditionality creates challenges for Pakistan, which faces

scrutiny over labor practices, press freedom, and other human rights issues. At the same time, the EU's trade policies are influenced by its geopolitical interests in South Asia, including concerns about regional stability, counterterrorism, and economic development in Pakistan as a means of fostering security. Annus & Javaid (2023)

### **Opportunities for Improvement in Trade Relations**

Despite the difficulties, the trade relationship between Pakistan and the EU presents a wealth of opportunities. Khan (2024) the EU sees Pakistan as an equal partner, there have many trade relations with broadening the trade scope beyond textiles, for example in the fields of information technology, pharmaceuticals and agricultural products, would diversify the export structure and enhance the economic relations. Soomro & Ansari (2022)

International relations (IR) theories offer a perspective needed to cover some of the nuances of the evolving Pakistan–Europe Union relation in the field of trade. Realism emphasizes the significance of power and national interest in trade relations, proposing that both partners desire to optimize economic advantage but also protect strategic interests.

In resolving those issues, Pakistan is faced with internal issues such as political disturbance, irregularities within the bureaucracy and infrastructure deficit, which act as instruments of trade deterrence to fully exploit the trade opportunities with the EU. Continuous energy deficits, inefficient industry policies, inconsistent regulations all contribute to the decline of Pakistan's competitive edge in the International market. Due to such inner weaknesses, policy reforms are recommended that would expand production, build governance, and boost innovative changes that reflect the needs of the EU market. International relations trade theories help to explain the intricacies of the trade between Pakistan and EU. Hussain & Siddiqui (2023) realism postulates that power and national interest are significant features in international trade relations thus indicating that in the relations of two parties, both are interested in making money but also protecting their strategies. Sheikh (2023)

Liberalism explains that interdependence leads to cooperation, as seen in trade practices of EU geared towards benefits from the parties involved and growth of the economies. Constructivism, however, shows the process of furthering the trade agreements through socially constructed ideas, shared norms, and values even in sensitive areas such as people's rights and environmental issues. Nissen & Dreyer (2024)

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of studying lies in its potential to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted relationship between Pakistan and one of its largest trading partners. This research is vital for identifying and addressing the economic challenges that hinder Pakistan's ability to maximize its trade potential with the European Union, such as compliance with stringent regulatory standards and diversification of exports. By examining this relationship through the lens of International Relations (IR), the study underscores the geopolitical and strategic considerations that influence trade dynamics, including the EU's conditional trade preferences tied to human rights and sustainable development. The insights gained from this research can guide policymakers in formulating strategies to enhance Pakistan's economic resilience, strengthen trade ties, and navigate the complexities of global trade politics.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the key economic challenges faced by Pakistan in its trade relationship with the European Union, and how do these challenges impact its export potential and compliance with EU standards?
2. How do geopolitical factors and International Relations (IR) considerations influence the dynamics of Pakistan-EU trade, particularly in the context of trade agreements and policy conditionalities?

3. What opportunities exist for enhancing Pakistan-EU trade relations, and how can Pakistan diversify its exports and align with the EU's priorities to strengthen economic ties?

### Research Objectives

1. To identify and analyze the economic challenges affecting Pakistan's trade with the European Union, including regulatory compliance, market competition, and export diversification issues.
2. To examine the role of geopolitical and International Relations (IR) factors in shaping the Pakistan-EU trade relationship, with a focus on policy conditionalities and strategic interests.
3. To explore potential opportunities for enhancing Pakistan-EU trade relations by identifying new sectors for export diversification and strategies for aligning with the EU's sustainable development and trade priorities.

### Literature Review

Malik (2020) reveals that the European Union is an important trading partner of Pakistan and as a result the trade relations between EU and Pakistan have become one of the building bricks required for Pakistan to properly integrate its economy into the global trade landscape. The trade imbalance however, is tilted in favor of the EU which exports machinery, chemicals and advanced technology but imports textiles, garments and agricultural produce solely from Pakistan. GSP+ type of designation which the EU extended to Islamabad in the year of 2014, as a result, has enabled Pakistan to have a competitive edge in exports of textiles turning the EU into a market with almost no tariffs on any products.

Dijkstra et al. (2023) explores that European Union (EU) consists of 27 member's states that are primarily located in Europe joint on a common interest of economic development of themselves and the nations throughout world. When EU is seen geographically, their span has a rich and diverse landscape including vast plains, mountain ranges like the Alps and the Carpathians, and extensive coastlines along the Atlantic Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, and the Baltic and North Seas. There is also a variety of temperature and weather at the same time. There is also a range of natural resources including rivers such as the Rhine, Danube, and Seine that play a critical role in trade and connectivity.

Khan (2014) the backbone of the EU's foreign policy, this policy, has greatly placed Pakistan on the global stage. Nevertheless, hurdles remain as the EU GSP/tariff preferences are extended to countries provided they can safeguard human and labor rights and can establish desired environmental conditions for a requisite period of time. With respect to trade between Pakistan and the EU, it can under these circumstances hope for further economic development by strict compliance to the established standards, adding more exported products to the EU's basket and availing enhanced value addition in different sectors.

Parvez et al, (2024) suggest that trade relations between Pakistan and the EU progressed over years towards mutual interests of improving economic ties and development. It is one of the largest trade partners of Pakistan, with trade mostly comprised of textiles, garments, and agricultural products from Pakistan; while machinery, chemicals, and high-tech products are exported from the EU. The granting of GSP Plus status to Pakistan in 2014 was one of the landmark moments in the trade relationship; it gave Pakistan duty-free access to the EU market for over 20% of its exports-a boost for economic growth. But some challenges remain, such as Pakistan's need to harmonize its labor, environmental, and human rights standards with EU norms, plus trade balance and access issues.

Wagan (2015) the deepening of EU-Pakistan trade relations would require more economic integration, regulatory reforms, and more constructive engagement to address these challenges and further develop prospects for growth in areas like agriculture, textiles, and renewable energy.

Awan et al, (2015) finds out that the EU-Pakistan trade relations are developed over a period of time and it has a gradual journey. This journey is developed based on mutual interests that are economic and financial benefits. Pakistan has many trading partners and European Union is one of them. These trading partners have main focus on textiles, garments, and agricultural products from Pakistan.

Majeed et al, (2019) EU have specialty on exporting agricultural and industrial machinery, chemicals, and high-tech products. This trade relation was developed through the trade relationship and it was the granting of Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP) Plus status to Pakistan in 2014.

Shah et al, (2019) in research suggest that This arrangement was to provide duty-free access to the EU market for over 20% of Pakistan's exports. All the arrangement was to boost its economic growth. There was a challenge which needs Pakistan to align its labor. As a result that environmental and human rights standards with EU requirements and addressing issues of trade balance. There is need to develop deeper and strong economic relations and coordination to address challenge. There is need to focus on sectors that are key to boost economy like agriculture, textiles, and renewable energy.

Czermińska (2017) in a study suggests that the Generalized System of Performance GSP was developed by European Union, and these were changes to the conditions for eligibility. These arrangements were aimed to promote human rights, sustainable environmental protection, and sustainable development among beneficiary countries. There is GSP+ that is a developed framework for vulnerable countries.

Akinmade (2024) at the same time the development is EBA (Everything But Arms for least developed countries) this development imposed stricter requirements. These requirements were on the countries to have multinational conventions on basic human rights, labor rights, governance, and environmental standards. GSP+ countries have the compliances with 27 core international conventions. These areas environmental sustainability, anticorruption and sustainable economic development. There is an aim to develop the economic growth and human rights and environmental sustainability.

Khan, (2024) reveals that Pakistan's faced many issues in democracy era including political instability, governance issues, and periodic military interventions in government matters. Pakistan democratic development has a great support by European Union (EU) for democratic development and governance.

Shah et al, (2019) EU facilitate through technical support, financial assistance, economic development and diplomatic engagement. There was also contribution through free and fair elections in Pakistan, as a funding supporter and development awareness in civil society. EU also supported in developing inclusive governance, human rights, and implementing rule at the country. EU is strengthening the democracy in Pakistan through financial as well as by strengthening democratic institutions. This combination is proving a change maker for the domestic reforms and stronger accountability measures. This may prove a sustainable development for democracy and ensuring political stability in Pakistan.

Sultana et al, (2023) shares that Pakistan tried to develop new relations and allies to strengthen financial, human and defense relations with the Baltic States—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. There were multiple and diversified for Pakistan to develop its diplomatic and economic partnerships. These allies made it possible for Pakistan to provide economic access to European markets, innovative technologies, and opportunities for educational and cultural

exchange. The partnership may be provided as a source for democratic development in the country.

Javed & Khan (2022), shares that Pakistan has a critical component as a strategy to develop exports relations with Europe and China. This relation is to develop the economic and trade development of both the countries particularly under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Pakistan exports primarily rely on goods like textiles, cotton and its products, rice, corn, seafood, and minerals to China. There is a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between both the countries aimed to increase the exports of both the countries. But there may be an economic imbalance in the region as Pakistan has less products and services as compared to China.

Tasneem (2020) in the research reveals that the European Union (EU) has a prominent role in promoting the democracy though out the world by strengthening financially, ethically and governance. There is a political, economic, and diplomatic influence and EU took its leverage. The EU puts efforts to aware civil society, developing free and fair elections programs, support to improve infrastructure, and engage local societies with all the process. Through mechanisms like the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and alliance agreements, the EU support in financial and technical assistance to vulnerable countries and develop democracy

Akram & Malik (2020) international relation of Pakistan give opportunities for the connections, bonding with potential markets and trading markets. There is opportunity for all the partners to develop economic integration, exporting markets, and develop global level forums. Pakistan has a variety of agreements with the countries including China, United States, the United Kingdom, and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. All these arrangements have influence on trade flows, investment decisions and macroeconomic policies.

Lee, (2014) reveals that the international relations of East Asia in the 21st century have an opportunity to shift driven by economic growth, power competition, and regional integration. China is growing as an economic power and a global power to reshape the region economy and trade relations. China has a good strategy to engage with partners for a reshaped the region's political and economic landscape, challenging the traditional dominance of the United States.

Nitza-Makowska, A. (2020) discusses Pakistan has a unique geographical position in the region which enhances its value and strategically geographical position as it has shared borders with most important neighboring countries as well as European Union (EU). Due to these relations Pakistan has economic relations with South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Pakistan is also a pathway, crossroads of major economic and strategic routes, including the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Pakistan has regional importance for regional level connectivity and trade. Pakistan also has critical relation with India due to Kashmir dispute, and its complex to manage economic relationship with India in all circumstances. Afghanistan border is also a disputed border due to illegal supply of material and commodities and security concerns.

Raza (2024) there is also need to balance the relationship with neighbors as well as with EU and USA at the same time. Due to US-China stressed relations, Pakistan is also facing challenge to maintain balanced relations. Due to war against terrorism in tribal areas of Pakistan and in Afghanistan, Pakistani people also have bad thoughts for the government.

Khalid & M (2009) Pakistan external relations and defense strategies also affect its economic policies. Pakistan receive many strategic challenges include managing complex relations with India, particularly over the Kashmir dispute, addressing security concerns along the

Afghanistan border, and maintaining a balance in its alliances with global powers like the United States and China.

Rathor et al, (2023) Pakistan faces internal security issues, economic pressures, and the need to counter extremism, all of which significantly influence its foreign policy and defense strategies. Nawaz et al, (2024) mentioned that Pakistan foreign relations must be developing on the basis of trade, import and export. Pakistan should make sure economic national interest when Pakistan signs any trade agreement. Pakistan should strength Pakistan economy as like CPEC. Pakistan should focus trade relations with regional block particularly with China and neighbors.

### **Conclusion**

Pakistan-EU trade dynamics represent a mix of challenges and opportunities, deeply rooted in economic realities and shaped by geopolitical considerations. While the EU provides Pakistan with significant export opportunities, the relationship requires careful navigation of compliance requirements, domestic policy improvements, and diversification efforts. Even the worst economic situation, the trade relations between European Union and Pakistan has a lot to offer. The economic status and geo strategic significance of Pakistan as gateway to Central Asia draws the interest of the EU. There is a huge potential for augmentation of non-textile exports into the EU, especially in the fields of IT, pharmaceuticals and Agro products that can enhance bilateral trade and economic relations. Additionally, Pakistan's engagement within China's BRI and CPEC programs offers possibilities for the EU to assess joint initiatives geared towards utilizing Pakistan's potential as a hub.

In conclusion, Pakistan-EU trade relations offer a bunch of dynamic and significant opportunities for economic growth. GSP+ is a good initiative for most vulnerable countries who may be left over due to instable political, economic and technological conditions. However at the same time a range of challenges exists including compliances, standards, quality, implementation on laws and most importance peace in the country. From International Relations perspective, Pakistan must develop institutional and human capacities, right align the national and domestic laws and policies with international standards and compliance and maintain a strategic relation with EU for economic prosperity. A well balanced approach may be helpful to transform mutual interest and strengthen this relationship into a long lasting and sustainable development opportunity

Pakistan have limited options to deal for trade and economic development with EU due to its image for peace and war against terrorism. Countries hesitate to make investment decision due to lack of implementation on international laws, child labor and less secured working environment. South Asian trade policies are influencing economic policies of these countries as well as reducing the interest of big investors from EU and other big investors.

Pakistan has many challenges to maintain relations with EU, as Pakistan has a narrow range of exports options like garments and agriculture products that limits the trade options and as a result limited economy options exists. Pakistan has lack of diversification in exports products and there are rare options for services with EU countries. these narrow options make Pakistan vulnerable for global trade. Further, there is also a need to maintain minimum standard and compliances to establish trade relations with EU standards. Pakistan faces difficulties in meeting labor rights, industrial and environmental protection, and quality of products and services. There are also regulatory and tariff related obligations that are a challenge for Pakistan.

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