

Terrorism in Pakistan: The Implications for the EU's GSP+ programme

Written by MEPs Jussi Halla-aho & Nicolas Bay on 26 October 2017



For decades, security experts have been aware that Pakistan has been acting as a “safe haven” for terrorist organisations. Well-known and respected think tanks such as the Brookings Institution, have listed Pakistan as the “world’s most active sponsor of terrorist groups.”

The propensity of the Pakistani authorities to shield terrorists is a problem for the international community, but it also wreaks havoc within their territory. According to the US State Department, prior to 2016, the average number of civilian deaths occurring within Pakistan as a direct result of terrorism was approximately 3,000 people per year.

The US State Department has also reported that Pakistan’s half-hearted attempts to control militant groups are having “uneven” results. Pakistan has shown a profound hesitancy to address radicalisation in its madrassas (religious schools), its weak judicial system or its state funding of groups with extreme ideologies.

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President Donald Trump's August 21st comments where he reproached the Pakistani government for harbouring terrorists and demanded they take responsibility for the consequences of their actions appear more reasonable in this context.

Trump's comments marked the first time in seven decades that an American President has openly criticised the tyrannical, quasi-military dictatorship governing Pakistan. Trump acknowledged the hypocrisy of Pakistan sponsoring the same terrorists they claim to fight.

Pakistan's hypocrisy in this realm is a threat to regional and global security. Trump also highlighted the billions of dollars of development aid Washington has been sending to Pakistan, implying he would cut off the funds meant for human rights and state-building if the country continues along this path.

After all, it is nonsensical for the USA to continue (indirectly) funding the very organisations they are fighting in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Although any escalation between the USA and Pakistan – two of the world's nuclear powers – is unfortunate, Pakistan's state sponsorship of terrorist groups cannot go unheeded. Thus, an opportunity has been presented for the EU to act in accordance with cooperation principles it claims to be built upon.

"The opportunities of GSP+ are important for Pakistan's development, but equally important for the country's development is the security and well-being of its citizens. The international community cannot continue to turn a blind eye to Pakistan's wilful disregard of its own people"

According to European Commission figures, the EU is Pakistan's most important trading partner, putting the EU in a strong negotiating position. Trade between the two has increased by over five per cent annually. Furthermore, Pakistan benefits from the EU's most profitable trade programme, the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+).

Under GSP+, Pakistani imports can enter Europe at tariffs significantly lower than those set out by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), allowing the country to profit and grow.

Intrinsic in the GSP+ programme are detailed prerequisites. Beneficiaries of GSP+ must be considered economically vulnerable due to low levels of economic diversity and lack integration with international markets. They must also comply with 27 "core conventions", seven of which address basic human rights principles.

The opportunities of GSP+ are important for Pakistan's development, but equally important for the country's development is the security and well-being of its citizens. The international community

cannot continue to turn a blind eye to Pakistan's wilful disregard of its own people.

Furthermore, the international community cannot continue to disregard the impact these terrorist organisations have on the rest of the world, especially when European countries have to face terrorist attacks on their national soil.

The country's disregard to the Islamic terrorism ripping through its cities is inexcusable.

Pakistan's well-documented support of terrorist organisations is a direct violation of a number of the GSP+ pre-conditions, as well as an assault on the "good faith" principles which are the building blocks of any international agreement.

About the author

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