



# The Pakistani Diaspora in Europe and Its Impact on Democracy Building in Pakistan

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## Abstract

In order to understand the role that could be played in the democratization of Pakistan by Pakistan's diaspora in the European Union (EU), there is a need to study its nature and composition. There is also a need to understand how this community has evolved and its priorities vis-à-vis Pakistan.

There are approximately 2.2 million Pakistanis in Europe. Around half live in the United Kingdom. Italy, Greece, France, Spain, Germany and Denmark also have large Pakistani communities. The Pakistani diaspora in the EU maintain more contact with their homeland than those who live elsewhere. Pakistani emigrants and their children influence their homeland culturally and economically by maintaining close ties, travelling to Pakistan and investing there.

This paper examines the attitudes and aspirations of the Pakistani diaspora in Europe, EU policy towards them and the steps that can be taken by the EU in order to increase their role in democracy building in Pakistan. The interests of the EU, the Pakistani Government, and the Pakistani diaspora coincide on the need for stability in Pakistan. This can only be achieved through sound democratic and economic systems. There is therefore a need to engage the diaspora in a systematic way.

## Summary of Recommendations

Diaspora desk officers in the various foreign offices of the EU member states would be an effective mechanism for determining and estimating how and where the diaspora can play an effective role in their country of origin. Funding diaspora-led programmes could be an effective tool for investing in development projects that can help play a role in democratizing Pakistan. The role of the Pakistani diaspora should be considered at the next Pakistan-EU summit in order to give the diaspora a stake in the whole process. Pakistani community organizations exist in various EU countries and these could become cooperation partners with the EU. Scholarship schemes for students who are members of the Pakistani diaspora could be a significant step, enabling them to work

for six months on existing EU funded cooperation projects in rural areas of Pakistan. Internship programmes in various EU bodies should be introduced for Pakistani youth in Europe so they can learn from the EU experience of institution building. The EU should commission studies on what and how the Pakistani diaspora contributes to Pakistan.

## 1. Introduction

Democracy building is and always has been an important aim of EU policy towards developing countries and Pakistan is no exception to this principle. Relations between Pakistan and the European Union (EU) were strained as a result of issues surrounding the return to democracy and the protection of human rights in Pakistan. This contributed to the delay in the implementation of the Third Generation Agreement, which was finally ratified in 2004. Both the EU and the Pakistani Government want democracy in Pakistan. There needs to be a realization that the diaspora can play a positive and effective role in the process of democratization. The urgent need to exploit all channels to bring stability to Pakistan should be recognized in decision making circles in the EU and Pakistan.

Since the events of 11 September 2001, Pakistan has assumed the role of a frontline state in the global fight against terrorism, of which the EU and its member states are an important part. This role has not been easy for Pakistan and it continues to pay a price in the form of extremism in society, the alienation of its civil society and the destruction of its democratic and economic infrastructure. Poverty continues to fuel extremism. The failed policies of US drone attacks in the border areas with Afghanistan and the presence of destabilizing US companies such as Blackwater have created a mood of anti-Americanism and anti-government sentiment in the Pakistani population, thereby further dividing the society. In addition to the issue of terrorism, the inability of the present Pakistani Government to deal with energy and food crises has further alienated the people of Pakistan. Military action by the government in Swat and Malakand, although initially welcomed by the people of Pakistan, has increased anti-government sentiment after the authorities were unable to provide for the relevant reconstruction or the rehabilitation of the displaced population. Poverty and lack of governance are still hallmarks of the region because of the lack of resources available to the government.

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Pakistan requires special attention because of its fragile situation in the frontline of the fight against international terrorism. The democratic government is weak and lacks the

resources to provide for the huge population. The democratic institutions have been weakened as a result of not only prolonged military intervention but also intervention by the United States. The EU can play an important role by deploying its experience and resources. If Pakistan fails today, the fight against international terrorism is lost.

The Pakistani lawyers' movement, which in 2008 led the call for the reinstatement of the country's chief justice, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, demonstrated that Pakistan has the liberal democratic energy to transform the country's legal and political landscape. The lawyers' movement received a lot of support from the Pakistani diaspora in Europe. The power of the people and the strength of civil society in Pakistan were

evident, and the diaspora played a role too. With the demise of the presidency of General Pervez Musharraf, there has been genuine momentum towards democratic change in Pakistan, and civil society has proved its vibrancy and its key role in consolidating democracy. This momentum is fragile, however, and democrats and civil society groups need urgent support if the country is to stay on a democratic path and if human rights are to be protected.

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## 2. The History of Pakistan’s Diaspora in Europe

In the 1960s and the 1970s, a small number of Pakistanis emigrated to Europe in order to find a better standard of living and to support their families back home. Over the decades their numbers have swelled and today the European continent hosts second and third generation Pakistanis.

According to the estimates of the Pakistani Government, more than 7 million Pakistanis or people of Pakistani origin live outside Pakistan. Most of these people live and work in the Gulf region, United States and Europe. There are approximately 2.2 million Pakistanis in Europe. Around half these individuals live in the United Kingdom. Italy, Greece, France, Spain, Germany and Denmark also have sizeable Pakistani communities. In addition to the official estimates, a number of illegal immigrants of Pakistani origin also live in Europe. Table 1 gives the approximate number of people of Pakistani origin in various European countries according to official figures.

**Table 1: People of Pakistani origin in Europe**

Country	Numbers
United kingdom	1.200,000
Italy	100.000
Greece	80.000
Spain	47.000
France	60.000
Netherlands	40.000
Denmark	31.000
Norway	30.000

*Source:* Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis, Government of Pakistan.

The Pakistani diaspora in Europe is very different from the Pakistani diaspora in the rest of the world. Those who moved to Europe three decades ago were mostly poorly educated, semi- or non-skilled people from the rural areas. Those who moved to the United States or Australia were mostly skilled and came from urban and educated backgrounds. The Pakistani diaspora in Europe concentrated on improving its economic

situation, but also brought over and accommodated close and extended family members and helped them to settle in their respective countries. This did not happen in the USA and Australia. In the UK, which hosts the largest Pakistani population outside Pakistan, most of the Pakistani diaspora is from the region of Azad Kashmir. Elsewhere in the EU, it is mostly from parts of the Punjab. One important aspect of the Pakistani diaspora in Europe is the fact that it always learns the language of the country of residence. Because most of the Pakistanis who migrated to Europe were unskilled or semi-skilled, they either became part of the European labour force or established their own businesses, which usually flourished. Many now import raw materials from Pakistan and also have businesses in Pakistan.

**The Pakistani community in Europe still aspires to assert its influence in the home village, city or town – most often by establishing schools, mosques and hospitals. Generally, the Pakistani diaspora is interested in and knowledgeable about political and economic developments in Pakistan.**

Compared to the Pakistani diaspora elsewhere, that in the EU still maintains contact with the homeland: first, because of the need to marry children to relatives in Pakistan; and, second, because the Pakistani community in Europe still aspires to assert its influence in the home village, city or

town – most often by establishing schools, mosques and hospitals. The latter element is very important from the perspective of this study. Generally, the Pakistani diaspora is interested in and knowledgeable about political and economic developments in Pakistan, especially because of the accessibility to Pakistani television channels available through satellite dishes and improvements in access to the flourishing Pakistani media available over the Internet free of charge.

The second and third generation of Pakistanis in Europe are very different from their predecessors. Most are well-educated and better integrated into their respective European societies. They are mostly skilled professionals working in the medical field and information technology. They want to retain their Pakistani identity and remain

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connected to Pakistan, and aspire to contribute to both European and Pakistani society at the same time. Pakistani emigrants and their children influence their homeland culturally and economically, keeping close ties to their roots by travelling to Pakistan and investing there.

The Pakistani diaspora in Europe is well known for its contributions to charitable causes in Pakistan and the Muslim world. Whether it is building schools and hospitals, assistance to earthquake victims, the rehabilitation of internally displaced persons in Swat and Malakand or contributions to debt relief schemes, the diaspora in Europe has been very generous in contributing to Pakistan's well-being. Contributions to charities would be even higher if the Pakistani diaspora had more trust that its contributions were being put to good use. The members of

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the Pakistani diaspora in Europe are well-respected in their villages and towns in Pakistan, because they have at some point assisted their friends and family to settle in Europe, or have invested in industry or provided employment for people.

In addition, the Pakistani community is instrumental in raising campaign finance for various political parties in

Pakistan. Party leaders visit the Pakistani community in Europe in order to collect money to finance election campaigns. The extent of this financial support is not documented.

### 3. EU Policy on Migration

Europe has emerged as a mixed, multi-ethnic and pluralistic society as a result of the economic and political migrants who moved to Europe in the past three decades. Europe has a huge immigrant population, mostly of North African origin with a smaller minority of Asian origin. These minorities are mostly Muslims. According to some estimates, there are at least 15 million people in Western Europe who adhere to the Muslim faith. In the course of a few decades, Islam has emerged as Europe's second religion after Christianity.

There is no common EU policy towards minorities and immigrants. The member states have different policies on the integration of their minorities and immigrants. These range from representation in national parliaments to equal job opportunities for minorities. EU member states tend to work out strict integration plans for their immigrant populations. The Pakistani community has become an important part of the workforce in Europe, but certain factors restrain them from becoming part of the mainstream. There is some resistance to being absorbed by European culture. This tends to be a hurdle.

The Pakistani diaspora is, to a certain extent, integrated into its respective European countries. Nonetheless, like other minorities, it faces issues related to discrimination and assimilation due to the difference in culture and religion.

EU member state governments have adopted different approaches to the integration of their minority communities. France has a strong secular culture and has opted for aggressive assimilation, although Muslims there still feel marginalized. The UK, on the other hand, has taken a far less intrusive approach. By far the majority of European countries, including Germany, Italy and Spain, have, at least until recently, taken a laissez-faire approach that has treated Muslim minorities as a temporary phenomenon that will eventually go away and, hence, can safely be ignored. There must be a common policy towards migrants and minorities in Europe.

Like other Muslim communities in Europe, the issues of the hijab and the building of mosques remain important to the Pakistani community. The issue of political representation is also present. There are few legislators of Pakistani origin in the parliaments of the various EU member states who could bring the grievances of the community to the attention of those at the highest level. In countries such as the UK and Denmark, members of the Pakistani community have been elected to legislative bodies and are part of the decision making system.

Like other minorities in Europe, ghettoization is a feature of the Pakistani community. Specific towns or cities host specific minorities in various European countries. For example, Southall in West London and the city of Bradford in Yorkshire, in the UK, and Norrebro in Denmark are major places of residence for the Pakistani diaspora.

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This trend is changing, however, and many third generation Pakistanis have moved to new areas and integrated into mainstream society. There is no European consensus about how to deal with the political, social, religious and economic problems associated with the absorption of minorities. More dialogue is required to understand the mindset of migrants in Europe and to make them feel part of European society rather than outsiders always answerable for and defensive about the so-called clash of civilizations.

An important aspect of labelling and discrimination in Europe, generally towards Muslims, is the issue of being referred to as British Pakistanis or German Turks. This is a crucial difference from the situation in the USA, where the emphasis is the other way around: they are not American Pakistanis but Pakistani Americans. They are Americans first and foremost, implying a sense of belonging and of acceptance which Europe sometimes struggles to emulate. In Europe, these citizens are a minority and not part of the mainstream.

In addition, there has been a resurgence of far-right political parties at the national and regional level in Europe in recent years as a reaction to increased multiculturalism in Europe. The rise of the far-right across the EU has been attributed to high levels of immigration. Their share of the vote at the national level has increased in countries with migrant Muslim populations, such as Belgium, Austria, the Netherlands, the UK, France, Norway and Denmark. The issue of depictions and caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad published in a Danish newspaper damaged the integration process in various EU member states vis-à-vis their Muslim minorities.

#### 4. Pakistan's Diaspora and Democratization in Pakistan

Pakistan is unstable and if it were to become a 'failed state' this would provide more room for the extremist elements in the region and facilitate their dispersal to other parts of the world to create further instability and insecurity. A secure, stable and democratic Pakistan, anchored in the international security community, is essential for the people of Pakistan and Europe. The Pakistani diaspora should be seen as an asset in facilitating this scenario. Involving the Pakistani diaspora in achieving some of the objectives of the

EU regarding Pakistan would be an important step, leading to the empowerment of the Pakistani community and, in the long run, contributing to stability and democracy building in Pakistan.

The Pakistani diaspora is important to the Pakistan Government because its remittances are one of the largest source of foreign exchange for Pakistan and an important source of liquidity. In recent years, foreign exchange

remittances have maintained a steady rising trend. In 2008–2009, remittances received from Pakistani workers overseas increased by 21.08 per cent, from USD 6451 million in 2007–2008 to USD 7811 million in 2008–09. All possible efforts are being made to boost these remittances through normal banking channels. Remittances sent by Pakistanis in Europe increased from USD 74.5 million in 2003–2004 to USD 247.6 million in 2008–2009. In August 2009, Pakistan's Finance Minister launched a Pakistani Remittance Initiative to facilitate the continued rapid growth of remittance inflows from the Pakistani diaspora.

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Despite its high level of contributions to the Pakistani economy in the form of remittances, the Pakistani diaspora has not been given much attention. Since the present Pakistan Government came to power in February 2008, efforts have been made to engage the diaspora and to involve it in the political and social life of Pakistan. Some important steps are under way to involve the Pakistani diaspora in the democratic process, electing representatives to the national and provincial assemblies. In December 2009, the Election Commission of Pakistan recommended granting representation in the national parliament to Pakistanis overseas. If the bill is approved, it will give the Pakistani diaspora all over the world a say in the democratic process in Pakistan.

## 5. EU Policy on Pakistan's Diaspora

If Europe fails Pakistan, it is not only regional and international peace and security but also democracy that will be the loser. The survival of a fragile democracy is at stake. EU officials allocated EUR 52 million in non-military aid to Pakistan in 2009, approximately the same amount as for Paraguay. For the period of 2009–2013, the figure is EUR 435 million, which is in stark contrast to the USA's recent tripling of its non-military aid to USD 1.5 billion per year over the next five years.

The first Pakistan-EU summit took place in June 2009. It signalled a step towards a change in relations between the EU and Pakistan, moving from a relationship that was mainly based on trade to a strategically focused partnership embracing security, democratic governance, humanitarian and development assistance, and regional and global issues. There was, however, no mention of the contribution or role of the Pakistani diaspora in facilitating these objectives.

The EU does not have a general or specific policy for dealing with the Pakistani diaspora and the role of the Pakistani diaspora in bilateral relations with Pakistan has not been explored by either EU officials or the Pakistani Government. Pakistan's diaspora should be considered an asset for the EU because it is a community that is still well-connected to its roots in Pakistan. The first Pakistan-EU summit has taken bilateral relations on trade and aid partnerships to a strategic level. The next step should be to involve the diaspora. Diaspora members will be good or bad ambassadors for the EU member states in Pakistan, depending on their experiences, but they have a lot to contribute as they have seen how democracy and democratic institutions work.

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## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The interests of the EU, the Pakistani government, and the Pakistani diaspora coincide. There needs to be stability in Pakistan, and this can only come through a sound democratic and economic system. There is thus a need to engage with the diaspora in a systematic way. The following recommendations could help to determine the role of the Pakistani diaspora in democracy building in Pakistan.

There should be a recognition that the Pakistani diaspora in Europe could act as a bridge and become instrumental to democracy building in Pakistan. Diaspora desk

officers in the various foreign offices of the EU member states would be an effective mechanism for determining and estimating how and where the diaspora can play an effective role in their country of origin.

Funding diaspora-led programmes could be an effective tool for investing in development projects that can help play a role in democratizing Pakistan. Such programmes may be effective, for instance, at building schools and health centres, and providing employment opportunities for people in rural areas. These programmes may also have an important function in challenging the role of extremist organizations, which undertake charity and rehabilitation work that the Pakistani government is unable to do due to a lack of resources.

The role of the Pakistani diaspora should be considered at the next Pakistan-EU summit in order to give the diaspora a stake in the whole process. A huge number of Pakistani businessmen in Europe also do business in Pakistan or import their raw materials from Pakistan. Trade concessions, especially in the textiles field, can provide a boost to stabilizing the economy and democracy in Pakistan. Exploring the pros and cons of opening up negotiations on a free-trade agreement with Pakistan could be a positive step in involving the Pakistani diaspora.

A number of Pakistani community organizations exist in various EU countries that could become cooperation partners with the EU, exploring avenues of cooperation for building and supporting democracy in Pakistan. Such diaspora forums need to be explored.

Scholarship schemes for students who are members of the Pakistani diaspora could be a significant step, enabling them to work for six months on existing EU funded cooperation projects in rural areas of Pakistan. Internship programmes in various EU bodies should be introduced for Pakistani youth in Europe so they can learn from the EU experience of institution building.

The EU should commission studies on what and how the Pakistani diaspora contributes to Pakistan. It is important to study the diaspora in detail and to determine its potential. For example, it is still not known how much party finance the various Pakistani political parties receive from the diaspora in Europe. This is especially important in the light of the new role that the diaspora could play if they are given voting rights and representation in the Pakistan Parliament in the near future.

In order to understand the role the Pakistani diaspora residing in EU countries can play in the democratization of Pakistan, there is a need to study its nature and composition. There is also a need to understand how this community has evolved and what its priorities are vis-à-vis Pakistan.

Involving and engaging the Pakistani diaspora in the process of democracy building gives the diaspora a stake in the process of the democratization of Pakistan and also encourages the democratic process in Pakistan.

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