



## EUROPE INDIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

69, Boulevard Louis Mettewie (bte.18)

1080 Brussels (Belgium)

Tel & Fax: 0032 2 469 2677, 02-840 2800 GSM: 0472 207 338

E-mail: [info@europeindia.eu](mailto:info@europeindia.eu); [sunil.prasad@telenet.be](mailto:sunil.prasad@telenet.be) Website: [www.europeindia.eu](http://www.europeindia.eu)

**Chairman: Ravi K Mehrotra, CBE Secretary General: Sunil Prasad**

EICC-2021

Brussels, 4 May 2021

Mr. David Maria Sassoli  
President of the European Parliament  
Rue Wiertz 60  
1047 Bruxelles

Dear Mr. President Sassoli,

### **Re: Pakistan's Blasphemy laws and EU's GSP plus trade privilege**

On behalf of the Europe India Chamber of Commerce, I am writing to state that we share European Parliament's serious concern on the criminal and blatant use of Blasphemy laws in Pakistan against minority Christians and the deteriorating human rights situation in the country. We also stand in support of the resolution the Parliament adopted last week (on 29 April), and its directive to the European Commission to urgently review the GSP plus trade privilege status to the country. This resolution is important for interconnected freedoms of thought, religion, belief, and expression and we stand in firm opposition to the on-going developments in Pakistan including on the rising abuse of the blasphemy laws which is inconsistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Our Chamber has been seeking withdrawal of EU's GSP plus trade privilege to Pakistan because we believe that a country which is home to all shades of darkness; from extremist ideologies and darker powers of radicalisation to the darkest manifestation of terrorism, does not deserve to receive one of the finest instruments of EU's economic and trade support. However, today we shall confine ourselves to the issue of the existing blood-thirsty Blasphemy laws as they target minorities and are used for personal vendettas.

Religious fundamentalism has become a powerful and dangerous force in the country, due mainly to the opportunism of successive political leadership that has pandered to it. The religious freedom in the country has continued to worsen and the successive governments have systematically enforced blasphemy laws to silence minority voice and to appease religious fundamentalists. Blasphemy laws are the darkest moment for religious freedom in the country.

Sir, the repeated blasphemy charges brought against Pakistani Christians show that reliance on these laws is a gift to extremists and religious fundamentalists, and they are used as tool to wage terror against Christians, to run them from society, to steal their property, and to ultimately extinguish them. The blasphemy laws have long been used not only to restrict free religious practice, but to punish minority faiths, shut down political opponents, and settle workplace or trivial arguments. History shows that despite international condemnation, successive Pakistan's governments have continued to uphold death sentence and at the same time it has been receiving significant trade benefits and other aid from the European Union. We think EU could have conditioned economic assistance or trade benefits on the repeal of this oppressive blasphemy law as a matter of policy.

We would like to remind you that Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan, time and again, had vowed to defend the country's strict blasphemy laws in the run-up to his general election win two and half years ago. PM Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), then in the opposition, had unequivocally supported each and every protest by religious fundamentalists. And now, PM Khan has made combatting Islamophobia and blasphemy a key part of his international engagements. It is no secret that the violent demonstrations and explosive statements by the radical Islamist groups like the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) which had convinced the government to "boycott French products" and is seeking the expulsion of French Ambassador from Pakistan, has the tacit support of the ruling party, government, and the powerful military.

As you are aware, despite the government recently banning the TLP, it caved into the Islamists' demands and has introduced a resolution in the Parliament to debate expulsion of French ambassador. The government has also quashed all criminal cases filed against the banned TLP. This poisonous nexus between the ruling party and the Islamists is nothing but a continuance of the political phenomenon in the country. European Union and European Parliament must not remain a passive spectator on the issue of expulsion of French Ambassador being considered by the National Assembly of Pakistan. For the victory of European values, and its liberal democracy, EU must act with confidence and with courage.

Pakistan's blasphemy law is and has been used to target the Christian and the Ahmadiyya religious community with impunity. Between the strict blasphemy laws and the political hard-liners who hold a great deal of influence, mainly Christians are afraid to speak their minds. Their fears are perhaps well-founded. Job discrimination is rampant and even in the textile industry which is the sole beneficiary of the EU's GSP plus status, the number of workers employed in the textile industry from the minority is less than "insignificant". We would like to ask, has the EU's GSP status accorded to Pakistan achieved its objective?

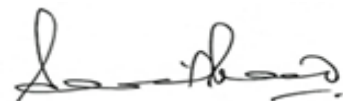
Mr. President, a tragic human drama is played every time someone is accused of blasphemy and sentenced to death. Proof is not needed; the court is just too scared to let the accused go, as happened in the case of the couple Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel (their case exclusively mentioned in the Parliament's resolution), who were sentenced to death on blasphemy charges in 2014. We are of the view that the 'misuse' of Pakistan's indefensible blasphemy laws should not be the issue for EU; its mere "existence" in the country's laws should be.

It is not out of context to state that the counterterror watchdog Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has criticized Pakistan's inaction against proscribed terror outfits that continue to function under different names. Pakistan's prosecution of designated terror groups has remained the primary stumbling block since the country's return to the grey list in 2018.

In view of the above, allowing Pakistan to continue benefitting from preferential EU trade rules despite strong international concerns over its human rights abuses threatens the EU's credibility and we appeal to the European Parliament to direct the European Commission to ask Pakistan to repeal the blasphemy laws, and until the law is repealed, withdraw the GSP status given to the country.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,



Secretary General