

Eyeing trade expansion, a German bets Pakistan can beat the odds

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KARACHI: Pakistan is resilient and strong enough to strive for economic progress in the face of worst natural disasters and the currently it is well-positioned to push the envelope of trade and investment with Germany further, a German business leader said.

“While the overall German-Pakistani development cooperation relationship, as well as trade and investment ties, are decades old and quite strong, it is high time to further expand the relationship,” Dr Pantelis Christian Poetis, who has been serving as Honorary Consul of Pakistan for last 10 years, said in an exclusive talk.

“I personally feel that the overall law and order and governance environment is quite favorable for more trade and investment: the time is ripe for the German-Pakistani development partnership.”

Poetis said creating employment opportunities, access to better health, education, infrastructure, and energy would lead to economic development and certainly contribute to long-term peace and stability, one of the key objectives of Germany’s development cooperation with Pakistan.

Dr Poetis loves Pakistan and sees a lot of potential in this country. He has been making robust efforts to enhance industrial cooperation and promote cultural exchanges between Pakistan and Germany. To promote Pakistani culture and its cuisine, he also holds food festivals in Munich at regular intervals. He is also the CEO of the POWERGROUP, a private consulting company.

Germany is a country that is traditionally highly regarded in Pakistan; the German people and products are valued and generate a positive response in Pakistan.

It is indeed very fascinating to know how a German changed his perception of Pakistan and then went on to play a significant role in further cementing the relations between the two countries.

Interestingly enough, when he was appointed as an Honorary Consul about ten years ago, he admits that he had grave concerns about Pakistan due to the adverse portrayal of the country in the press.

He had never visited Pakistan and had no first-hand experience with the culture, tradition and way of life of the Pakistanis. But then his opinion about this country changed when he came in contact with incredibly wonderful and inspiring people during his first visit. The richness of Pakistani culture and delicious cuisine were so compelling, that within a short span of time, Pakistan became almost his second home.

He found a Pakistan which was quite different from the commonly portrayed stereotypes in the Western media. The discovery of the real Pakistan led him to realise that Pakistan, similar to Germany, is a fascinating symbiosis of centuries-old traditions.

After becoming the Honorary Consul of Pakistan, he visited Pakistan many times over the last 10 years and his love for the country became stronger after each visit. The Pakistan Embassy in Berlin; the Pakistani Foreign Office and other departments also cooperated with him at all times. The display of support and nonstop cooperation gave him the impetus to keep playing a greater role in enhancing cooperation with Pakistan, particularly at the industrial & commercial level. He gives full marks to the Pakistani and German governments for appreciating his efforts and assisting him throughout his tenure.

Consul Poetis recently led a delegation of 36 Bavarian business managers who met with key Pakistani decision-makers in Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore. They all experienced the welcoming warmth of Pakistani friendship. Describing the delegation's experience, he said, "We all enjoyed the very high standard of our hosts' hospitality and their convincing ability to convince us of myriad reasons for laying the foundation for cooperation between Pakistan and Bavaria. I am confident that with such understanding and mutual support we can together master the challenges of the 21st century. "

He praised the efforts of Qazi Sajid Ali, CEO of the German Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GPCCI), and his team for providing the delegation with the immense opportunity for inspirational discussions and fruitful talks. He further explained that Sulaiman Mehdi, Chairman, Pakistan Stock Exchange, discussed briefly with him how to attract more investment to Pakistan.

He specially thanked Khurram Jameel, CEO, Siemens Healthineers Pakistan, who was part of the delegation and promised to support the project 'Patty's Child Clinics Pakistan' after the signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Lions Club Chillianwala, Patricia Poetis, initiator of the project, and Aamir Mehmood Kiani, Federal Minister for National Health Services, regarding the construction of two more Patty's Child Clinics in Pakistan.

While summing up the details of his visit to Pakistan he said, "We were not only able to experience Pakistan from a completely different angle but also had the opportunity to build a bridge between the two countries. The best part is the fact that we have been able to implement the concept of 'Made in Pakistan with German Engineering' and establish our future aim of strengthening Pakistan economically and helping it reach its full potentials while maintaining its historical, social and religious heritage."

While in Pakistan, he said he was fortunate to have the opportunity of meeting some of the experienced and highly capable leaders who provided him with the prospects of significantly improving the chances of a successful transformation. He specially mentioned the names of personalities like Chaudhry Mohammad Sarwar, Governor of Punjab, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, Abdul Razzak Dawood, Advisor to the Prime Minister, Haroon Sharif, Chairman Board of Investment, Shafqat Mahmood, Federal Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training, Aamir Mehmood Kiani, Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination and others.

He said, "My interaction with them was both interesting and rewarding. I have learnt quite a lot from them and honestly speaking the cooperative projects which have arisen through our visit would not have seen the light of day without their input."

Pakistan's relationship with Germany is of vital importance because it's not only the fourth largest economic power in the world; it is also Pakistan's 5th largest trading partner. Starting in 1961, Germany has financed development projects worth over 2.5 billion euros in Pakistan and the main goal of this cooperation has always been to see a stable and prosperous Pakistan playing a productive role in the region.

Keeping Pakistan's priorities in view, Germany has funded interventions in key sectors including sustainable economic development (education, health and vocational training), good governance (improving tax revenue) and energy (renewable and energy efficiency).

It is pertinent to mention here that Germany's role during times of humanitarian crises, including the 2005 earthquake and the 2010 floods. A very positive aspect of this incredible partnership is that, unlike partnerships with some other Western donors, it is not influenced by geo-politics. But there were some personalities in both the countries that played a very important role in taking this relationship to new heights, and Dr. Poetis is certainly one of them.