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Report – Public Talk

“Pakistan-Romania Relations”

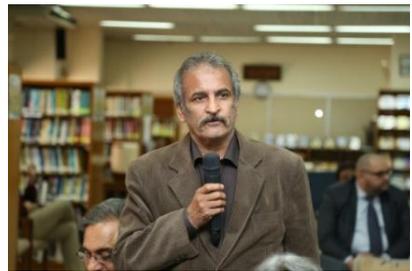
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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) held a Public Talk under its Ambassadors Platform 2018 titled “*Pakistan-Romania Relations*” on January 23, 2018. The distinguished speaker on the occasion was H.E. Mr. Nicolaie Goia, Ambassador of Romania.

Welcoming the speaker and the guests, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI reflected on the history of bilateral ties between Romania and Pakistan. He stated that Pakistan and Romania have enjoyed cordial relations since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1964. The relationship was particularly robust during the 1970-80s, as there was sizeable trade, economic activity and exchange of visits. Ambassador Mahmood said that very few people know that Romania assisted Pakistan in setting up the National Oil Refinery at Karachi and establishing cement and fertilizer plants in Pakistan. He stated that unfortunately by the end of Communist era following the anti-communist revolution in 1989, the subsequent changes in international situation led to a downturn in bilateral relations in terms of high level contacts and volume of trade. However, since Romania joined the European Union in 2007, considerable goodwill has been expressed by the Romanian leadership to further enhance relations with Pakistan in all fields.

Ambassador Mahmood said that Pakistan considers Romania an important country and partner and is keen to further strengthen bilateral ties. He informed that both the countries hold regular sessions of Bilateral Political Consultations. The volume of bilateral trade currently stands around US\$ 100 million. Both countries are working together to enhance cooperation in defense, education, science and technology and culture. He stated that Romanian and Pakistani leadership also cooperate with each other at international fora. Both countries also have extended mutual support to each other for candidature at various UN and International Organizations.

H.E. Mr. Nicolaie Goia, Ambassador of Romania briefed the audience about Romanian history. He stated that Romania, a middle sized Eastern European country, has a population of 20 million. Romania is at 41st place in the world when it comes to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Ambassador GOIA highlighted that Romania has contributed a lot in the fields of science, history, art and medicine. He pointed out that according to some historians, first writing in the world was discovered in Romania. Romania has acquired a lot of its cultural traditions from the Romans as some parts of Romania were captured and colonized by the Roman Empire.

Ambassador Goia said that in 1918, important political, economic and social developments occurred. The establishment of parliamentary system, a multi-party political system, vivid and lively press has strengthened democracy in Romania, and the economy has also started to improve steadily. But unfortunately, the economic boom could not last for long as Europe was hit by World War II. Eastern Europe came under the wave of communism after the Big Powers of that era pushed Romania into the Soviet Camp. Mr. Goia informed the audience that this caused a disastrous impact on the Russian society, economy and political setup. Human rights violations rose, mixed economy was replaced with centralized economy and dictatorship took over the parliamentary system. However, the revolution in 1989 overthrew the Soviets and brought back multi-party system and parliamentary democracy. Initially, the Romanian economy was in a transformation phase for a decade, but after 2000, the economy started to recover. Romania is now a member of both EU and NATO. Ambassador Goia highlighted the fact that Romania is the fastest growing economy in Europe with a stable democratic political system.

Talking about Pakistan-Romania relations, Ambassador Goia was pleased to inform that both countries have very friendly bilateral ties and fortunately, there is no bone of contention between the two countries. He stated that Pakistan-Romania relations are based on long standing cooperation and mutual trust. Both countries have signed multiple agreements for international cooperation in the fields of defense, security and trade. Pakistan and Romania also enjoy good cultural ties. He said that about 100 students are currently studying in Romania.

Ambassador Goia expressed his concerns regarding low volume of bilateral trade between the two countries. He believed that Pakistan has a lot to offer in terms of trade and economic prospects, and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a mega project which will help in enhancing interconnectivity in the region. He stated that CPEC can provide a great opportunity to Romanian business community to invest in CPEC related projects in the future. He expressed his optimism that trade ties will improve in the future due to Romania's booming economy and better connectivity through CPEC. Ambassador Goia highlighted that Romania's exports to Pakistan mainly include timber, furniture, chemicals and spare parts while it imports agricultural, textile, skin and leather goods from Pakistan.

The Ambassador was very optimistic about the future of Pakistan-Romania relations and said that Pakistan has recently signed an agreement for joint defense production with Romania. A few agreements regarding cooperation in scientific fields and avoidance of double taxation on trade goods are also in the pipeline. Romania is also important for Pakistan because being a member of the European Union; Romania was a staunch supporter of Pakistan when it came to giving the latter the GSP Plus status. Due to this scheme, Pakistan's exports to the EU have increased by more than 30 per cent.

Ambassador Goia said that Pakistan is an important country not only in the region, but also internationally. It has made significant contributions in establishing peace and stability in the region. He stated that Romania is aware of the fact that Pakistan is playing a critical role in fighting terrorism and has paid a heavy price of the war on terror which includes more than 75,000 casualties.

The talk was followed by a lively question and answer session.

To a question on whether Romania would support for the renewal of its GSP Plus status, and try to make the EU member countries understand that capital punishments are necessary in cases where the terrorists are targeting innocent children, for example, the Army Public School incident, Ambassador GOIA responded that suspension of capital punishment is not part of the conditions for the renewal of GSP plus status and its should only be considered in extreme cases.

Responding to a question regarding Romania's position on the Kashmir issue and rising Indian atrocities, Ambassador Goia stated that Romania is in favor of encouraging dialogue between the two countries and doesn't support any violation of the UNSC's resolutions. He was of the opinion that this issue should be resolved peacefully, and both India and Pakistan should seek a peaceful solution to this issue by themselves.

A question was raised about ways in which the information gap between Romanians and Pakistanis can be bridged. To this, Ambassador Goia said that people-to-people contact should be encouraged. More business opportunities should be provided to the business community of the two countries in order to enhance trade. He was of the opinion that the negative image of Pakistan abroad has also widened the gap between the citizens of the two countries. Foreign

journalists should be allowed to travel around various parts of Pakistan in order to promote a positive image of Pakistan abroad. He stressed that more people-to-people contact would greatly help in narrowing this gap.

When asked whether Romania sees the return of Romania migrants to their home country as a problem, Ambassador Goia agreed that a reverse migration process has started, but at a very slow pace. However, Romania is happy to have these people back and hope that they will help in developing the country through the skills, experiences and knowledge they have attained while living and working in UK and other European countries.

In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood stressed upon the need for exploration of new cooperation avenues. He stated that private sector should also be involved in order to enhance bilateral trade. He agreed with Ambassador Goia that at the moment, CPEC is a bilateral project, but soon it will open its doors for other countries as well and Pakistan would be looking forward to Romania's participation in these projects in the future. Moreover, Ambassador Mahmood clarified that the Kashmiri struggle is for the right of self-determination and it's not only a bilateral dispute between India and Pakistan. Hence, the international community needs to play a proactive role in order to resolve this issue which is necessary to establish regional peace.