

FROM MINSK WITH AGREEMENTS: A STRATEGIC APPRAISAL OF THE PM'S VISIT TO BELARUS

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Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's official visit to Belarus on 10-11 April 2025 marked a significant milestone in the bilateral context as well as Pakistan's diplomatic and economic engagement abroad. Accompanying the Prime Minister were several members of the Cabinet, including Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, Federal Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Tariq Fatemi.¹

This visit followed a series of high-level interactions between the two countries, including the 8th session of the Pakistan-Belarus Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC) held in February 2025 and the visit of a high-powered ministerial delegation from Pakistan to Belarus earlier in April 2025. Furthermore, in November 2024, President Aleksandr Lukashenko had undertaken an official visit to Pakistan, during which the two sides signed the 'Roadmap for Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement' along with 15 other Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), laying the groundwork for long-term collaboration across a broad range of areas.

The 2025 visit resulted in multiple agreements relating to defence, labour, agriculture, industrial cooperation, and environmental protection. Significantly, Belarus extended an invitation to over

¹ "Belarus offers to host 150,000 skilled Pakistani workers: PM Shehbaz", DAWN, published April 11, 2025. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1903558>

150,000 skilled Pakistani workers, aimed at addressing its labour shortages. This development is set to further strengthen bilateral relations and open new avenues in various key sectors.²

Key Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) Signed

1. Defence and Security Cooperation

- A comprehensive roadmap for military-technical cooperation for 2025–2027 signed between Pakistan's Ministry of Defence Production and Belarus's State Authority for Military Industry.
- A separate defence cooperation agreement concluded between both Defence Ministries.
- A Readmission Agreement and cooperation protocol between Interior Ministries, focusing on organized crime, counter-terrorism, and migration, also finalized.³

2. Labour Mobility

- As mentioned, Belarus offered to host over 150,000 skilled Pakistani workers to support its industrial and agricultural sectors. Prime Minister Sharif hailed this as a "gift" for the Pakistani people.⁴

3. Economic and Industrial Collaboration

- Joint ventures were proposed for agricultural machinery and electric bus manufacturing to benefit Pakistan's rural economy and reduce urban transport gaps.
- Discussions also involved taking advantage of Belarus' vast experience in production of mining equipment and industrial goods to harness the potential of Pakistan's vast mineral resources.⁵

² Falak Mahmood Khan, "Pakistan PM ends 'monumental' Belarus visit as both sides sign defense, trade and environmental pacts", Arab News, updated April 11, 2025.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2596700/pakistan>

³ "Belarus, Pakistan sign package of cooperation agreements", BELTA, published April 11, 2025.

<https://eng.belta.by/president/view/belarus-pakistan-sign-package-of-cooperation-agreements-167063-2025/>

⁴ "Belarus offers to host 150,000 skilled Pakistani workers: PM Shehbaz", DAWN, published April 11, 2025.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1903558>

⁵ Falak Mahmood Khan, "Pakistan PM ends 'monumental' Belarus visit as both sides sign defense, trade and environmental pacts", Arab News, updated April 11, 2025.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2596700/pakistan>

4. Environmental and Trade Agreements

- Agreements were signed for cooperation in environmental protection and climate change mitigation.
- Business facilitation MoUs included postal coordination, private sector engagement, and cross-border transportation.

Appraisal of Agreements and Broader Diplomatic Implications

The visit yielded multiple agreements reinvigorating Pakistan-Belarus ties. It is pertinent to assess both the new opportunities as well as some potential challenges.

Labour Deal – Promising Opportunities with Implementation Considerations

The invitation by Belarus to welcome 150,000 Pakistani workers represents a promising opportunity for both countries. For Pakistan, it could enhance remittance flows and create employment avenues, while Belarus could address existing labour gaps in agriculture, mining, and manufacturing. At the same time, there are important factors to consider as both sides move toward operationalizing this initiative.

Belarus remains under EU and U.S. sanctions stemming from its domestic political climate and involvement in the Ukraine conflict, which may present administrative and legal challenges in formalizing large-scale labour movement.

Moreover, while Belarus has made efforts to engage internationally on economic and labour fronts, some international organizations, including Amnesty International, have pointed to areas where labour rights and protections for foreign workers could benefit from further development.⁶

In this context, it would be prudent for Pakistan to explore comprehensive bilateral labour agreements (BLAs) that proactively address the welfare, legal safeguards, and dispute resolution mechanisms necessary for ensuring a secure and mutually beneficial experience for its workforce abroad.

Additionally, there have been concerns raised in some parts of Eastern Europe, including Poland, regarding irregular migration flows that have allegedly passed through Belarus.⁷ Reports have

⁶ "Belarus 2024", Amnesty International, accessed April 15, 2025.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/belarus/report-belarus/>

⁷ Tatsiana Ashurkevich, "Inside Belarus' secret program to undermine the EU", POLITICO, accessed April 16, 2025.

suggested that Belarus has previously been accused of facilitating or "instrumentalizing" migration as a geopolitical tool.^{8 9} In parallel, there have been increasing cases of Pakistani nationals seeking irregular entry into Europe via various transit corridors.^{10 11}

While the labour mobility agreement aims to be structured and lawful, it would be prudent for authorities in both Belarus and Pakistan to maintain strict due oversight and clear mechanisms to ensure that such movements are regulated, transparent, and mutually agreed upon — mitigating any potential misuse of the framework and maintaining the trust of European partners.

In response to past concerns over irregular migration through Belarus, including the 2021 EU border crisis, both Belarus and Pakistan have emphasized their commitment to ensuring labour cooperation remains lawful. Belarus denies facilitating illegal migration and maintains that claims of criminal activity by Pakistani nationals are unfounded.¹² While isolated incidents involving irregular entry via Russia have been reported, both governments have pledged to enhance oversight and coordination to prevent misuse of migration channels.

Pakistan has underscored the importance of regulated labour migration, committing to transparency and adherence to international standards in its agreements with Belarus. Both sides have agreed to strengthen bilateral monitoring and information-sharing mechanisms to prevent misuse of labour mobility for irregular migration. These steps aim to ensure lawful cooperation while addressing European concerns about migration flows.

Defence Cooperation – Expanding Strategic Options with Diplomatic Considerations

The 2025–2027 military-technical cooperation roadmap signifies Pakistan's intention to diversify its defence partnerships and leverage Belarusian expertise in specialized military-industrial

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- ⁸ <https://www.politico.eu/article/alexander-lukashenko-belarus-secret-program-to-undermine-the-eu/>
Dr. Aurel Sari, "Instrumentalized migration and the Belarus crisis: Strategies of legal coercion", Hybrid CoE Paper, The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, Paper # 17, published April 2023.
<https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/20230425-Hybrid-CoE-Paper-17-Instrumentalized-migration-and-Belarus-WEB.pdf>
- ⁹ Aleksandra Ancite-Jepfanova, "Migrant Instrumentalisation: Facts and Fictions – Realities on the Ground at the EU-Belarus Border", Verfassungsblog, published September 21, 2023.
<https://verfassungsblog.de/migrant-instrumentalisation-facts-and-fictions/>
- ¹⁰ Roberto Forin & Peter Grant, "Pakistani Nationals on the Move to Europe: New Pressures, Risks, Opportunities", Mixed Migration Centre, published July 31, 2023.
<https://mixedmigration.org/pakistani-nationals-on-the-move-to-europe/>
- ¹¹ Fatima S. Attarwala, "Europe – the new hot spot", DAWN, published May 27, 2024.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1835777>
- ¹² "The Interior Ministry reassures: Migrants from Pakistan aren't coming, and no crimes are being committed. We found both the migrants and the crimes", Belarusian Investigative Center (BIC), published on April 30, 2025.
<https://investigatebel.org/en/fakenews/migranti-pakistan-belarus-mvd>

technologies. These may include optical-electronic systems, equipment repair capabilities, and dual-use technologies that could complement Pakistan's existing defence infrastructure.

At the same time, given the complex geopolitical landscape and Pakistan's broader foreign policy goals, it would be prudent to maintain a balanced and transparent approach in defence collaboration.

A pragmatic step forward could involve Pakistan communicating the purely technical and bilateral nature of such defence engagements, while continuing to strengthen its diplomatic dialogue with European stakeholders to reinforce its position as a constructive and non-aligned partner.

Economic Ventures – Promising Avenues Amid Structural Considerations

Proposals for joint manufacturing of electric buses and agricultural machinery represent a forward-looking step toward industrial collaboration between Pakistan and Belarus. These ventures, if effectively realized, could support Pakistan's rural and urban infrastructure needs while drawing on Belarus's technical expertise.

That said, some contextual factors may merit attention. Belarus's limited access to Western financial systems and international markets, primarily due to ongoing sanctions, could pose challenges in terms of project financing and market outreach. Furthermore, the operational environment within Belarus—characterized by a more centralized industrial structure—might differ from the dynamics familiar to Pakistan's private sector investors.

To navigate these factors successfully, among other things, it would be advisable to explore frameworks supported by multilateral or regional economic arrangements such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), or China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These platforms could also offer channels for long-term implementation, financing, and technology cooperation while reinforcing confidence among private stakeholders on both sides.

Diplomatic Sensitivities and Perception Management in Europe

Pakistan's engagement with Belarus, while aimed at advancing bilateral cooperation, may be viewed with measured caution by some European Union member states, particularly those in Eastern Europe. This is largely due to Belarus's close alignment with Russian geopolitical positions and its standing under the EU sanctions regime. Additionally, heightened European sensitivity toward engagement with states considered to have limited political pluralism could shape perceptions of Pakistan's broader foreign policy orientation.

Pakistan may consider reinforcing its diplomatic messaging to affirm that its cooperation with Belarus is focused on pragmatic, sector-specific goals—particularly in labour, trade, and industrial development—and does not signal any departure from its constructive approach to relations.

Proactive communication, enhanced transparency in agreement implementation, and parallel engagement with other stakeholders can help ensure that Pakistan's evolving ties with Belarus are better understood and appreciated within the wider framework of its balanced foreign policy outlook.

Strategic Significance of PM Sharif's 2025 Belarus visit

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to Belarus underscores a broader strategy of diplomatic diversification and regional engagement. By reaching beyond traditional partners, Pakistan is signalling its intent to deepen relations across Eurasia, especially in consonance with evolving multipolar trends. The agreements signed on labour, industry, and defence cooperation not only reflect Islamabad's efforts to address domestic development goals—such as employment generation, infrastructure modernization, and technology acquisition—but also showcase its desire to build flexible, multidimensional partnerships. The visit highlights Pakistan's willingness to enhance collaboration with non-traditional partners while remaining mindful of its broader global relationships, particularly with European stakeholders. Ultimately, this outreach adds to Pakistan's diplomatic space and positions it as a country seeking pragmatic and balanced international engagement.

Future Outlook

The visit lays the groundwork for a future-oriented trajectory in Pakistan-Belarus relations. It paves the way for expanded labour mobility under a regulated framework, structured industrial partnerships guided by high-level oversight, and a calibrated diplomatic posture that sustains productive engagement with Belarus while staying aligned with Pakistan's broader strategic interests, including its relationships with the European Union and NATO member states. These developments signal a forward-looking and multidimensional diplomatic agenda that blends economic pragmatism with strategic nuance.

Conclusion

To ensure that the momentum generated by this visit translates into tangible outcomes, Pakistan could consider establishing a high-level Pakistan-Belarus Coordination Committee. Such a mechanism would not only oversee the implementation of signed agreements but also provide a

platform for strategic direction and addressing operational challenges – fostering continuous engagement with both Belarusian and other relevant stakeholders.