

**Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad urges renewed diplomacy on Ukraine as UN debates risks of wider regional escalation**

**Liaquat Ali**

Islamabad: Pakistan this week warned that the prolonged war in Ukraine is creating increasingly dangerous consequences beyond the immediate battlefield, cautioning that continued military escalation could trigger wider regional instability, cross-border

(Page-5)

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**U.S. Embassy hosts spectacular 'Freedom 250' Gala in Islamabad**

**Celina Ali**

Islamabad: The diplomatic enclave of the federal capital was illuminated last night as the United States Mission in Pakistan hosted a historic "Freedom 250" gala. The grand reception marked two and a half centuries of American democratic history while celebrating the enduring, nearly 80-year

(Page-10)

# Pakistan moves to convert US \$7.54 billion China agreements into investment projects

**Celina Ali**

Islamabad: Pakistan this week launched an ambitious drive to transform \$7.54 billion worth of preliminary agreements signed during Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's recent visit to China into concrete investment projects and joint ventures, as Islamabad seeks to accelerate the next phase of economic cooperation with Beijing and attract greater Chinese investment into key sectors of the economy. Chairing a high-level review meeting in Islamabad on Monday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed all relevant ministries and government departments to expedite the implementation of agreements reached during the Pakistan-China Business-to-Business (B2B) Conference held in Hangzhou during his visit to China from May 23 to 26. He also announced that he would personally oversee progress through monthly review meetings to ensure that the understandings reached between Pakistani and Chinese companies are translated into tangible economic outcomes.

The move reflects Pakistan's broader strategy to deepen economic engagement with China beyond the infrastructure and energy projects that characterized the first phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the flagship component of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Pakistan. Over the past decade, CPEC has brought tens of billions of dollars in Chinese investment into Pakistan, financing major power generation projects, motorways, transport infrastructure and the development of Gwadar Port. Pakistani policymakers now view the second phase of cooperation as an opportunity to attract investment into productive sectors capable of generating employment, increasing exports and strengthening industrial capacity. According to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office, PM Sharif instructed officials that the memorandums of understanding signed during the Hangzhou conference should be swiftly converted into formal agreements, investment projects and joint ventures

between Pakistani and Chinese firms. The prime minister emphasized that rapid implementation was essential for maximizing the economic benefits of the agreements and ensuring that investment commitments materialize on the ground. Officials informed the meeting that the Pakistan-China Business-to-Business Conference witnessed unprecedented participation from the private sectors of both countries. A total of 123 Pakistani companies and 436 Chinese enterprises took part in the event, highlighting growing business interest in expanding commercial cooperation between the two nations. The conference resulted in the signing of approximately 207 memorandums of understanding valued at US \$7.54 billion, covering a diverse range of sectors considered critical to Pakistan's future economic growth. The investment agreements span battery energy storage systems, artificial intelligence, mobile phone and handheld device manufacturing, fertilizer production, seed development, modern irrigation technologies, fisheries, food processing, biotechnology and vaccine manufacturing. Many of these sectors are regarded as strategic priorities for Pakistan as it seeks to modernize its industrial base and enhance export competitiveness. Speaking during the meeting, PM Sharif described the surge in business engagement between Pakistani and Chinese companies as a landmark development in bilateral economic relations.

"An extraordinary increase in business linkages between the private sectors of Pakistan and China marks the beginning of a new era in the economic partnership between the two countries," the prime minister said. He noted that greater cooperation in industry, agriculture and technology would help expand Pakistan's export potential while creating new employment opportunities for the country's growing workforce. The prime minister's visit to China focused heavily on attracting investment and encouraging private-sector partnerships. During the trip, Sharif held meetings with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Chinese Premier Li Qiang, while also participating in a series of business engagements aimed at encouraging Chinese companies to invest in Pakistan's manufacturing, mining, agriculture and technology sectors. Economic experts view the latest agreements as particularly significant because they signal a shift in Pakistan-

China cooperation from government-led infrastructure projects toward private-sector-driven industrial investment. Such investments are expected to support Pakistan's efforts to sustain economic stabilization, strengthen foreign exchange earnings and boost export-oriented production. The implementation drive comes at a time when Pakistan is working to consolidate economic recovery under a US \$7 billion program with the International Monetary Fund while seeking new avenues for growth through foreign direct investment and industrial expansion. In addition to industrial cooperation, Sharif directed officials to accelerate collaboration between the China Academy of Agricultural Sciences and the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, describing agricultural modernization as a key pillar of future Pakistan-China cooperation. The prime minister said that joint agricultural research, technology transfer and collaborative ventures could help transform Pakistan's farming sector by introducing advanced cultivation techniques, improving productivity

and enhancing food security. Officials told the meeting that the agricultural partnership would focus on research cooperation, the adoption of modern farming technologies and the development of joint projects designed to increase yields and improve efficiency across the sector. Agriculture remains one of Pakistan's most important economic sectors, contributing nearly a quarter of national economic output and employing a substantial share of the country's labor force. Policymakers believe that closer collaboration with Chinese agricultural institutions could play a pivotal role in modernizing the sector and improving rural incomes. The government hopes that the implementation of the newly signed agreements, coupled with enhanced industrial and agricultural cooperation, will usher in a new phase of investment-led growth, strengthen Pakistan's economic ties with China and create a foundation for long-term economic development driven by technology, innovation and export-oriented industries.



## More Americans seek Canadian citizenship as expanded eligibility rules take effect



**Covert Report**

Ottawa: A growing number of Americans are pursuing Canadian citizenship as Canada's newly expanded citizenship-by-descent rules open the door to a broader pool of applicants with Canadian ancestry. Recent data released by Canada's immigration authorities shows a sharp increase in citizenship approvals since the revised legislation came into force in December 2025. The changes allow a wider range of descendants of Canadian citizens to claim citizenship, extending eligibility well beyond the previous first-generation limit. The impact has been immediate. Approvals for proof of citizenship by descent have increased by more than 1,000 additional cases per month during the first months of 2026, a significant jump from the 275 extra approvals recorded in December when the legislation was introduced. Nearly half of those newly approved applications through February—around 48 percent—originated from the United States, underscoring strong American interest in obtaining Canadian citizenship. The surge comes at a time when relations between Washington and Ottawa have experienced tensions under US President Donald Trump's administration. Despite political strains between the neighboring countries, immigration experts say Canada continues to hold strong appeal for many Americans because of its social stability, educational opportunities, healthcare system, and quality of life. Legal experts specializing in immigration matters note that the high proportion of American applicants reflects the deep historical, cultural, and familial connections that have long linked the two countries. They

also point to growing interest among Americans in securing greater mobility and future opportunities for themselves and their families amid political and economic uncertainty in the United States. For many applicants, the attraction extends beyond immediate relocation plans. Rather, Canadian citizenship is viewed as a long-term investment that offers future generations broader educational, employment, and residency options. Among them is Seattle resident William Hunnewell, 41, who submitted his application earlier this year and expects a decision within nine to twelve months. His eligibility stems from family roots in Canada dating back more than a century. Hunnewell's great-grandfather settled as a homesteader in Saskatchewan before the First World War, while his grandfather was born in Canada. He said obtaining Canadian citizenship would provide valuable flexibility for his family, particularly for his daughter. With citizenship, future opportunities to study, work, or live in Canada would become significantly easier, eliminating many of the visa and immigration hurdles that international applicants typically face. The rising number of applications highlights how Canada's revised citizenship framework is reshaping access to nationality for people with ancestral ties to the country, while reinforcing Canada's reputation as an attractive destination for those seeking greater educational, professional, and lifestyle opportunities across North America.

## Bilawal Bhutto calls for climate justice, says vulnerable nations cannot bear climate burden alone

**Liaquat Ali**

Islamabad: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari this week called for urgent global action against climate change, warning that countries contributing the least to global emissions are continuing to suffer the most severe consequences of an escalating environmental crisis. In a message issued on World Environment Day, Bilawal described climate change as a defining challenge of the modern era and said the struggle against environmental degradation had become a battle for humanity's future. He stressed that the climate crisis is no longer a distant threat but a harsh reality already affecting millions of people worldwide. The PPP chairman said the increasing frequency of floods, droughts, heatwaves and water shortages demonstrates the growing intensity of climate change and its devastating impact on communities across the globe. He noted that vulnerable populations are increasingly facing economic hardship, displacement and loss of livelihoods as environmental disasters become more frequent and severe.

"Climate change is not a debate or a prediction for countless families; it is the loss of a home, a livelihood, a harvest and, in many cases, a loved one," he said, emphasizing that the human cost of climate change is being felt every day in communities struggling to recover from environmental shocks. Highlighting Pakistan's exposure to climate-related risks, Bilawal noted that the country remains among the nations most vulnerable to climate change despite contributing only a small fraction of global greenhouse gas emissions. He argued that this disparity underscores the urgent need for climate justice and greater international responsibility. According to Bilawal, developing countries are paying a disproportionate price for emissions largely generated by industrialized economies. He said millions of people in climate-vulnerable states are facing the consequences through damaged infrastructure, reduced agricultural productivity, increased poverty and greater exposure to natural disasters. Calling for a more equitable global response, the PPP chairman urged the international community to recognize the unique challenges confronting countries on the frontline of climate change. He stressed that vulnerable nations require stronger support to enhance adaptation measures, build resilience and pursue sustainable development pathways. Bilawal emphasized that climate action must move beyond rhetoric and translate into meaningful commitments, including greater climate financing, technology transfer and international cooperation. He said developing countries need adequate resources to strengthen disaster preparedness, protect vulnerable communities and transition toward greener and more sustainable economies.



Reaffirming his party's commitment to environmental sustainability, renewable energy and conservation efforts, Bilawal said sustainable development should remain at the heart of policymaking. He argued that long-term prosperity cannot be achieved without protecting natural resources and addressing environmental challenges. The PPP chairman also paid tribute to former prime ministers Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto, saying their vision linked social progress with responsible stewardship of natural resources and sustainable development. He reiterated that environmental protection is not merely an ecological concern but a social and economic imperative that directly affects the well-being of future generations. Stressing the need for collective action, Bilawal called upon governments, international institutions, businesses and citizens to work together in confronting the climate emergency. "The Earth is a trust we hold for future generations," he said, urging policymakers around the world to place sustainability, resilience and environmental responsibility at the centre of development strategies. His remarks came as countries across the world marked World Environment Day amid growing concern over accelerating climate impacts. For Pakistan, which has experienced devastating floods, recurring heatwaves, worsening water stress and other climate-related challenges in recent years, climate resilience remains one of the country's most pressing long-term priorities. Bilawal's message reinforced calls for stronger international cooperation and renewed focus on climate justice, arguing that the global response to climate change must reflect both shared responsibility and support for those nations bearing the heaviest burden of a crisis they did little to create.

# Pakistani women climate innovators take centre stage as France spotlights grassroots environmental leadership



diversity of submissions demonstrated the emergence of a new generation of environmental champions committed to building climate-resilient communities. After a rigorous evaluation process, two outstanding women were selected for recognition. Zillay Mariam was honoured for her pioneering efforts in promoting green entrepreneurship and introducing innovative technological approaches to plastic and organic waste management. Her work focuses on transforming waste into economic opportunities while advancing environmentally sustainable practices. Songul Jamal received the award for her contributions to marine conservation and her efforts to protect vulnerable coral reef ecosystems. Her initiatives have helped raise awareness about the importance of preserving marine biodiversity and safeguarding coastal environments from the growing impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. Congratulating the award winners, Ambassador Galey described them as powerful examples of how community-level leadership can generate

meaningful environmental impact. He said their achievements demonstrate that locally driven initiatives can play a critical role in advancing global climate goals while delivering tangible benefits to communities. The ceremony was attended by prominent climate and development stakeholders, including Sherry Rehman, Chairperson of the Senate Climate Committee; Aisha Humaira Moriani; Samuel Rizk; and climate advocate Aisha Khan, underscoring the broad support for women-led climate action in Pakistan. Ambassador Galey emphasized that climate action and gender equality remain closely linked priorities in France's international engagement. He noted that women and girls often bear a disproportionate share of the impacts of climate change, particularly in vulnerable regions where environmental disasters can deepen existing social and economic inequalities. He said empowering women to participate in environmental decision-making and climate adaptation efforts is essential for building resilient societies capable of confronting future challenges. According to the ambassador, strengthening women's leadership in climate governance is not only a matter of equality but also a practical necessity for achieving sustainable development objectives. Highlighting France's broader climate commitments, Galey reaffirmed support for international efforts aimed at implementing the goals of the Paris Agreement and accelerating global action against climate change. He stressed that international cooperation remains vital as countries confront increasingly frequent and severe climate-related disasters. Describing Pakistan as one of the countries most exposed to climate risks, he said partnerships focused on resilience, adaptation and sustainable development are particularly important. He noted that France has continued to support climate-focused initiatives worldwide and has committed substantial resources to projects aimed at helping developing countries transition toward greener and more resilient economies.

The ambassador also highlighted the contribution of the French Development Agency, which has worked alongside the French Embassy in supporting climate and development initiatives in Pakistan. Since 2006, the agency has backed dozens of projects across multiple sectors, integrating climate resilience and gender inclusion into its development agenda. Participants at the ceremony said the Gender and Climate Award has become an increasingly influential platform for recognising women whose efforts often remain unseen despite their significant contributions to environmental protection and community resilience. Beyond celebrating individual achievements, the initiative seeks to encourage greater participation of women in climate leadership and strengthen networks of environmental innovators across Pakistan. As climate challenges continue to intensify, the event underscored the growing recognition that women are not only among those most affected by environmental change but are also emerging as some of the most effective leaders in developing practical, community-based solutions. Through initiatives such as the Gender and Climate Award, their work is gaining greater visibility and helping shape a more inclusive and sustainable response to the climate crisis.

**Celina Ali**  
Islamabad: Pakistani women driving innovative solutions to some of the country's most pressing environmental challenges were placed in the international spotlight as the French Embassy in Pakistan this week hosted the fourth edition of the Gender and Climate Award 2026, celebrating female leadership in climate resilience, sustainability and environmental protection. The ceremony brought together senior government officials, diplomats, development partners, climate experts and civil society representatives to recognize women whose work is helping communities adapt to climate change and build a more sustainable future. The event highlighted the growing influence of women-led initiatives in addressing environmental challenges

ranging from waste management and green entrepreneurship to marine conservation and ecosystem protection. Speaking on the occasion, French Ambassador to Pakistan Nicolas Galey said the award has evolved into an important platform for identifying and supporting women climate leaders across Pakistan. He noted that the initiative has expanded considerably since its inception, attracting increasing interest from applicants, partners and environmental organizations every year. The ambassador observed that this year's competition received more than 350 applications from across the country, reflecting both the urgency of climate-related challenges and the growing engagement of women in developing local solutions. He said the quality and

meaningful environmental impact. He said their achievements demonstrate that locally driven initiatives can play a critical role in advancing global climate goals while delivering tangible benefits to communities. The ceremony was attended by prominent climate and development stakeholders, including Sherry Rehman, Chairperson of the Senate Climate Committee; Aisha Humaira Moriani; Samuel Rizk; and climate advocate Aisha Khan, underscoring the broad support for women-led climate action in Pakistan. Ambassador Galey emphasized that climate action and gender equality remain closely linked priorities in France's international engagement. He noted that women and girls often bear a disproportionate share of the impacts of climate change, particularly in vulnerable



# Nepal seeks stronger tourism partnership with Pakistan, unveils ambitious travel initiatives



**Celina Ali**  
Islamabad: Nepal Friday sought to deepen tourism cooperation with Pakistan while positioning itself as a global destination for adventure, wellness and sustainable travel, unveiling ambitious tourism initiatives and highlighting growing people-to-people links between the two countries during celebrations marking the 73rd International Everest Day in Islamabad. Speaking at a ceremony organized by the Embassy of Nepal, Nepal's Ambassador to Pakistan, Rita Dhital, said the increasing participation of Pakistani climbers on Mount Everest and other Himalayan peaks reflected the growing tourism and cultural connectivity between the two South Asian nations, both home to some of the world's most spectacular mountain landscapes. The ambassador noted that Mount Everest, known as Sagarmatha in Nepal, has evolved beyond its status as the world's highest peak to become a global symbol of human determination, resilience and international cooperation. She recalled the historic first ascent of Everest by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa

in 1953, describing it as an achievement that continues to inspire climbers and adventurers across generations. Highlighting the enduring appeal of Everest, Dhital said more than 1,000 climbers from 56 countries successfully reached the summit during the 2026 spring climbing season, demonstrating the mountain's continued attraction as one of the world's premier adventure tourism destinations. She congratulated Pakistani climber Salman Ateeque on his successful ascent of Everest on May 21 and praised the growing presence of Pakistani mountaineers in Nepal. The ambassador also acknowledged the achievements of celebrated Pakistani climbers Samina Baig and Naila Kiani, saying their accomplishments had helped inspire a new generation of women adventurers and mountaineers in Pakistan. Referring to Nepal's tourism-driven economy, Dhital said mountain tourism and expedition activities remain critical sources of employment, local economic development and foreign exchange earnings. She emphasized that Nepal is increasingly focusing on sustainable and high-value tourism experiences that benefit local communities while preserving natural and cultural heritage. As part of that strategy, she announced that Nepal has designated 2027 as "Nepal Wellness Year," a campaign

aimed at promoting the country as a global hub for holistic health, spiritual healing and wellness tourism. She further revealed that the government would launch "Visit Nepal Year 2028," a major tourism promotion initiative designed to attract international visitors, upgrade tourism infrastructure and modernize travel services across the country. The ambassador invited tourists, investors and adventure enthusiasts from Pakistan and around the world to participate in the upcoming campaigns and experience Nepal's diverse tourism offerings, ranging from mountaineering and trekking to cultural and wellness tourism. While underscoring the economic significance of tourism, Dhital also warned that the Himalayan region faces mounting threats from climate change, glacier retreat and environmental degradation. She said these challenges not only endanger fragile ecosystems and biodiversity but also threaten the livelihoods, cultural heritage and economic prospects of mountain communities. The ambassador stressed that protecting the Himalayas requires stronger international cooperation and collective environmental action. She highlighted Nepal's efforts to promote sustainable mountain tourism through initiatives such as the "cash for trash" programme, stricter waste management protocols and enhanced climber safety regulations aimed at preserving Everest and



surrounding mountain ecosystems. The event brought together diplomats, government officials, tourism stakeholders and renowned mountain-

leaders from both countries. It began with the national anthems of Nepal and Pakistan and featured a video message from Nepal's Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal as well as presentations showcasing Nepal's iconic 8,000-metre peaks and tourism attractions. Major General (ret'd) Irfan Arshad, President of the Alpine Club of Pakistan, paid tribute to Pakistani Everest climbers and highlighted the country's growing footprint in international mountaineering. A video presentation showcasing the achievements of Pakistani Everest summiteers was also screened during the ceremony. Managing Director of the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC), Aflab ur Rehman Rana, emphasized the significant potential for collaboration between Pakistan and Nepal in adventure tourism, mountain expeditions and destination marketing. Chief Guest Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan, Prime Minister's Coordinator on Tourism, delivered concluding remarks and underscored the importance of regional tourism cooperation for economic growth and people-to-people engagement. The ceremony concluded with the presentation of tokens of honour to distinguished guests and Everest summiteers, reinforcing the growing partnership between Nepal and Pakistan in promoting adventure tourism, mountain conservation and regional connectivity.



# Pakistan-Italy partnership gains momentum as leaders celebrate expanding cooperation at Italy National Day reception

**Abida Shaheen**

Islamabad: Pakistan and Italy have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening a multifaceted partnership spanning trade, investment, energy, labour mobility and cultural exchanges, as senior leaders from both countries gathered in Islamabad this week to celebrate Italy's National Day and underscore the growing depth of bilateral relations. The high-profile reception highlighted the steady expansion of ties between Islamabad and Rome, with

Federal Minister Hanif Abbasi and Faisal Karim Kundi, reflecting the importance attached by Pakistan to its relationship with Italy. Addressing the gathering, Ambassador Armellini highlighted the positive momentum in bilateral relations and pointed to significant opportunities for expanding cooperation in sectors that are increasingly shaping the future economic landscape of both countries. She identified energy, infrastructure development, industrial cooperation, agriculture, technological innovation and climate resilience as areas with substantial potential for



officials emphasizing that cooperation between the two countries has evolved beyond traditional diplomatic engagement to encompass a wide range of economic, developmental and people-to-people initiatives. The ceremony brought together prominent members of Pakistan's political leadership, diplomats, senior government officials, parliamentarians, business representatives and members of the diplomatic corps. Federal Minister for Energy Ali Pervaiz Malik attended as chief guest and joined Italy's Ambassador to Pakistan Marilina Armellini in a cake-cutting ceremony marking the national celebra-

deeper engagement. The ambassador noted that Pakistan and Italy have developed a strong foundation of mutual trust and collaboration over the years, enabling both countries to pursue new partnerships in emerging sectors while strengthening traditional areas of cooperation. As she prepares to conclude her diplomatic assignment in Pakistan later this month, Ambassador Armellini described Italy as a longstanding and reliable European partner of Pakistan and highlighted the important role played by the Pakistani diaspora in strengthening



between the two nations. Members of the diaspora have contributed significantly to Italy's economy while maintaining close cultural and social links with Pakistan, helping foster greater understanding and connectivity between the two societies. Speaking at the event, Energy Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik praised the Pakistani community in Italy for its contributions to both countries. He said the diaspora has emerged as a vital pillar of bilateral relations by promoting economic engagement, cultural exchange and stronger people-to-people connections. The minister noted that cooperation in labour mobility has become one of the most dynamic aspects of the Pakistan-Italy relationship in recent years. He said both governments have worked closely to create pathways for skilled Pakistani workers to access employment opportunities in Italy, benefiting both economies and strengthen-

ing human connections between the two countries. According to Malik, the labour mobility agreement signed between Pakistan and Italy has opened new prospects for thousands of Pakistanis seeking overseas employment while helping Italy address workforce requirements in various sectors. The initiative, he said, represents a successful example of mutually beneficial cooperation that contributes to economic growth and social development in both countries. Officials at the reception also highlighted the broad framework of bilateral engagement that now encompasses trade, investment, tourism, education, culture, science and technology, defence cooperation and coordinated efforts to counter transnational crime. Over the years, Pakistan and Italy have maintained regular diplomatic engagement and have sought to deepen institutional cooperation through various agree-

ments and joint initiatives. Both countries have increasingly focused on expanding commercial ties and encouraging business-to-business partnerships to unlock new economic opportunities. Participants observed that the relationship continues to gain strength amid growing global economic and geopolitical challenges, with both sides expressing interest in enhancing collaboration in areas linked to sustainable development, energy transition, technological innovation and climate adaptation. The National Day celebration thus served not only as a commemoration of Italy's national occasion but also as a reflection of the enduring friendship between Pakistan and Italy and their shared determination to build a stronger, broader and more future-oriented partnership in the years ahead.



Among the distinguished guests were Yousaf Raza Gilani, Federal Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif,

bilateral relations. Italy hosts one of the largest Pakistani communities in Europe, a factor that continues to serve as a bridge



# Is US-Canada defense cooperation entering an era of 'decoupling'?

By Liu Dan

Seoul's industry ministry said Tuesday that the country has discussed a deeper partnership in advanced industries with Canada, according to Yonhap. Not long ago, Canada announced that it is in negotiations to procure GlobalEye, an advanced aerial surveillance system developed in Sweden. "Canada turns away from the US on major defense purchase," Canadian media reported.

These developments signal that Canada is moving away from its dependence on US defense contractors, following the Pentagon's decision on May 18 to suspend the Permanent Joint Board on Defense mecha-

nism between the US and Canada. It marks the entry of bilateral relations into a new period of adjustment and reflects the structural dilemma Canada faces in the contemporary international landscape.

On the surface, this series of "decoupling" tendencies in the defense sector stems from the US' dissatisfaction with Canada's defense spending, which only met NATO's 2 percent of GDP target this year after decades of lagging. On a deeper level, the US is conducting a comprehensive re-evaluation of its alliance systems, demanding that allies assume greater responsibility for their own security.

For Canada, the repercussions of a widening defense rift with the US extend far

beyond the military realm, striking at the very core of the external strategic framework it has long relied upon. In the post-World War II international order, Canada fashioned a foreign and security strategy centered on "managed dependence": relying on US-led collective security mechanisms for defense while utilizing multilateral international institutions to play an intermediary role between the West and developing countries. However, this strategic framework is gradually failing amid current global shifts.

First, the US commitment to multilateralism has significantly waned, hamstringing platforms like the United Nations and NATO, through which Canada once

wielded influence. Second, US policy toward its allies has become highly transactional; the policy inertia once driven by shared values and long-standing alliances is fading, leaving allies to constantly prove their "contribution" to US interests. Finally, intensifying major-power competition has squeezed the strategic room for maneuver for middle powers. Canada's high security dependence on the US leaves it without effective levers of influence when facing Washington's pressure, severely restricting its autonomous diplomatic choices.

As the core friction of the international order returns to major-power geopolitical competition, Canada's strategic value is reduced to two dimensions: serving as a defense node on the US northern flank and acting as a resource supplier. Ironically, these are the very areas where its traditional strategy possesses the least autonomy.

Vincent Rigby, former national security and intelligence advisor to Canada's Liberal government, noted that the escalating rhetoric from Washington has prompted many policymakers in Canada to rethink the defense relationship between the two neighbors. "They're [The US is] saying stuff, doing stuff that really puts us in a difficult position," he said. The crux of this "difficult position" is that Canada can neither change its geographical proximity to the US and the resulting security dependence, nor construct alternative external economic and security networks quickly enough to offset it.

If Canada wishes to re-establish its strategic footing in the new international landscape, it must enhance the autonomy of its defense capacity building and break free from a security model bound to dependency on the US. Canada should leverage its geographical and resource advantages to diversify diplomatic cooperation, reduce the risk of being co-opted by unilateral policies, and mitigate the volatility in bilateral relations caused by US policy shifts. Meanwhile, Canada needs to pursue a more balanced economic and security layout in other regions, avoid the concentration of all strategic resources in a single direction, and refrain from making reckless, unwarranted moves on issues concerning the baseline principles of other countries.

The adjustment of the US-Canada defense cooperation mechanism exposes a universal dilemma faced by middle powers in a new era: When a major power ceases to provide public goods as it once did, nations that relied on its umbrella must learn how to act independently in an uncertain strategic environment. For Canada, this is both a challenge and a potential catalyst for reshaping its national strategy and discovering a genuinely sustainable pivot toward self-sufficiency.

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# Europe at a crossroads in an era of US uncertainty



Richard D. Wolff

The forcible seizure of President Nicolas Maduro from Venezuela in January, along with US-Israel operations against Iran, is also part of the same political theater. They serve as media distractions: not just from the hovering Epstein scandals or the deeply troubled inequalities of the domestic US economy, but from the deeper threats posed by a declining empire. Thus, a reaction formation type of neo-colonialism infuses many of the US' favorite distractions. When charged with violating international law and undermining the entire United Nations project, Washington

proudly rebrands both actions as bold signs of US strength.

As in 1945, Western Europe and the US once again find themselves at a crossroads. The declining empires back then were Europeans. Now, in 2026, it is the decline of the US empire that has become both the US' and Europe's problem. In its desperate attempts to slow or stop that decline, the US has turned on its subordinated, very junior European partners. That problem and that turning derive from this ongoing historical moment of empire decline.

Currently, Washington has withdrawn much of its support for Ukraine in its war with Russia, weakening the Ukrainian side and

leaving a militarily underdeveloped Europe to rely even more on economic sanctions against Russia. As a result, Europe has lost access to cheap Russian oil and gas. High energy prices have driven up European export prices, extinguishing its competitiveness. Meanwhile, deindustrialization is deeply disturbing Europe's economies.

The global economy looks increasingly like a great contest between China and the US, with Europe increasingly out of the picture or merely a footnote to it. The US' massive tariffs and demands for tribute from Europe combine both abandonments and assaults by the US on its allies. NATO trembles and faces growing forces of dissolution.

The US demands that European nations fund their own defenses in part because the declining US empire needs to enlarge its own military as the possible offset to the empire's decline. Moreover, already heavily indebted, the US needs to worry about its future creditworthiness unless it cuts its annual budget deficits.

The Europeans are stuck in that proverbial room where the walls are closing in on them. Their subordination is reflected in their passage from junior partners in US-led "coalitions of the willing" to the 2026 Iran war's "coalition of the unraveling," as Spain and Italy refuse to participate and even the UK waffles. The US openly threatens to

leave NATO. The employer classes of Europe are most worried about the combination of no longer having US-funded defense protection via NATO and the compensatory need to fund expanded European military spending. That will mean reducing European spending on its social welfare model of capitalism. Employers who do so risk triggering massive opposition from the left.

So far, Europe's employer classes have tried to cope with this situation through a quasi-hysterical campaign to demonize Russia as a threat to invade and conquer its European neighbors. Europe's mostly low-polling government leaders position themselves as great bulwarks against the Russian danger. This strategy aims to justify increased spending on defense, which in turn necessitates

reduced government welfare spending. The latter is rationalized as the whole society's necessary sacrifice for safety from Russia. The employer classes hope that this approach to retain their wealth, income and power will not become the explicit political issue of our times (rather than the "great Russian danger" that requires budget "adjustments").

While the "Russian

danger" discourse might secure Europe's employer classes a few more years of sitting atop Europe's wealth and power distributions, it fails to address Europe's long-term decline, which will continue and possibly accelerate because little is being done in Europe to directly oppose that trend.

Indeed, the disagreements inside Europe on whether to join the US-Israel operations against Iran, coupled with anxiety about being singled out for retaliation by the US, heightened the competitive pandering among Europeans to curry favor with Washington. Such divisions have always weakened European unity. The latter is surely a necessary, albeit insufficient, component of any imaginable rescue of Europe from its deepening decline.

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# Amb Asim Iftikhar Ahmad urges renewed diplomacy on Ukraine as UN debates risks of wider regional escalation

**Liaquat Ali** Islamabad: Pakistan this week warned that the prolonged war in Ukraine is creating increasingly dangerous consequences beyond the immediate battlefield, cautioning that continued military escalation could trigger wider regional instability, cross-border security risks and unforeseen repercussions for international peace and security.

The warning was delivered by Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, during an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council convened following concerns raised by Romania over reported violations of its airspace linked to the ongoing conflict.

Addressing the Security Council, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad stressed that the Ukraine war continues to pose serious risks not only to the countries directly involved but also to neighboring states and the broader international community. He cautioned that as the conflict drags on, the possibility of miscalculation, unintended escalation and geographic spillover becomes increasingly significant, raising concerns about the potential expansion of hostilities beyond their current scope.

The Pakistani envoy emphasized that the international community must remain vigilant against developments that could transform the conflict into a wider confrontation with far-reaching consequences for regional and global stability. He underscored that preserving international peace requires urgent efforts to contain tensions and prevent further deterioration of the security environment.

Referring to reports concerning alleged breaches

of Romanian airspace, Ambassador Ahmad reaffirmed Pakistan's principled commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of all states. He described these principles as fundamental pillars of the international order established under the United Nations Charter and stressed that their consistent observance remains essential for maintaining peaceful relations among nations.

He expressed concern over reports of armed drones entering the airspace of neighboring countries, describing such incidents as troubling indicators of the increasingly complex and unpredictable nature of modern conflicts. According to the ambassador, the growing use of advanced military technologies in contemporary warfare has expanded the potential for unintended consequences that can affect countries beyond the immediate conflict zone.

Pakistan also voiced concern over reports of civilian casualties and damage to critical civilian infrastructure resulting from military operations. Ambassador Ahmad stressed that the protection of civilians must remain a central priority and called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint in conducting military activities.

Highlighting the emergence of armed drones as a defining feature of the Ukraine conflict, the Pakistani representative noted that technological advancements have significantly altered the character of warfare. While acknowledging their growing military significance, he warned that the humanitarian implications of such technologies continue to raise serious concerns for policymakers and international institutions.

He emphasized that the use of advanced weapons systems must remain fully consistent with the principles of International Humanitarian Law. Particular attention, he said, should be given to safeguarding

civilian populations and ensuring the protection of civilian infrastructure from the devastating effects of armed conflict. Ambassador Ahmad argued that a sustainable resolution to the Ukraine crisis cannot be achieved through military means alone. He reiterated Pakistan's longstanding position that dialogue, diplomacy and negotiated settlement remain the only viable path toward achieving lasting peace.

The envoy called for renewed efforts to revive diplomatic engagement and urged all stakeholders to recommit themselves to meaningful negotiations aimed at ending the conflict. He stressed that a durable peace settlement would require adherence to the principles of the UN Charter, recognition of the legitimate security concerns of all parties and respect for established multilateral mechanisms.

Pakistan also expressed support for efforts aimed at facilitating the resumption of negotiations, including diplomatic initiatives backed by the United States. Ambassador Ahmad described dialogue as the most credible avenue for achieving a mutually acceptable settlement and preventing further escalation.

According to the Pakistani envoy, revitalized diplomatic engagement could create conditions necessary for ending the devastating conflict and reducing the growing risks facing regional and international security. He stressed that every additional phase of escalation increases humanitarian suffering while making a political settlement more difficult to achieve.

Calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities, Ambassador Ahmad urged all parties to prioritize diplomacy over con-



frontation and to pursue constructive engagement aimed at restoring peace and stability.

Pakistan has consistently advocated the peaceful resolution of international disputes through dialogue and diplomacy. Its intervention at the Security Council reflected Islamabad's broader position that sustainable peace can only emerge

through negotiations, compromise and adherence to international law rather than through prolonged military confrontation. As concerns grow over the wider implications of the Ukraine conflict, Pakistan's message at the United Nations underscored the urgency of renewed diplomatic efforts to prevent further escalation and steer the crisis toward a peaceful and negotiated resolution.

# Azerbaijan emerges as key hub for D-8 cooperation on energy, climate and sustainable urban development

**Asif Iqbal** Islamabad: Azerbaijan has strengthened its position as a leading platform for multilateral cooperation within the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, hosting a series of high-level engagements focused on sustainable urban development, renewable energy and climate resilience during the first official visit of D-8 Secretary-General Ambassador Sohail Mahmood to the country.

The visit, undertaken at the invitation of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, highlighted Baku's growing role in shaping the future agenda of the D-8 bloc and advancing regional cooperation on some of the most pressing development challenges facing member states.

Held from May 17 to 20, the visit coincided with the 13th Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF13) and the D-8 High-Level Energy and Urban Dialogue, bringing together policymakers, ministers, urban planners, climate experts and development practitioners from across the world.

A major focus of the visit was Azerbaijan's expanding international profile as a host of global dialogue on climate action and sustainable development. The successful organization of WUF13, jointly hosted by the Government of Azerbaijan and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, followed the country's

hosting of COP29 and further reinforced Baku's emergence as a significant venue for international discussions on urban transformation, environmental sustainability and economic resilience.

The World Urban Forum, held under the theme "Housing the World: Safe and Resilient Cities and Communities," attracted more than 40,000 participants, including heads of state, ministers, mayors, urban development specialists and representatives of international organizations.

Discussions focused on addressing rapid urbanization, improving housing accessibility and strengthening the resilience of cities in the face of climate-related challenges.

On the sidelines of the forum, the D-8 Secretariat organized a High-Level Energy and Urban Dialogue at the Azerbaijan Pavilion under the theme "Powering Sustainable Cities in the D-8 Region: Aligning Energy Transitions with Urban Development Agendas." The event brought together senior government officials, experts and development partners to explore how renewable energy and sustainable urban planning can jointly contribute to long-term economic growth and environmental sustainability.

In his keynote address, D-8 Secretary-General Sohail Mahmood emphasized that urbanization and energy transition must be treated as interconnected policy priorities rather than separate



development challenges.

He noted that cities generate more than 80 percent of global economic output while accounting for nearly 70 percent of global energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. These realities, he said, make sustainable urban planning and clean energy transitions essential components of future development strategies.

Highlighting the collective potential of D-8 member states, Ambassador Mahmood pointed to the bloc's combined population of approximately 1.28 billion people and an economy exceeding \$5 trillion. He said these strengths provide a strong foundation for developing innovative solutions in renewable energy, smart infrastructure, connectivity and climate adaptation.

The secretary-general stressed the importance of addressing financing gaps that continue to constrain climate-smart infrastructure projects in developing countries. He called for enhanced access to concessional financing, technology transfer and equitable international partnerships to support sustainable development efforts across the Global South.

He further argued that any transition toward cleaner energy systems must remain people-centred, ensuring that urban youth, low-income communities and vulnerable populations benefit from emerging economic opportunities through green jobs, inclusive services and improved quality of life.

To accelerate cooperation among member countries, Ambassador Mahmood proposed a five-point framework focusing on integrated urban-energy planning, digital governance, stronger South-South cooperation, investment in

climate-resilient infrastructure and coordinated engagement at international forums.

He also suggested launching initiatives such as "Sustainable D-8 City of the Year," "D-8 Green Capital" and "D-8 Clean Energy Capital" to encourage innovation, showcase successful models and promote healthy competition among member states in advancing sustainability goals.

One of the most significant outcomes of the visit was progress toward operationalizing three D-8 Centres of Excellence in Baku dedicated to Energy and Climate, Transport and Media. These institutions are expected to become important platforms for policy research, technical cooperation, knowledge sharing and capacity-building among D-8 countries.

Officials said the centres would facilitate collaboration on renewable energy development, regional connectivity, climate resilience, sustainable transport systems and media cooperation while strengthening institutional links among member states.

During his stay, Ambassador Mahmood held a series of high-level meetings with senior Azerbaijani leaders aimed at advancing the strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and the D-8 organization.

In discussions with Hikmat Hajiyev, the two sides reviewed Azerbaijan's expanding role within the organization and explored future priorities for enhancing D-8 cooperation. The secretary-general also met Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov to discuss preparations for the upcoming D-8 Summit in Jakarta, institutional reforms and measures to strengthen the organizational and financial capacity of the D-8 Secretariat.

Talks additionally covered Azerbaijan's participation in key D-8 legal frameworks and mechanisms designed to deepen economic and technical cooperation among member countries.

In a separate meeting with Energy Minister Parviz Shahbazov, discussions focused on the proposed D-8 Energy and Climate Centre and preparations for the first meeting of D-8 Energy Ministers. The two sides explored opportunities for cooperation in renewable energy investment, energy security, climate resilience and sustainable financing.

Ambassador Mahmood also met Ahmad Ismayilov, Executive Director of Azerbaijan's Media Development Agency, to discuss the establishment of the Media Excellence Centre and avenues for strengthening media cooperation among D-8 member states through professional exchanges, media literacy initiatives and collaborative communication platforms.

According to the D-8 Secretariat, the visit reflected the strategic importance Azerbaijan attaches to its membership of the organization and demonstrated the country's growing contribution to advancing D-8 initiatives.

The engagements in Baku also showcased a shared determination among member states to pursue practical cooperation in clean energy, sustainable urbanization and climate resilience while building stronger institutional mechanisms capable of supporting long-term economic development across the D-8 region.

As the organization seeks to enhance its global relevance and respond to emerging development challenges, Azerbaijan's expanding role within the D-8 framework is increasingly positioning the country as a key centre for regional cooperation, innovation and sustainable growth.



# The Great Ownership Divide - Growing gap between ownership and participation reshaping modern economies: Ali Rehman Malik



**Abdullah Jan**

Islamabad: Strong economic indicators and rising public anxiety are increasingly coexisting in advanced economies, reflecting what analyst Ali Rehman Malik describes as a widening structural divide between ownership and participation in the modern economic system. In his latest analysis, Malik argues that apparent

contradictions—such as record asset valuations and technological gains alongside stagnant wages, housing unaffordability and rising household debt—are not anomalies, but symptoms of a deeper divergence in how economic gains are distributed. According to him, the modern economy is increasingly characterised by two parallel realities: one driven by asset ownership and capital accumulation, and another defined by labour-based participation with limited access to wealth-building mechanisms. Growing divide between assets and wages Malik notes that economic participation through wages and salaries is no longer translating into ownership of productive assets at the same rate as in previous decades. Instead, returns from equities, property, intellectual property and financial instruments are increasingly concentrated among those who already hold assets. This shift, he writes, extends beyond income inequality and is reshaping broader economic stability, affecting housing access, credit availability, intergenerational mobility and long-term financial resilience. He argues that the core issue is not the existence of markets or technological advancement, but

whether the pathway from earning income to acquiring ownership remains sufficiently accessible for the majority of workers. Unequal power of income in the modern system In Malik's assessment, the same unit of income carries fundamentally different economic power depending on financial position. Individuals with access to assets and credit can leverage income to invest, borrow and expand wealth, while those without such access are more likely to see earnings absorbed by rent, debt servicing and essential consumption. This structural imbalance, he argues, extends beyond households to corporations and even national economies, where access to capital markets and liquidity shapes long-term economic trajectories. Technology accelerating divergence The analysis highlights artificial intelligence as a potential accelerant of existing inequalities rather than a standalone cause. While AI is widely expected to boost productivity and create new economic opportunities, Malik warns that early evidence suggests disproportionate gains for capital owners, high-skilled workers and dominant technology platforms. He notes that this technological shift is occurring within an already financialised global economy marked by asset concentration, housing shortages and high debt burdens, which may amplify distributional imbalances. However, he stresses that technology itself is not inherently negative; rather, outcomes depend on the economic structures into which it is introduced. Credit systems reinforcing inequality Malik also points to credit scoring systems as an example of mechanisms that, while designed to measure financial risk, can also reinforce long-term inequality. Stronger credit profiles reduce borrowing costs and improve access to financial opportunities, while weaker profiles increase financial strain and limit upward mobility. Over time, he



argues, such systems can contribute to a self-reinforcing cycle of advantage and disadvantage. From economic divergence to social strain Over time, these dynamics create what Malik describes as a form of "de facto stratification," where different groups experience the same economy in fundamentally different ways. He argues that this growing gap is not merely economic but also social, as it affects perceptions of fairness, opportunity and dignity. When employment no longer offers a credible pathway to ownership or stability, trust in the broader economic system begins to weaken. According to Malik, this erosion of confidence may help explain rising political and social tensions in many countries, often framed in ideological terms but rooted in underlying structural economic changes. Multiple forces shaping inequality The analysis acknowledges that the ownership-participation divide is not the sole driver of inequality. Demographics, education systems, geography, institutional strength, cultural factors and energy costs all play significant roles in

shaping economic outcomes. However, Malik argues that the interaction between these forces increasingly revolves around one central question: who owns productive assets, and who only has access to them through rent or wages. Growth and fragility coexisting Malik concludes that strong aggregate economic performance can coexist with weakening economic foundations for broad sections of the population. Rising GDP, stock market growth and technological progress do not necessarily translate into broad-based financial security. If the gap between ownership and participation continues to widen, he warns, early signs of strain are likely to appear not in headline economic data, but in declining social cohesion, reduced institutional trust and growing political instability. Ultimately, he argues, the central challenge facing modern economies is not wealth creation itself, but whether economic systems can continue to translate participation into meaningful ownership at scale—ensuring long-term legitimacy, stability and shared prosperity.



## PPP true voice of people: Natasha Daultana

**Liaquat Ali**

Islamabad: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Natasha Daultana this week reaffirmed that the PPP remains the genuine representative of the masses, emphasizing the party's longstanding commitment to democratic continuity, national development, and public welfare. She expressed these views during a meeting with prominent farmer leader Sakhi Hussain Shah, who, along with his associates. The meeting, held in Vehari, turned into a show of support for the party's leadership and its vision for inclusive governance. Addressing the gathering, Daultana

highlighted the historical role of the Pakistan Peoples Party in advocating for the rights of ordinary citizens, particularly marginalized segments of society. She said the PPP has consistently stood by farmers, labourers, and underprivileged communities, ensuring their voices are heard at the highest levels of policymaking. She paid tribute to PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, praising his leadership and diplomatic engagements during his tenure as Foreign Minister. According to Daultana, his efforts have significantly enhanced Pakistan's international standing, projecting a positive image of the country and strengthening diplomatic ties across the globe. "The PPP has always prioritized peo-

ple-centric policies and democratic values. Our leadership believes in empowering citizens and addressing their concerns through practical measures," the Member of the National Assembly (MNA) remarked. She further stressed that party workers remain the backbone of the PPP, acknowledging their dedication and sacrifices in strengthening the party at the grassroots level. Reiterating her commitment to public service, Daultana assured that she would actively work to safeguard the rights of farmers, address agricultural challenges, and uplift disadvantaged communities. She emphasized the importance of inclusive development and vowed to raise these issues in the National Assembly.



# EU top court rules Germany must maintain asylum support: benefits cuts violate fundamental rights

**Covert Report**

Brussels: The European Court of Justice (ECJ) this week ruled that Germany's reduction of asylum benefits breaches EU law, in a landmark judgment affirming that even rejected asylum seekers must retain access to essential support to live with dignity while awaiting transfer or deportation. The decision, delivered in a case involving an Afghan asylum seeker identified as FB, found that basic provisions such as clothing and essential household goods cannot be withdrawn, even when an individual's asylum application has been deemed inadmissible under EU rules. FB had applied for asylum in Germany in 2021 before his claim was declared inadmissible a year later under the EU's Dublin Regulation, which assigns responsibility for

asylum claims to the first EU country of entry. While awaiting transfer to Romania, he was provided with food, accommodation, and healthcare, but received no cash assistance or support for clothing and other basic necessities following reforms to Germany's asylum benefits system. Germany's 2024 amendment to its Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act significantly reduced cash payments for asylum seekers, providing in-kind support such as housing and food but limiting financial allowances. The Bavarian district of Schweinfurt, which implemented the cuts, argued that the reduced support still met minimum legal obligations. However, the ECJ ruled that such reductions fell short of EU requirements under the Reception Conditions Directive, stating that essentials like clothing are part of the "most basic needs" required for physical and men-

tal well-being. The court also emphasised that financial allowances for daily necessities, including communication and transport, contribute to ensuring a minimum level of social and cultural participation in the host country. The ruling clarifies that asylum seekers retain the right to a basic standard of living not only during the initial assessment of their claims, but also during transfer procedures between EU member states. Legal experts say the decision reinforces the principle that fundamental rights obligations under EU law continue to apply even after an asylum application is rejected, as long as the individual remains under the responsibility of a member state. The judgment has been welcomed by refugee rights organisations, which argue that Germany's reforms effectively reduced asylum support to what critics described as a "bed, bread and soap" model of subsistence. The case comes amid growing political pressure across Europe to reduce asylum-related spending, as migration remains a highly sensitive issue in domestic politics, particularly in Germany. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and other political voices have long argued that generous welfare provisions act as a "pull factor" for irregular migration, a claim strongly disputed by humanitarian organisations. In response to political pressure, Germany's 2024 reforms reduced cash-based assistance and increased reliance on prepaid systems or in-kind support. Critics argue this has left some asylum seekers without sufficient resources for basic personal needs. Despite the court's ruling, uncertainty remains over how long these protections will effectively hold. The EU's new migration and asylum pact, set to take effect on June



12, 2026, introduces revised rules governing benefits, border procedures, and responsibility-sharing among member states. Under the new framework, member states may have greater discretion to reduce or withdraw certain allowances, particularly for individuals required to be present in another EU country under transfer rules. However, EU officials and legal experts stress that all member states remain bound by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which requires that asylum seekers are guaranteed a dignified standard of living. Refugee advocacy organisations welcomed the ECJ's judgment as an important affirmation of minimum living standards within the EU asylum system. However, some warned that its long-term impact could be limited if the forthcoming migration pact enables governments to further restrict material support. "This ruling clearly reaffirms that personal

dignity must remain central to asylum policy," said one rights advocate, while noting that implementation will depend on how national governments interpret both the court decision and the new EU rules. The ruling is expected to influence how member states design benefit systems for asylum seekers and rejected applicants awaiting transfer, potentially requiring revisions to national legislation that falls below EU-defined standards. At its core, the judgment reinforces a key legal principle: that access to essential goods and a minimum standard of living is not optional, but a binding requirement under EU law—even in politically sensitive areas such as migration control. As the EU prepares to roll out its new asylum framework, the tension between stricter migration management and fundamental rights protections is likely to remain at the centre of Europe's policy debate.



# Bulgaria's Black Sea coast anticipates another record summer season in 2026

**Covert Report**

Sofia: Bulgaria's Black Sea coast is heading into the 2026 summer season with expectations of continued record growth, following strong tourism performance in 2025 and sustained early booking trends, according to national authorities and industry data. The official summer tourism season began on June 1, with resorts along the coastline preparing for increased visitor numbers after what was already a record-breaking year. Data from the National Statistical Institute and the Ministry of Tourism show that foreign visitor registrations rose by 9.8% in 2025, while domestic holiday-makers increased by 2.9% compared with the previous year. Overnight stays grew by nearly 4%, placing Bulgaria among the European Union's fastest-growing tourism destinations. Tourism revenues for the January–November period last year reached approximately €3.9 billion, underlining the sector's expanding contribution to the national economy. Early indicators for 2026 suggest continued momentum. The Ministry of Tourism reports a 3% rise in advance bookings for the summer season, with overall visitor numbers projected to increase by around 5%. Authorities say beaches along the Black Sea

coast are fully prepared for the peak period, with seasonal inspections already underway to ensure compliance with safety, hygiene and service standards. Demand remains strongest for established seaside resorts, particularly Sunny Beach, Golden Sands and Albena, which continue to dominate international bookings. A key milestone for 2026 is Bulgaria's first summer season as a full member of both the eurozone and the Schengen Area. Tourism officials expect the move to simplify travel for EU visitors by eliminating currency exchange costs and reducing border-related friction, particularly for independent travellers. The government continues to promote Bulgaria as a competitive Mediterranean-adjacent destination offering affordability alongside improved accessibility. Industry estimates suggest prices remain roughly 20% lower than those in neighbouring Greece and Turkey. The Ministry of Tourism reports that organised package holidays and family travel continue to drive demand, with the strongest advance bookings coming from Poland, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Czech Republic and Romania. Additional growth is being recorded from organised tour groups in France and Israel, reflecting broader diversification of source markets. Domestic tourism patterns remain more varia-

ble, with many Bulgarian travellers continuing to rely on short-term and last-minute bookings for weekend and holiday breaks. Air traffic arrangements for the 2026 season show continued strong international connectivity, particularly through Burgas Airport on the southern coast, which remains a major hub for UK charter traffic. Varna Airport, however, will not operate direct charter flights from the United Kingdom this season. British visitors will instead rely on scheduled low-cost and traditional carriers with direct services. Charter operations from Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, Switzerland and Israel remain robust, with several routes expanded compared to previous years. Together, Varna and Burgas airports connect Bulgaria's Black Sea coast to more than 20 European markets. Seasonal inspections have been launched across all major beaches along the coastline. The coordinated checks involve multiple state institutions and focus on lifeguard deployment, availability of medical services, safety standards for water sports and attractions, hygiene conditions and fiscal compliance among commercial operators. Authorities also confirmed that pets are generally prohibited on supervised beaches during the active season, with exemptions only for certified



assistance dogs. To improve transparency and visitor experience, the Ministry of Tourism has introduced an updated interactive beach map for the 2026 season. Concession holders are required to publish real-time pricing for umbrellas and sun

loungers, aimed at preventing overcharging and improving price transparency for tourists. Officials say the system will be continuously updated based on inspection results throughout the season.

# June holidays in Portugal

## Top destinations and festivals

### shaping summer travel in 2026



**Liaquat Ali**

Lisbon: Portugal enters peak travel appeal in June 2026, as long daylight hours, stable weather, and an expanding calendar of cultural events combine to make the month one of the most attractive periods for domestic and international tourism. From Atlantic beaches and mountain escapes to historic cities and medieval fairs, the country offers a wide range of holiday options before the peak summer crowds of July and August arrive.

Tourism experts note that June sits in a “sweet spot” of the Portuguese travel calendar. The official bathing season is underway along most of the coastline, yet popular destinations remain relatively uncrowded. Inland regions, meanwhile, benefit from mild temperatures that are well-suited to outdoor exploration, hiking, and cultural sightseeing.

A country in early summer rhythm  
Across Portugal, June marks the beginning of the festive summer season. Cities and towns come alive with traditional celebrations known as Santos Populares, honouring popular saints through street parties, music, and communal gatherings. At the same time, historic fairs and regional festivals add a strong cultural dimension to travel itineraries.

Weather conditions during this period are generally favourable nationwide. Coastal regions enjoy warm but manageable temperatures, while inland and northern areas remain slightly cooler, offering comfortable conditions for walking tours and nature-based activities. Evenings are typically long and pleasant, encouraging outdoor dining and waterfront strolls.

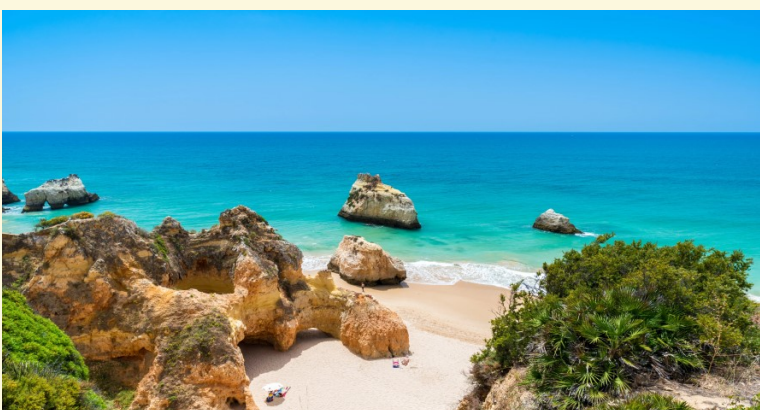
Coastal escapes before peak season crowds  
For many travellers, Portugal’s coastline remains the main attraction in June. The month offers a balance of warm weather, open tourist facilities, and relatively light visitor numbers compared with high summer.

Algarve: Established summer comfort with quieter corners

The Algarve is fully in summer mode by June, with beach infrastructure operating at full capacity and coastal towns welcoming early-season visitors. Temperatures are high but not yet at their August peak, making it ideal for beach holidays.

While major resorts attract steady tourism, quieter alternatives continue to stand out. Eastern Algarve destinations such as Tavira, Cabanas, and Cacela Velha offer a more relaxed atmosphere, while smaller western and central coastal towns like Ferragudo, Burgau, and Salema provide a slower pace away from large

crowds. June is particularly suited to a rhythm of morning beach visits, shaded afternoon breaks, and evening walks along the shoreline. Costa Vicentina and southwest Alentejo: Portugal’s wild Atlantic edge  
For travellers seeking more rugged scenery, the Costa Vicentina and southwest Alentejo coast offer dramatic landscapes and a strong sense of natural isolation. Stretching from Arrifana and Carrapateira to Odeceixe, Zambujeira do Mar, and Vila Nova de Milfontes, this region is defined by towering cliffs, long sandy beaches, and protected natural parks. Although the Atlantic waters remain cool, the appeal lies in the unspoiled environment and extensive hiking opportunities along coastal



trails. Seafood restaurants and small fishing villages contribute to the region’s authentic character, while visitor numbers remain moderate compared to southern resort areas. Oeste region, Ericeira and Peniche: Surf culture and coastal towns  
North of Lisbon, the Oeste region—including Ericeira, Peniche, Baleal, and Santa Cruz—offers a slightly cooler coastal experience that is especially popular with surfers. June provides stable weather conditions and consistent waves, making it a prime time for water sports. In addition to surfing culture, the region is rich in historic towns and traditional architecture, allowing visitors to combine beach days with cultural exploration. Nature and mountain escapes inland  
Beyond the coast, Portugal’s inland regions offer an appealing alternative for travellers prioritising nature, hiking, and cooler air. June is widely considered one of the best months for

outdoor activity in these areas, as landscapes remain green and rivers continue to flow strongly after spring rainfall. Peneda-Gerês National Park: Waterfalls and mountain villages  
In the far north, Peneda-Gerês National Park stands out as one of Portugal’s most important natural destinations. June conditions allow for comfortable hiking, river swimming, and exploration of traditional stone villages scattered throughout the park. Water levels in streams and waterfalls remain high, creating ideal conditions for scenic routes and nature photography. Wildlife activity is also more visible during early summer, adding to the park’s appeal. Serra da Estrela: Green landscapes after winter snow



Portugal’s highest mountain range, Serra da Estrela, transitions in June from its winter snow cover into lush green valleys and expansive

viewpoints. The region is known for its cooler temperatures, making it a popular escape from inland heat. Visitors are drawn to its open landscapes, walking trails, and traditional mountain cuisine. The combination of natural scenery and rural villages makes it a strong choice for a quiet, restorative holiday.

Cities in celebration mode  
Portuguese cities also play a major role in June travel plans, offering a blend of culture, festivals, and urban exploration under favourable weather conditions.

Lisbon: festivals and historic neighbourhoods  
Lisbon is particularly lively in June due to the Santo António Festival, which transforms neighbourhoods such as Alfama, Graça, and Bica into open-air celebrations. Streets fill with music, food stalls, and community gatherings, creating a festive atmosphere across the city.

Outside of the celebrations, Lisbon remains rich in cultural attractions. Visitors commonly explore historic districts, riverside viewpoints, and landmark sites in Belém, including major monuments and museums.

Porto: Riverside celebrations and cultural heritage

In Porto, June is closely associated with the São João Festival, one of the country’s most famous annual events. The city becomes a centre of street entertainment, fireworks, and riverside festivities along the Douro.

Beyond the celebrations, Porto offers scenic river walks, historic architecture, and visits to wine cellars across the river in Vila Nova de Gaia, making it a well-rounded urban destination.

Évora: Alentejo culture and seasonal fairs  
In the Alentejo region, Évora offers a quieter but

culturally rich city experience. June temperatures are warm but still manageable for sightseeing, and the city provides access to wider regional attractions. A key highlight in 2026 is the Feira de São João, a large annual fair running from late May into early July. The event includes food stalls, amusement rides, and live performances, adding a festive dimension to the historic city.

Medieval fairs and cultural festivals in 2026  
In addition to coastal and city tourism, June 2026 features a strong lineup of medieval fairs and historical reenactments across Portugal. These events offer immersive cultural experiences and encourage travel to lesser-known destinations.

In Guimarães, the Feira Afonsina recreates the atmosphere of the 12th century with parades, markets, and performances across the historic centre.

In Lamego, a medieval fair transforms the castle district into a living historical setting with artisans, entertainment, and themed activities.

Montemor-o-Novo also hosts a castle-based medieval event featuring reenactments and traditional crafts, while Torres Vedras presents a fair inspired by historical trading traditions, complete with markets and staged tournaments.

A month of varied travel possibilities  
Overall, June 2026 presents one of the most diverse travel windows in Portugal’s tourism calendar. Whether choosing coastal relaxation, mountain hiking, urban festivals, or historical fairs, travellers are offered a wide spectrum of experiences before the height of summer begins. With favourable weather, active cultural programming, and relatively moderate crowd levels, June continues to establish itself as a preferred month for exploring Portugal in depth.



# U.S. Embassy Hosts Spectacular 'Freedom 250' Gala in Islamabad



**Liaquat Ali**

Islamabad: The diplomatic enclave of the federal capital was illuminated last night as the United States Mission in Pakistan hosted a historic "Freedom 250" gala. The grand reception marked two and a half centuries of American democratic history while celebrating the enduring, nearly 80-year-old bilateral relationship between Washington and Islamabad.

The landmark event brought together a distinguished gathering from across Pakistani public life, including senior government functionaries, political leaders, corporate executives, civil society advocates, academics, and prominent cultural icons.

Reaffirming a Time-Tested Alliance Delivering her keynote address, U.S. Chargé d' Affaires Natalie Baker emphasized that "Freedom 250" is not only a monumental milestone in American history but also a testament to the shared values of liberty and mutual respect that bind the two nations together.

"Tonight, we celebrate 250 years of American freedom, nearly 80 years of friendship between our two peoples, and everything we are going to build together in the years ahead," Chargé Baker stated. "The best is not behind us. It is in front of us, and we are going to get there together."

The evening masterfully blended



Central Command Band alongside Pakistani pop sensation Bilal Saeed. The celebration culminated in a spectacular fireworks display that lit up



state protocol with vibrant artistic collaboration:

The event commenced with a presentation of Colors by the U.S. Marine Corps Color Guard, followed by the national anthems of both nations. The audience enjoyed dynamic performances by the U.S. Air Force

the Islamabad sky, symbolizing the bright future both nations aim to cultivate.

The reception forms part of a year-long global series of events marking the 250th anniversary of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, launched under the national banner of "A New Era of American Greatness."



# EU backs Pakistan's regional peace role as both sides agree to deepen strategic partnership

**Celina Ali**  
Islamabad: Pakistan and the European Union this week agreed to further expand their strategic partnership across trade, investment, security, climate action, migration and regional diplomacy, with the EU praising Islamabad's role in promoting peace and stability during recent regional crises, including efforts to defuse tensions between the United States and Iran. The understanding emerged during the 8th Pakistan-European Union Strategic Dialogue held in Islamabad, where senior leaders from both sides reviewed the entire spectrum of bilateral relations and explored new avenues for cooperation in political, economic and security domains. The high-level engagement reflected the growing importance both sides attach to their relationship at a time of increasing geopolitical uncertainty and global economic challenges.

of the European Union's GSP+ trade scheme in strengthening economic ties between Pakistan and Europe. He said the preferential trade arrangement has played a vital role in boosting Pakistani exports and fostering deeper economic integration between the two sides. He stressed that Pakistan remains committed to broadening cooperation with the EU and exploring new opportunities for partnership in emerging sectors, particularly those linked to sustainable growth, technological advancement and climate adaptation. Regional and international developments also featured prominently in the discussions. Prime Minister Shehbaz thanked the European Union for supporting Pakistan's diplomatic efforts aimed at promoting peace and stability in the Gulf region and emphasized the importance of collective international action to prevent conflicts and encourage dialogue.



with Pakistan and expand cooperation across a broad range of sectors. Significantly, the EU's top diplomat expressed appreciation for Pakistan's mediation efforts during the recent US-Iran crisis, noting that Islamabad's diplomatic engagement contributed to preventing a wider conflict. She said the European Union supports efforts aimed at achieving a peaceful and sustainable resolution and remains ready to contribute to initiatives that reduce tensions and promote regional stability. Her remarks were widely seen as an acknowledgment of Pakistan's growing diplomatic role in regional conflict management and crisis prevention. Addressing a joint press stakeout following the dialogue, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar described the Strategic Dialogue as the highest institutionalized mechanism between Pakistan and the European Union. He noted that the latest meeting followed the previous round in Brussels after the shortest interval in the history of such engagements, reflecting the growing momentum in bilateral relations. Dar said both sides reviewed progress under the



Officials described the dialogue as a significant step toward transforming Pakistan-EU relations into a broader and more comprehensive partnership based on shared interests and mutual benefit. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, during a meeting with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas, reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to enhancing cooperation with the European Union in key sectors including trade, investment, climate resilience, sustainable development, connectivity, migration and security. The prime minister highlighted the importance

He noted that Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir have played important roles in advancing Pakistan's diplomatic outreach and peace initiatives during recent regional tensions. The prime minister also shared Pakistan's perspective on developments in South Asia and Afghanistan, highlighting Islamabad's commitment to regional stability and constructive engagement with international partners. In her remarks, Kaja Kallas described Pakistan as a major regional power and an important partner for the European Union. She reiterated the EU's desire to deepen strategic engagement



Pakistan-EU Strategic Engagement Plan 2019, covering areas such as trade and investment, development cooperation, migration and mobility, human rights, rule of law, security and counterterrorism. He emphasized that the European Union remains one of Pakistan's most important trading partners and described cooperation under the GSP+ framework as a mutually beneficial arrangement that has delivered significant economic gains for both sides. Discussions, he said, focused on further strengthening trade and investment ties and identifying new opportunities for economic collaboration. The two sides also exchanged views on a range of global and regional issues, including the security situation in South Asia, developments in Afghanistan, the Middle East, Europe and the evolving geopolitical landscape. During the discussions, Dar raised Pakistan's concerns regarding what he described as unprovoked Indian aggression and reiterated Islamabad's longstanding position that the Jammu and Kashmir dispute should be resolved in accordance with the wishes of the Kashmiri people and relevant United Nations resolutions. He also highlighted Pakistan's position regarding the Indus Waters Treaty, stating that recent developments had reinforced Islamabad's legal stance concerning water rights under the agree-

ment. On Afghanistan, Dar expressed concern over the continued presence of militant groups operating from Afghan territory and stressed the need for effective regional cooperation to address cross-border security threats. Kallas, while discussing Afghanistan, acknowledged Pakistan's security concerns and stated that every country has the right to defend its citizens in accordance with international law. Both sides ultimately agreed to strengthen cooperation in areas including climate resilience, clean energy, digital connectivity, migration management, education and people-to-people exchanges. Particular emphasis was placed on expanding educational opportunities through programmes such as Erasmus scholarships and fostering closer interaction between the citizens of Pakistan and Europe. The dialogue concluded with a shared commitment to elevate Pakistan-EU relations to a new level, reflecting growing convergence on economic cooperation, regional stability and multilateral engagement. Observers viewed the discussions as evidence of deepening trust between Islamabad and Brussels and a recognition of Pakistan's increasing diplomatic relevance in addressing regional and international challenges.

# Kate Middleton shares rare public praise for Prince William during cancer charity reception



**“I love him**  
Kate makes rare public comment about her love for Prince William.”

**AT CANCER CHARITY RECEPTION**  
The Princess of Wales showed her support for cancer patients and their families during a meaningful evening.

## KATE MIDDLETON SHARES RARE WORDS OF LOVE FOR PRINCE WILLIAM



**Covert Report**  
London: Catherine, Princess of Wales, offered a rare glimpse into her affection for Prince William during a surprise appearance at a reception celebrating the work of Cancer Research UK.

the Throne Room of St James's Palace to mark the 125th anniversary of Cancer Research UK, one of Britain's leading cancer charities. During conversations with guests, Kate made a number of personal comments about Prince

While speaking with singer Ronan Keating and his wife, Storm Keating, the discussion turned to the Prince of Wales. After the couple praised William and described him as a gentleman, Kate responded with a smile, "So do I," prompting

reflections about her marriage private during public engagements. Kate also spoke warmly about William while meeting Sebastian Bowen, whose late wife, Dame Deborah James, became a prominent advocate for bowel cancer

confident demeanour as she engaged with cancer survivors, campaigners, researchers and charity supporters. Dressed in a red-and-white ensemble complemented by ruby and diamond jewellery, she spent time listening to personal stories and acknowledging the contributions of those involved in cancer research and patient



High Commissioner of United Kingdom to Pakistan Jane Marriott



Deputy high commissioner of UK to Pakistan H.E. Matt Cancell

drawing warm reactions from guests with her candid remarks about her husband. The Princess of Wales joined King Charles III and Queen Camilla at a recent reception held in

William, reflecting the strong bond the couple continue to share after more than 15 years of marriage and a particularly challenging period for their family.

laughter and delight among those present. The brief exchange was widely seen as an unusually open expression of affection from the future queen, who generally keeps personal



awareness before her death in 2022. Bowen recalled the support his family had received from Prince William during difficult times and mentioned the prince's thoughtful guidance and encouragement. Responding to the comments, Kate praised her husband, saying, "He's good like that," highlighting William's compassionate approach in supporting families facing serious illness. The reception carried particular significance for the Princess of Wales, who has spoken publicly about her own cancer journey. Following her diagnosis in 2024, Kate underwent treatment and later announced that she had completed chemotherapy before confirming she was in remission in early 2025. Her openness about the experience marked a notable departure from traditional royal practice and was widely viewed as helping raise awareness about cancer and the challenges faced by patients and their families. Guests at the reception noted Kate's relaxed and

support. Royal observers have noted that the health challenges faced by the Prince and Princess of Wales over the past two years appear to have strengthened their partnership. Throughout Kate's treatment and recovery, Prince William maintained a reduced public schedule to support his wife and their three children, reinforcing the couple's emphasis on family life and shared decision-making. Sources close to the royal household have suggested that the experience brought the couple even closer together, helping them build resilience while navigating one of the most difficult periods of their lives. Now gradually returning to a fuller programme of public engagements, the Princess of Wales has increasingly focused on causes related to health, wellbeing and early intervention, while continuing to support charitable initiatives across the United Kingdom. Her appearance at the Cancer Research UK reception not only highlighted the importance of continued investment in cancer research but also provided a rare and heartfelt insight into the enduring relationship between the Prince and Princess of Wales, whose partnership remains at the centre of the future of the British monarchy.

Sometimes good things fall apart so better things can fall together

No matter how many mistakes you make or how slow you progress, you are still way ahead of everyone who isn't trying.

# Pakistan and Italy sign agreement to abolish visa requirement for diplomatic passport holders

## Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan and Italy this week signed an agreement to abolish visa requirements for holders of diplomatic passports, marking a step aimed at strengthening official exchanges and easing travel for senior government representatives between the two countries. The agreement was signed in Rome at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Pakistan's Ambassador to Italy Ali Javed and Italy's Secretary General of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Riccardo Guariglia. The signing ceremony followed a round of one-on-one discussions between the two senior diplomats, during which both sides reviewed the full scope of bilateral relations. According to a statement issued by the Pakistan Embassy in Rome, both sides expressed satisfaction over the "substance, intensity and upward

trajectory" of Pakistan-Italy relations and reaffirmed their commitment to further expanding cooperation at bilateral and multilateral forums, including the United Nations and the European Union. Officials described the visa waiver for diplomatic passport holders as a reflection of mutual trust and friendship, and said it would facilitate smoother movement of official delegations, contributing to more efficient diplomatic engagement between Islamabad and Rome. The two sides also reviewed the broader framework of existing agreements and institutional linkages between Pakistan and Italy. These include a wide range of cooperation mechanisms spanning education, trade, culture, science and technology, defence studies, tourism and counter-narcotics efforts. According to official figures, 21 memoranda of

understanding are currently in place between universities and think tanks in the two countries, while 15 intergovernmental agreements have been concluded across multiple sectors. Key existing frameworks include a defence cooperation agreement signed in 2009, a strategic engagement plan established in 2013, and a joint economic commission formed in 2005. Earlier accords include an investment protection treaty signed in 1997, a dual citizenship agreement dating back to 1983, and an extradition treaty concluded in 1972. Officials also recalled the recent signing of a memorandum of understanding on labour mobility and migration, described as Pakistan's first such agreement with a European country. The arrangement provides for opportunities for Pakistani workers, including a quota of 10,500 country-specific jobs in Italy. Both sides highlighted this development as part of broader efforts to manage migration pathways and expand legal employment opportunities for Pakistani workers in Europe. During the meeting, Ambassador Ali Javed reiterated an invitation for Italy's Secretary General of Foreign Affairs to visit Pakistan for the seventh round of bilateral political consultations, expected in the final quarter of 2026. He also expressed Pakistan's readiness to host the upcoming engagement and underscored interest in further deepening institutional cooper-



ation between the two countries. Separately, both sides noted the importance of the planned inauguration of a newly constructed Italian Embassy in Islamabad, described as Italy's largest diplomatic mission abroad, reflecting the growing strategic importance of relations with Pakistan. The agreement to remove visa requirements for diplomatic passport holders is expected to

streamline official travel and enhance coordination between foreign ministries, reinforcing what both sides described as a steadily expanding and mutually beneficial partnership. Officials from both countries characterised the development as part of a broader effort to modernise and intensify bilateral relations, building on decades of diplomatic engagement and expanding cooperation across multiple sectors.



# Anne-Sophie re-elected in 2026 Consular Elections for Central Asia with 77.21% vote share, to lead Consular Council



## Celina Ali

Islamabad: Anne-Sophie has been re-elected in the 2026 Consular Elections representing French communities across Central Asia and neighbouring regions, securing a commanding 77.21% of the vote across a vast nine-country constituency spanning Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, and Azerbaijan. The result marks a significant endorsement of her leadership and public service record, and will see her assume the presidency of the Consular Council, a role that carries responsibility for representing and coordinating support for French citizens living across the region. The election outcome reflects broad support among French expatriate communities spread across a geographically and culturally diverse region. According to the results, Anne-Sophie's list achieved a clear majority in all parts of the constituency, culminating in an overall regional vote share of 77.21%. The nine-country electoral zone is among the most extensive in the French consular network, encompassing parts of Central Asia, the South Caucasus, South Asia, and the Middle East. French citizens living in these countries rely on consular representation for administrative support, civic engagement, and coordination with French diplomatic services.

With this decisive victory, Anne-Sophie will now serve as President of the Consular Council for the constituency, a position that involves representing French nationals' interests, facilitating communication with French diplomatic missions, and addressing community concerns across multiple jurisdictions. The role is particularly significant given the logistical and political complexity of the region, where French citizens are dispersed across countries with varying administrative systems, security environments, and levels of access to consular services. In a statement following the announcement of the results, Anne-Sophie expressed deep gratitude to voters and supporters, describing the outcome as both a privilege and a responsibility. She highlighted the trust placed in her by French communities across the region and emphasised that the result reflects a collective effort rather than an individual achievement. **"This is both a tremendous privilege and a great responsibility, which I embrace with enthusiasm, determination, and gratitude," she said, noting that the success belongs to all those who support efforts to strengthen consular services and community engagement.**

The newly elected President is expected to continue prioritising support for French citizens living abroad, particularly in remote or complex jurisdictions where access to consular services can be limited. French consular councils play an advisory and representative role, helping to identify community needs, support local initiatives, and maintain links between expatriate populations and France's diplomatic network. The scale of the constituency, stretching from the Caucasus to Central and South Asia, places the Consular Council among the more diverse French representative bodies abroad. The election result is therefore seen as a strong regional mandate, reflecting both continuity and confidence in existing leadership structures. Observers note that such a high vote share across a wide and varied electorate underscores the cohesion of the French community's representation system in the region. As she begins her new term, Anne-Sophie is expected to focus on strengthening communication channels between French citizens and consular institutions, improving accessibility of services, and supporting community initiatives across the nine-country constituency. The result signals both continuity and renewed confidence, as she takes on the presidency of the Consular Council with a clear mandate and a strong electoral backing from French communities across Central Asia and neighbouring regions.