Panel: Regional Economic Integration in Central and South Asia

This panel aims to discuss key political and economic challenges faced by Pakistan and the region in expansion of trade within Central Asia, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) organisation and Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) member countries. The discussion will provide an understanding of the a) challenges and opportunities in commercial trade and transit with neighbouring countries; b) implementation issues with the existing regional and bilateral trade agreements (in the region); c) political issues associated with commercial trade and transit; and d) policy measures needed to improve competitiveness and trade facilitation.

The recent demand from China, Iran and Central Asia for transit facilities and China’s willingness to fund a major infrastructure programme under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) presents an important opportunity for improving trade and transport-related infrastructure. Pakistan and the region’s preparedness to quickly implement trade-related interventions under CPEC and Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) will also come under discussion. Some of the questions which the panel will aim to answer are:

1. Can enhanced regional trade and investment create economic interdependencies and help in strengthening political relations between Pakistan and its neighbours?
2. How can the Strategic Trade Policy Framework best serve regional economic integration?
3. How can trade and transit-related governance in Pakistan improve to benefit from regional and bilateral trade agreements, regional opportunities and integration in supply chains?
4. How can the business community help the government in promoting the ‘make in Pakistan’ brand across Central and South Asia?
5. What is the role of think tanks and media in policy engagement and highlighting key bottlenecks in trade, and at the same time offering innovative solutions to reducing cost of doing business, rationalise tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade?
6. How are the development partners helping to improve the capacity of trade and transit governance, and competitiveness of the private sector in Pakistan?
7. Can Pakistan’s enhanced market access under GSP Plus and free trade agreements with new partner countries help in improving competitiveness for regional trade?

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