



*In Conversation With*

## H.E ANDREI METELITSA Ambassador of Belarus to Pakistan

H.E ANDREI METELITSA IS CURRENTLY SERVING AS THE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS TO THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN SINCE NOVEMBER 19, 2020. HE HAS THE DIPLOMATIC RANK OF EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY ENVOY OF THE SECOND CLASS.

An Exclusive Interview by Global Affairs



Saadain Gardezi

H.E Andrei Metelitsa has an extraordinary diplomatic career spanning across 23 years in which he has served in a number of important positions such as Director-General for Treaties and Legal Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus; Counsellor of the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Serbia; Head of the Bilateral Treaties Division, General Directorate of Treaties and Legal Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus; Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations; Legal Adviser of the Legal Division, Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations of the Republic of Belarus among others.

He graduated from the Law Faculty of the Belarusian State University in 1998 (summa cum laude), did postgraduate course at Belarusian State University (2010), served as Special Faculty at Minsk State Linguistic University (2010), and has completed Courses at Cambridge University (2020).

He was born in 1976 in Mogilev region, Belarus. Is happily married & has a son.

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**Q. As the Ambassador of Republic of Belarus to Islamic Republic of Pakistan, what is your vision regarding your responsibility?**

A. First of all I would like to thank Global Affairs International Magazine for this great opportunity to familiarize the readers with the Republic of Belarus and to brief the esteemed readers on the current state of Belarusian-Pakistani bilateral relations.

The Embassy's main responsibility is to open new opportunities for cooperation on a wide spectrum of issues. Of course economic cooperation is a key priority because it contributes to the wellbeing of each nation. Thus the Diplomatic Mission is a door and a destination point for every interested in my country person whether it is a businessman or a tourist applying for a visa.

The Embassy makes efforts for maintaining regular political dialogue at different levels, as well as facilitates joint projects in different spheres.

**Q. Pakistan and Belarus enjoy cordial bilateral relations, how do you see it in terms of the past developments, the current engagements and prospects to further strengthen them in the future?**

A. To begin with I want to stress that Belarus and Pakistan established diplomatic relations in 1994 and this year our countries mark the 27th Anniversary. It may not sound like much but during this time the relationship between Belarus and Pakistan has evolved significantly and today we work for its further development.

The effective mechanisms of bilateral cooperation have been established, including the Joint Commission on trade and economic cooperation, commissions on science and technology, military and military and technical cooperation, working groups on industrial cooperation, agriculture, education, and pharmaceuticals.

A solid legal base consisting

of more than 80 treaties and MoUs has been formed in all areas from economy to culture and education.

Different official visits and experts meetings are held on a regular basis, parliamentary and inter-regional contacts between the two countries have been established, relationships between the business circles are expanding.

**Q. You have assumed this responsibility during the peak of COVID-19 Pandemic, how have these altered dynamics affected diplomacy in general and what experiences have you had in particular?**

A. The COVID-19 outbreak became a real challenge that effected traditional perceptions of the workflow and processes in general. The diplomacy and inter-state relations are no exception.

There is a saying that, in every storm, every cloud has a silver lining. So in every negative situation we need to seek a positive im-

pact and opportunity. During the pandemic we shifted some of our bilateral relations to online format, for instance online-meetings of the working groups on industry, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, education and science.

However other events are conducted face-to-face, for example, the sessions of the commission on military and technical cooperation, the fifth round of political consultations at the level of deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs and military consultations, so called Staff talk.

So as you see even in this difficult situation and restrictions caused by COVID we try to move forward our cooperation.

**Q. Given your experience as the Ambassador to Pakistan during the COVID-19 Pandemic, how do you view Pakistan's national response to deal with the issue?**

A. In my opinion Pakistan being one of the most populated countries in South Asia region has successfully dealt with the pandemic outbreak.

The Government of Pakistan launched all necessary activities to prevent the spread of COVID including SOPs' measures, smart lockdowns, and engaged with the international experts to prevent the spread of this disease.

The special unit – National Command and Operation Centre keeps the finger on the pulse and monitor the situation with the COVID on the permanent basis. We see that vaccination campaign continues its drive throughout the country, including the foreign diplomats. For instance, I and other Belarusian diplomats have been vaccinated in Pakistan at the National Health University

Hopefully all these measures will contribute to defeating this virus in the near future.

**Q. Bilateral relations between Belarus and Pakistan date back to 1994. But they were further strengthened to new heights after the opening of the embassy of Belarus in Islamabad in 2014, and the subsequent historic visits of Honorable President Alexander Lukashenko in 2014 and 2015. How do you analyze this association in the evolving situation in the international arena?**

A. Belarus and Pakistan are long standing partners. Our countries successfully collaborated long before Belarus established diplomatic relations with Pakistan in February 1994.

A reciprocal opening of our diplomatic missions, Belarus Embas-

sy in Pakistan in 2014 and Pakistan Embassy in Belarus in 2015, was a logical step in the development of our cooperation and confirmation of a true interest to build closer ties between the countries.

The President of the Republic of Belarus visited Pakistan twice in 2015 and 2016. The Prime Minister of Pakistan paid an official visit to Belarus in 2015 and the Belarusian Prime Minister visited Pakistan in same year.

During these visits Belarus and Pakistan defined the key areas of cooperation, set the visions for further development and growth, build an effective business to business channels of communication. Looking at our bilateral relations through the prism of the evolving situation in the international arena I can say that in our rapidly changing world any kind of cooperation is a positive factor. The stronger is mutually beneficial international cooperation – the stronger are countries and wellbeing of their people.

Belarus is located in Eastern Europe, but is part of the Eurasian Economic Union with Russia and other CIS states. Our country has an open export-oriented economy and is aimed at mutually beneficial cooperation with the countries worldwide. We consider Asia as a high priority of our foreign policy, and Pakistan is a perspective partner in



H.E Andrei Metelitsa – Ambassador of The Republic of Belarus to Pakistan during an interaction with Mr. Rizwan Haider Shah - Bureau Chief Gilgit Baltistan and Mr. Saadain Gardezi - Sub Editor. Mr. Dzianis Siniuta - Consul Belarus Embassy is also present on the occasion.

this region.

Pakistan plays an increasingly important role in the region, in international affairs and in global production and trade chains. It is an important market in which global players such as China, the US and the EU operate and compete. The ambitious project of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor with investments of over \$ 60 billion has been launched.

Belarus and Pakistan both can offer opportunities for development of cooperation in different areas that display the success formula of our relations.

**Q. There is immense potential for trade between Pakistan & Belarus as also stated by the Belarusian President during his recent meeting with Pakistani PM Imran Khan. What are the initiatives that can be taken to increase this current trade volume?**

A. Speaking of the meeting between our leaders in Dushanbe on the sidelines of SCO Summit on September 16th, 2021, the key point of the discussion was economic cooperation.

In this regard the two leaders agreed to intensify work on the preparation for a meeting of the intergovernmental commission on trade and economic cooperation next year.

However, the execution of joint economic projects mainly depends on business of two countries. The 5th Session of Business council meeting was held online, but the Pakistani business delegation visited our country in October to hold the 6th Session of bilateral Business council as well as business forum in person. Previously Pakistani business delegations visited Belarus in March, May, June and September.

We expect a representative Belarusian business delegation to participate in the international trade and industrial fair in Karachi on November 16 – 18, 2021. Businessmen of our countries will continue their dialogue during the following events at the Belarusian-Pakistani Pharmaceutical Forum that will take place on the sidelines of the International Medical Exhibition – “Belarus-Medica 2022” in Minsk and the dairy forum in Lahore next year.

**Q. In your opinion, what initiatives can be taken to boost people to people contacts between Belarus & Pakistan?**

A. Some steps were taken for promoting people to people contacts in different spheres, as well as for raising public awareness about our countries.

The Centers of the Belarusian language and culture were established at the National University of Modern Languages of Pakistan,

the National Library of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the library of the University of Punjab. They are equipped with literature on the history, culture and nature of Belarus, information materials on the development of Belarusian statehood, political and socio-economic structure of our society.

On the other hand the Department of Urdu language was opened in the Minsk State Linguistic University in November 2017.

We have laid legal foundation for cooperation between the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and the Pakistan Academy of Sciences as well as the Institute of Information Technologies of Pakistan, Pakistan Academy of Letters and Pakistan Council for Agricultural Research. There are some joint projects underway.

Interregional cooperation is a significant part of the Belarus-Pakistan relationship. MoUs were signed between our regions. Belarus honorary consul in Lahore facilitates cooperation of Punjab with Belarus. We are now working on setting up an honorary consulates in Karachi and Peshawar for the promotion of cooperation with Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa regions.

I am glad to say that taking into account friendly nature of the relationship between our countries and as a gesture of goodwill the Belarusian Side granted to the Pakistani citizens free visa entry to Be-

larus for a period of 30 days on the conditions that they have valid multiple-entry Schengen visa.

The President of Belarus endorsed the relevant decree on September 14th, 2021 which entered into force on October 17th, 2021. We trust that this initiative will give impetus for promotion people to people and business contacts, tourism and cultural exchanges, interregional cooperation and become a true bridge of friendship that will make our countries closer together.

**Q. The agricultural machinery of Belarus is widely-acclaimed for its durability and robustness amongst the agricultural community in Pakistan. With the current government's initiatives regarding Ease of Doing Business and encouraging Foreign Direct Investment, would Belarusian companies be interested in tapping the business potential of the agricultural sector of Pakistan by setting up plants or developing partnerships to produce farm machinery in Pakistan?**

A. Development of cooperation in the field of agricultural machinery is vitally important for Belarus and Pakistan.

The citizens of Pakistan are familiar with the word “Belarus” on a similar title of the Belarusian trac-

tors produced by “Minsk Tractor Works” that we have been supplying to the Pakistani market for more than half a century.

Belarus has also “Gomselmash”, “Lidselmash” and “Bobruiskagromash” and other factories that produce a wide range of agricultural equipment and machinery such as harvesters, tractor trailers, special machines for cultivation and harvesting.

I believe that Belarusian companies, that are working in Pakistan, will take into account the new Pakistan government's initiatives while developing partnerships in the field of farm machinery.

**Q. As per the figures of 2019, Pakistan-Belarus Trade Volume stood at 50.2 million Dollars, improving considerably over the years. Pakistan and Belarus had also agreed to enhance bilateral trade up to \$1 Billion in 2016. Are there any untapped sectors that in your opinion can be utilized to meet this goal?**

A. The volume of bilateral trade with Pakistan has varied from 50 to 120 million US Dollars over the past 15 years.

Belarus traditionally exports to Pakistan tractors, potash fertilizers, tyres. Moreover acrylic fibers, baby food, milk, whey powder and medicines are being exported in re-

cent years.

Pakistan exports to Belarus basmati rice, textiles, medical instruments, fruits, vegetables, sugar cane confectionaries, leather and sport goods.

Despite COVID pandemic in 2020 and 2021 bilateral trade results were quite positive. According to our statistics bilateral turnover has slightly increased in 2020 from 50 to 52 million. Belarus exports reached 37 million and Pakistan exports to Belarus – 15 million. This year is promising to bring even better trade results.

Belarus and Pakistan are well equipped with such instruments of trade facilitation as the joint commission on trade, Business Council, working groups on industry, agriculture, pharmaceuticals.

Taking into account the structure of the economies of Belarus and Pakistan, they are complementary since the growing agricultural, industrial and construction sectors of Pakistan require technologies, expertise and machinery, which Belarus can provide.

Industry is an important part of our bilateral cooperation and this message was reiterated by the Sides during the recent (third) Session of the Joint Belarusian-Pakistani Joint Working Group on Industrial cooperation that took place on June 8, 2021.

Another promising sphere of cooperation is agriculture. Our



country can offer affordable and high quality agricultural products, as well as technologies and experience in establishing enterprises in Pakistan for the processing of dairy, meat, fruit and vegetable products. For instance, Belarusian experts and technologies could be used for the production of cheese and butter in Pakistan and selling them through a network of Pakistani companies.

Currently we are working on achieving result-oriented projects, that is why in June the Pakistani delegation headed by Mr. Ghufuran Memon, Secretary of the Pakistani Ministry of National Food Security and Research, as well as local businessmen visited International Agro Exhibition "Belagro" in Minsk. At the end of July the Sides conducted the Meeting of the Joint Working Group on Agricultural cooperation.

Referring to the subject of cooperation in the field of healthcare and pharmaceuticals last December the Sides hold the first Session of the Joint working group. The results of this Session showed that our countries have good potential for cooperation in this field and it is mutually beneficial.

Belarusian side has indicated its interest in establishing cooperation in the following areas:

**- supplies of Belarusian medicines to the Pakistani market that are not produced here to provide citizens of Pakistan with high-quality and effective medicines;**

**- training of citizens of Pakistan in medical universities in Belarus;**  
**- providing citizens of Pakistan with high-tech medical care in health-care organizations of Belarus.**

Taking into account potential of both countries in pharmaceuticals we are now working on organization of bilateral pharmaceutical forum and we invite interested Pakistani companies for participation. The Forum will be a platform for B2B dialogue to consider the prospects for possible directions of mutually beneficial cooperation for:

**- Pharmaceutical products and medical equipment importers/ distributors/retailers.**  
**- Pharmaceutical products manufacturers companies.**

We invite all interested Pakistani partners to join this event and write directly to the Embassy in this regard.

Education is one of the important aspects of our relationship. Belarus and Pakistan have indicated interest in implementing joint projects in the sphere of education. Among them is exchange of students and academicians, holding joint conferences and joint research.

There are more than 15 MoUs signed between leading higher education institutions of Belarus and Pakistan. Some Pakistani graduates from Belarusian universities have built successful profession-

al careers here mainly in medical sphere. Around 30 students from Pakistan are studying in Belarus at the moment.

I would like to note that speaking about promising areas of cooperation we fully take into account the economic interests of both the Belarusian and Pakistani Sides. Here we proceed from a simple postulate: cooperation is a two-way street which is organized on the basis of mutual respect, equality and observance of the interests of each Side.

**Q. How does Belarus see the development of Belt and Road Initiative in terms of Global Economic Development?**

A. Belarus is a part of the "Belt & Road" initiative and we have established together with our Chinese partners "Great Stone Industrial Park", a special economic zone in Belarus with more than 70 residents that represent Chinese, European and US companies.

This industrial park contributes to the economic wellbeing of Belarus and facilitates the economic cooperation in the Eurasian region. Similarly our understanding is that the CPEC initiative is a way for better economic cooperation and connectivity in the region. Definitely our businessmen are interested to participate in tenders for machinery

supplies within the framework of CPEC projects.

**Q. How does Belarus see the evolving situation in Afghanistan? What impacts do you think the recent events are going to cause on the regional peace and stability?**

A. Each state focuses on improving well-being of its citizens. And of course the vital part in this process is closer cooperation and ties with its neighboring countries.

We hope that all involved Sides supporting the Afghan peace process will succeed and it will bring better connectivity and development in the region, in particular to Pakistan.

Pakistan has historically close ties with its neighbour Afghanistan. At the same time Belarus has traditionally well-developed economic and other ties with the Central Asian Republics.

Hopefully the situation in Afghanistan will be continually improving for the prosperity and better connectivity in the Central and South Asia.

**Q. Over the past years, Belarus has been constantly focusing the attention of the world community on the need for a new global dialogue on security. Would you like to shed some light on it**

**please?**

A. Addressing the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York on September 27, 2021 the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus called for a new global dialogue on security.

This dialogue is supposed to address the main thing – to establish an efficient, truly fair international order. Belarus calls on the great powers to start such a dialogue, to understand their responsibility for the future of the planet and to implement the civilizational mission entrusted to them.

Essential component of this dialogue is to think about the economic component of the new order. We see that economic globalization does not work in the interests of all people on the planet that is why we believe that regional integration has a huge potential for the global economy. We call this approach "integration of integrations".

In May this year, Belarus, in partnership with Barbados and UNCTAD, held a high-level online meeting on the use of interregional integration in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The major regional economic organizations welcomed the idea of strengthening such interregional cooperation.

**Q. As a foreigner, how is your experience in Pakistan? What**

**perceptions did you have beforehand of the Country and the people? Has there been a change of perspective?**

A. I arrived to Pakistan with my family in December 2020. Ever since I have started my mission, I feel very comfortable in your country. Pakistani people are very kind, open and friendly. It worth mentioning warm welcome, hospitality not only during the official meetings with my colleagues at the Pakistani Foreign Ministry and other Governmental Offices, but also in my everyday life whether it is a walk with my family on the streets of Islamabad or study of gorgeous flora and fauna of the Margalla Hills.

You must feel very lucky to have such a sunny weather in Pakistan, as well as, I can say, sunny fruits like – mangoes, Kinnow mandarins, guava. As you may know the weather in Belarus is totally different and we do not have so many sunny days that's why I enjoy my work and stay here.

I am also very lucky to discover other parts of Pakistan besides Islamabad since I visited the heart of Pakistan – the vibrant city of Lahore in Punjab and business capital – Karachi in Sindh. So I saw diverse culture and traditions, cultural heritage and scenery variety – mountains in the North and deserts in the South of the country, as well



as cuisine with its spices.

**Q. With museums, historical architecture, national parks and beautiful landscapes, Belarus has recently emerged as one of Europe's notable tourist destinations, yet there is little awareness of it in Pakistan. For our Pakistani audience, what are the places you would recommend people should visit in Belarus?**

A. In the Middles Ages, the lands now known as Belarus were called the Country of Castles. Today it is more often called "blue-eyed", the country of thousands of lakes. And thanks to forests, which occupy more than third of the territory of the country, and the unique bog complexes it is also called the "lungs of Europe".

Despite numerous wars and territory partition throughout its centuries-old history, Belarus managed to preserve a rich cultural heritage. Castles and extraordinary nature reserves, old family estates and churches, ethnographic villages, unique and truly breathtaking landmarks can be found in each of the six regions of the country.

Belarus has a lot to offer to tourists. During the hottest season in Pakistan – in summer – the Pakistani citizens could find the pleasant cool in Belarusian sanatoriums, health resorts and agro-touristic farms located in the picturesque places near the lakes and rivers. At the same time tourist can visit different sport facilities and to discover the city life in Minsk and other Belarusian cities.

Among the places I would recommend to visit are "Mir" castle that is situated in the small picturesque village of Mir in Grodno region, The Palace and Park Complex in Nesvizh, the memorial complex "Brest hero-fortress", the most ancient national parks of Belarus "Belovezhskaya Pushcha", "Lake Naroch", "Braslavskiye lakes" and many other places.



Left to Right: Mr. Saadain Gardezi (Sub Editor - Global Affairs), Mr. Ilya Kanapliou - (DHM/Counsellor Belarus Embassy), Mr. Rizwan Haider Shah (Bureau Chief GB - Global Affairs)



Mr. Saadain Gardezi presenting Global Affairs International Magazine to Mr. Ilya Kanapliou - DHM/ Counsellor Embassy of Belarus in Pakistan.

For those who are interested in technologies we can offer visits to "BELAZ Company" which is a major global manufacturer of mining dump trucks and transport equipment for mining and construction. On the site you can see the largest dump truck with payload capacity of 450 MT. In addition, if you wish you will have an opportunity to book a ride on mining dump truck on the testing area.

All interested to see with their own eyes the production of tractors «BELARUS» can visit "Minsk Tractor Works Company".

I believe that everyone can find a place in Belarus for his own taste.

**Q. Similarly, with tourism being an important sector of Pakistan, what are the places in Pakistan that you would recommend to the people of Belarus to visit?**

A. Belarusian tourists can discover the mountains with breathtaking mountain valleys, can learn about deep cultural tradition, mystical Sufi songs and dances that go far into antiquity and processed by local composers and choreographers in a modern manner, visit the heart of Pakistan – the vibrant city of Lahore,

the Buddhist archaeological sites at Taxila, the ancient settlement of Mohenjo-daro civilization, as well as can taste the spicy cuisine.

A great place to visit in Islamabad is a Lok Virsa museum where you can get acquainted with the diverse culture of Pakistan.

Of course in order to promote bilateral tourists exchanges a lot of joint work from both Sides is still required. That is why as an important initial step Belarus and Pakistan initiated creation of the necessary legal framework to develop cooperation between tourist agents of two countries.

In order to foster the cooperation in this area in 2019 our Minister of Sports and Tourism Mr Sergei Kovalchuk has invited to Minsk his counterpart Ms Fehmida Mirza, Federal Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination of Pakistan. We hope that her visit to our country, postponed earlier due to the COVID pandemic, will eventually take place. During this visit both Ministers will be able to elaborate practical steps on the implementation of the provisions laid down in the said MoU.

An important step in this direction will be the signing of an MoU between the Ministry of Sports and Tourism of Belarus and the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination of

Pakistan. We believe that cooperation between the ministries and travel agencies of both countries will facilitate a more active tourist flow.

**Q. What message would you like to give to the people of Belarus & Pakistan?**

A. Taking this opportunity I would like to invite all interested in cooperation with Belarus to contact the Embassy and we will be ready to assist in strengthening the existing and establishing new partnerships. I wish prosperity and progress to Pakistan, strong health, well-being to its people and to Belarusian-Pakistani relationship further development and growth.



Special Thanks to the Embassy of Belarus in Pakistan for facilitating the Interview.



Mr. Saadain Gardezi presenting Global Affairs International Magazine to H.E Andrei Metelitsa - Ambassador of The Republic of Belarus to Islamic Republic of Pakistan