Address by H.E. Dr. Alexander Spachis, Ambassador
Delegation of the European Union to Nepal
At The Roundtable
'Observations on Nepal's political institutions and their challenges and opportunities for sustainable democracy
and political stability in Nepal'
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democracy and political stability in Nepal'

Distinguished Guests
Ambassadors
Other Luminaries
President of Association of Political Science Students
And Media Colleagues

I would like to thank APSS for organizing this timely event and to commend the excellent work, year-round,
promoting research and quality debate across Nepal.

Nepal has privileged relation with the European Union and I am proud to serve as the first Resident Ambassador
and Head of a fully fledged EU Diplomatic Mission here in Kathmandu. The close and friendly relationship
between Nepal and the EU dates all the way back to 1977. The EU’s primary aim is to be a trusted partner in
Nepal's well being stability, prosperity, ongoing development, and we are a key investor in Nepal's peace,
education and economic capacity building, for a democratic and inclusive society.

Our policy is one of non-intervention; we are friends and well-wishers only. Our funding priorities are determined
by the requests of our partners in Nepal and align with government strategy. In this sense, the EU is one of the
few donors in Nepal that uses systems of government for budget support despite well-known challenges in the
area of governance and accountability. Both these principles lie at the heart of EU Development cooperation and
we remain committed to prioritize initiatives geared towards promoting democratic governance and accountability
as well as human rights.

We have come together to discuss Nepal’s political institutions at a time when many of the existing political
institutions have become severely constrained. Nepal’s peace process has nevertheless reached important
landmarks. In recent weeks, the process of integrating Maoist combatants into the Nepal Army has been resumed
and looks likely to be completed with minimal disruption. Discussion about consensus-building among the parties
have resumed as well.

Despite these positive aspects, Nepal's existing institutional arrangements are incomplete, and require the major
political parties and all stakeholders to work together to avoid serious instability. At present, there is no clear
legislative process and no easy way of filling vital posts that lie empty in various constitutional bodies. The strains
inherent in passing only a one-third budget are beginning to show, and consensus on some hotly-contested
constitutional issues remains elusive. On the local level, the long-term absence of elected bodies has had negative
consequences for accountability and service delivery. Local elections (independently from CA and/or
parliamentary elections) are one of the foundations of empowering people at the local level.

In this constitutional vacuum, legitimacy can come only from wide consensus and public approval. The political
parties are doing the right thing by holding talks to reach an agreement on the way forward. In Nepal's immediate
future, we need to see rapidly a new constitution and in any case the holding of free, fair and impartial elections. It
is not for me to say what is the best option, as this is a decision for Nepalese. But I can observe that it is not yet
clear which will come first, and political parties must balance these two priorities. On the one hand, we hope that
the parties will work to preserve the achievements that have been made in the process of constitution-writing and consensus-building over the last few years. On the other hand, political leaders know that they must remain accountable to the people who elected them.

Whatever route is taken out of the current difficulty, considerable challenges are to be expected in Nepal's journey towards sustainable democracy and political stability in the longer term. But these challenges can be met. The countries of the European Union have passed through similar challenges. It was a common resolve of the countries and peoples affected by the worse atrocities of war and instability that inspired the European Union. While it is not for the EU to decide on what is best for Nepal in terms of federal restructuring, I cannot stop thinking that in view of Europe's own experiences of devolution and working in close connection with its regions, empowering people outside of the central system remains indispensable to ensure accountability and better control of spending of resources at all levels.

Enduring peace is a precondition for sustainable democracy. Although major gains have been made in the peace process this year, ensuring transitional justice remains a challenge. Experiences across the world show that post-conflict impunity creates a dangerous precedent for the future and that transitional justice institutions are essential in breaking cycles of violence. It would therefore be in the interests of long-term peace and prosperity that Nepal acts now to secure justice for the victims of human rights abuse. Commitment to human rights is one of the core values of the EU, and we have been unwavering in our commitment to the protection of human rights in Nepal, also through projects supported by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights.

Despite the risks and challenges, this is a time of huge opportunity for Nepal. Since it has emerged from a period of intense conflict, Nepal's commitment to multiparty democracy and constitutionalism has not been in question. As a result of increased political consciousness, engagement and mobilization among the population, Nepal's democracy is deeper now than it was in 1990. If political parties and civil society organizations continue to hold one another accountable and work hard to generate consensus, then democracy can be further consolidated and the expectations of the Nepali people met, despite the many challenges that remain.

Elections represent a further opportunity for reengagement and renewal. Elections will allow the Nepali people to give their verdict on the performance of the parties and to confer a fresh mandate upon them. Hundreds of thousands of young people will be able to participate in a formal democratic process for the first time. The EU is a major supporter of Nepal's Election Commission. We have funded the Electoral Support Project (implemented by UNDP), which aims to strengthen its capacity and build up the skills of its staff. This fine institution is a crucial pillar of Nepal's democracy. The EU has also funded voter education programs by Nepali NGOs in some of the remotest parts of the country. Whatever decision is taken by the Nepali people, it remains my personal belief that elections – whether it is for a new Parliament or a new CA - should better take place sooner rather than later.

The EU Delegation is fully supportive of Nepal's efforts towards creating lasting peace, stability and prosperity, to meet the aspirations of its citizens. We do so by supporting the poorest, the marginalised, and the excluded communities and regions. Our programmes are exclusively based on need, and not on any other preferences. We will continue our assistance and funding in partnership with the government and civil society organizations. We believe that our financial difficulties at home should not affect our commitments abroad. We look forward to the conclusion of the peace process and to the promulgation of a new constitution. Stable political conditions would enable the assistance that we provide to be used even more constructively and sustainably. We want Nepal to be able to make the best possible use of us.

In all of our relationships and activities, we seek to uphold and promote the fundamental principles of peace, stability, democracy, human rights and prosperity. This has been a period of profound transformation for Nepal and, although the final outcome is still uncertain, we are confident that these same principles will find expression in the political institutions and policies that are adopted.

Thank you for inviting the EU Ambassador to join you in this debate.