

Honourable Chief Guest, Minister for Foreign Affairs, His Excellency
Mahmood Ali,

Honourable Ministers,

Excellences and dear colleagues of the diplomatic corps,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good evening to all of you and a warm welcome to Europe Day 2015!

I am extremely thankful to all of you for offering us the privilege of your company on this highly symbolic occasion. The message of peace and unity that Robert Schuman, one of our founding fathers, conveyed 65 years ago remains as relevant as ever.

Allow me first to express my gratitude to the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Mr Mahmood Ali, who has gracefully consented to be our chief guest.

A big vote of thanks should also go to the principal, teachers and students of Chittagong Grammar School-Dhaka. Their youthful interpretation of both the Bangladeshi and EU anthems has radiated plenty of positive energy and emotion among us.

You have also noticed a photo exhibition that has been especially conceived for this Europe Day. Drik Gallery, the curator, and GMB Akash, the photographer, have performed with plenty of talent and commitment. They also deserve our acknowledgement.

The theme of the exhibition is "Women and Girls of Bangladesh". By a fortunate coincidence today is Mothers' Day. Congratulations to all mothers present tonight! The pictures have been taken at various sites where the EU is conducting development projects. This exhibition is also the occasion to flag that we, in the EU, together with our 28 Member States, meaning Europe altogether, have put gender balance and women empowerment very high on our international agenda.

We firmly believe that respect to women is a cardinal value in any society. All women deserve equal respect, be they working in the field or working in a Garment factory, or be they female students celebrating Nobo Borsho.

One picture will also probably catch your attention. It received the first prize at the exhibition "Bangladesh through your eyes" organized by the Turkish Embassy. This photo was taken by one of my colleagues of the EU Delegation, Nicole Malpas, during a trip to the Sundarbans. What I wish to say here is that, at the EU Delegation, we are all very inspired by what we see around us in Bangladesh.

This passion for Bangladesh, we are committed to translate it into practical realities benefiting both the European and the Bangladeshi citizens.

Since the previous Europe Day, one year ago, we have been working hard in this direction. Let me briefly share with you some of our bilateral achievements:

- . The launch of the new Multi Annual Indicative Program (MIP 2014-2020) that identifies the main avenues of our development cooperation for the next seven years, namely Education and Skills Development – Nutrition and Food Security- Strengthening democratic Governance.

- . The creation of a new institution: the EU Business Council Bangladesh, that aims at bringing forward Bangladesh from a status of supplier of garment to a full fledge economic partner: this country deserves better than the image associated to low cost and cheap labour. This would do justice to the millions of actors of this silent revolution which is gradually taking Bangladesh out of poverty.

- . Precisely in the economic field, the implementation of the Sustainability Compact adopted two years ago after the Rana Plaza tragedy has captured all our attention. We are glad that Bangladesh has been the world most successful country in benefiting from the EU GSP/EBA market access regime. What we expect now, as underlined a few days ago by the EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom, is that the conditions for workers will also further improve.

- . And, last but not least, we have launched an awareness campaign on HORIZON 2020, the new EU Research and Innovation mega programme. We are convinced that it will accompany your country in bringing to reality two very inspiring visions: Digital Bangladesh and Blue Economy.

Honourable Ministers, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, the people of Europe and Bangladesh have a lot in common. It is not by routine that we have enshrined Democracy and Human Rights into the article 1 of the bilateral Cooperation Agreement signed in 2001.

We both come from far in history and culture. We pursue the same ideals. Because the EU believes that there is no peace without reconciliation, it received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. Because Bangladesh believes in Peace and Development, it is the world largest contributor to the UN Peace Keeping Operations and also currently the Chair of the WTO Least Developed Countries Group.

There are no limits to what a stronger Europe, which is now back on track to economic prosperity and a fast developing Bangladesh, could do together in face of many transnational challenges: countering violent extremism, jointly combatting climate change through a concerted preparation of the Paris conference COP21, offering safer ways to migration are some of them. My wish is that when we'll meet again in one year on the occasion of Europe Day 2016, we will witness that this common ground has further benefited the wellbeing of the people of Bangladesh and Europe.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a very pleasant evening.