

The Why and the How of European Union efforts in Mediation.

Speech by

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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

- Before starting, I would like to congratulate once again the GPH and MILF Panels for the signature of the Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro on the 27th of March.
- Their tremendous efforts, along with those of the Malaysian Peace Facilitator, have shown once again the importance and efficacy of dialogue, mediation and mediation support.
- And it is about this matter that I am glad to talk about today, presenting the why and the how of European Union efforts in Mediation.
- Over the last 10 years, there has been an increased recognition that the practice of peace mediation is a cost-effective instrument in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Reports suggest that the drivers of the marked decline in conflicts, including in sub-Saharan Africa, is due to a surge of policy initiatives to stop wars, often labelled peace-making. While mediation traditionally was the exclusive prerogative of states and large multilateral organisations like the UN, the mediation field has recently witnessed the emergence of new actor such as regional, sub-regional and private diplomacy actors. These can have certain comparative advantages and skills, for example their access or proximity to the parties in a conflict or their capacity to use innovative approaches.

- The rather chaotic year 2013 with the conflicts in Mali, Syria, CAR and South Sudan, reinforced the urgent need for negotiations, mutually beneficial solutions, and scenarios that would suit all parties. In particular, the conflict in Syria and the roles played by the world powers and regional countries has shown a readjustment in global politics and, accordingly, mediation. The stronger roles played in the conflict by emerging political powers such as Turkey add a new dimension to mediation efforts while the agreement on Syria's chemical weapons in the autumn showed the possibilities for settlement where there is a political will.
- It has been a busy time for the EU's comprehensive approach to crisis which employs the 3Ds of Diplomacy, Defence (understood as the provision of security and rule of law) and Development.
- But one may ask why the EU is engaged in mediation outside its region – What added value does it bring to a scene where regional organisations or the UN are already active? Here is my answer:
- **Firstly**, the very creation of the EU is based on efforts to overcome divisions and promote peace – a fact which was recognised when we received the Nobel Peace Prize not long ago. These internal experiences make the EU well placed to promote conflict prevention and peace building also beyond its borders.
- While not easy to implement in practice, our partners often expect us to bring them our specific mediation and dialogue know-how. Let's be clear the Nobel Peace Prize was received not for peace-making around the world but for keeping the peace amongst ourselves for 70 years (a big feat considering our European history). The 'art of compromise' where 'all countries emerge victorious from talks' was identified as the specific contribution that the EU has mastered. To quote from the Nobel lecture:
- *'Boring politics is the small price we pay for the EU's secret weapon – the art of compromise. No drama of victory or defeat, but ensuring all countries emerge victorious from talks.'*
- **Secondly**, The EU has also developed its capacity and experience in mediation and dialogue over the last 20 years including as a mediator itself (such as in Aceh) but also in providing political, financial and technical support to dialogue and mediation efforts of key partners.

- This means today, it is hard to find a region of the world where the EU is not active to some extent in peace mediation.
- Here we of course interpret the term mediation very broadly to include political facilitation and dialogue and initiatives in the whole conflict cycle ranging from conflict prevention to peace-building.
- Examples are many: on the so-called Track One, the EU (HR/VP) Catherine Ashton has been a key player in the positive developments in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. It is, however, a mistake to count EU peace mediation activities only in such settings where the EU has a formal mediation mandate.
- If we consider the daily work of our Heads of Delegation and EU Special Representatives, whether in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, Madagascar, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Afghanistan or here in the Philippines they are in contact on a daily basis with local political and civil society actors; so too, incidentally, are the EU staff working in military and civilian crisis missions and managing external aid programmes. When such countries are in a fragile, conflict or post conflict transition we will not be delivering on our duties under our Treaties if we do not strengthen our ability to mediate, and to support local mediation, dialogue and confidence building efforts. This is the reality of the EU's preventive diplomacy on the ground.
- **Thirdly** one advantage for regional organisations is that their members are often more familiar with the parties and the situation on the ground. Proximity can make a situation more salient and ensure earlier attention to a problem since neighbours are likely to take a greater interest in conflict prevention in an adjacent State. In some situations, however, neighbours may have a vested interest, such as when members of an aggrieved group in a neighbouring State are “ethnic kin”.
- Regional politics can play either a positive or a negative role. Regional influence may have more impact on the warring parties than international influence; in others, the opposite may be true. Therefore although geographically distant from Asia, over the last years the EU has been engaged in mediation efforts in Aceh- Indonesia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Nepal and of course here in the Philippines.
- **Fourthly**, it would be incorrect to assume that the EU support to other mediation actors is limited to providing funding through its wide array of financial instruments. Instead, the EU's added value in global mediation

lies precisely in applying a comprehensive approach to conflict prevention and resolution based on its many related experiences. Mediation is a key complement to other EU interventions, such as civilian crisis missions, in contributing to sustainable solutions.

- To illustrate the EU's comprehensive approach to mediation one could look at our experience in Aceh:
- The EU was involved in the Aceh process from the timid beginnings. We co-chaired a 2002 conference in Tokyo – this was inconclusive because while the monitoring of the process on the ground was recognised as important but the monitoring roles could not be resolved.
- We did not give up. In 2004 the EU was approached by former Finnish President Ahtisaari. We realised the – historic, albeit small – chance to support nascent talks that had been launched between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement. Christmas 2004 saw the devastating tsunami – the Acehnese were the main victims.
- While the tsunami did not trigger our mediation initiative, it helped it to take on new momentum. We tasked President Ahtisaari to undertake a mediation effort. He had only six months to do so. In the Memorandum of Understanding in August 2005, the parties recognised the role the EU could play and we were invited to monitor the peace process.
- We broke new ground in launching the Aceh Monitoring Mission – 250 monitors, one third of them from ASEAN. It was the first concrete security EU cooperation with ASEAN. Together, we developed the concept of "active monitoring", i.e. reaching out to regional and local authorities and communities including participating in local meetings with civil society and police. In parallel, the European Commission developed an assistance programme to support the implementation of the MoU.
- This intervention was comprehensive in character including firstly Security support in the form of the Monitoring Mission itself; secondly structural support including mediation, the opening of the EU Office in Banda Aceh as an open house for dialogue and assistance to the administration in drafting regulations and preparing local elections in 2006. And thirdly Developmental support, including economic policy planning and giving health and gender issues the importance they deserved.

- **Last but not least**, conflict prevention, crisis management and peace building are at the heart of the work of the EEAS, as set out in the Lisbon Treaty. This priority is reflected by the fact that over half of the EU external assistance is spent in the support of fragile and conflict affected countries. Already in 2005 the EU has stated in its core development policy that it believes there cannot be peace without development, and no development without peace - the "security and development nexus".
- This is also recognised in the 2009 Council Concept on the Strengthening EU mediation and dialogue capacities where member states set out an ambitious goal: to use mediation as a tool of first response to emerging or ongoing crisis situations. For a diplomatic actor on the world stage this is one of our *raison d'être*.
- To achieve this goal is not necessarily straight-forward. Peace mediation is a crowded field and close coordination between the different players is essential to ensure that we jointly bring added value rather than complicate the situation additionally.
- Since 2011, the EEAS Mediation Support Team has been working on building the EU's mediation support capacity. Equipped with its own earmarked funding, the team is now able to provide rapid operational support, such as assessing opportunities for mediation engagement, setting up the mechanisms to be able to ensure the deployment of internal and external expertise to the staff of EU Special representatives and EU Delegations.
- It provides Coaching and training in partnership with external training providers and experts delivering tailor-made on-demand coaching for EU Special Representatives and Heads of Delegation.
- Mediation support in these different forms has been provided to my colleagues working on Mali, Myanmar, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Israel/Palestine, North Africa, Afghanistan, South Caucasus, Central Asia, Western Balkans, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Nigeria and Central America.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Having presented what I believe lays at the core of the why and the how of EU mediation let me say something about the EU-ASEAN relationship in this field. I believe that it is worth recalling that the EU was the first dialogue partner formally engaging ASEAN, including at SOM level into

a constructive and open discussion on mediation, reconciliation and crisis management.

- Our level of interest and commitment is based on what we perceive as ASEAN's vocation to act as a regional mediator which is fully reflected in the unique architecture of its external relations. We are therefore committed to work together with ASEAN in this field including to develop mechanisms and institutions like AIPR as reflected in the Bandar Seri Bagawan Plan of Action.
- Indeed this is a good moment to wish the AIPR every success at this its first formal event and to commend those who brought the idea to fruition.
- Allow me now to illustrate the EU approach to mediation on the basis of our experience here in the Philippines. I will draw very much from an external assessment of EU mediation activity carried out last year by the ECDPM – the European Centre for Development Policy Management in the Netherlands.
- The case of Philippines is indeed telling and exemplary in its own way. It shows the wide concept of mediation we have and reflects the great variety of ways in which the EU uses this tool at different levels and through different actors and financial instruments.
- Engaged in Mindanao since the early 1990s, the EU and a few EU MS have been significant bilateral development and humanitarian actors in the conflict-affected provinces of the southern Philippines. At the time of the escalation of the crisis between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) between 2008 and 2009, the EU intensified its presence in the region of Mindanao, evolving from an established donor to a more political actor supporting the peace process.
- I do not want to overstate our role in the Peace Process but given its longstanding development and humanitarian engagement I believe the EU was seen as a credible actor in Mindanao with a thorough knowledge of the context. After careful political consideration and through the then relatively new Instrument for Stability, in 2008 the EU started providing support to the peace process in Mindanao by financing the activities of two international NGOs and one national NGO network engaged in facilitating dialogue among the stakeholders to the conflict. The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) worked primarily on dialogue, mediation and facilitation, while the Nonviolent Peace Force (NVPF)'s key activities included regular patrolling and reporting on

cases of human rights violations and other specific threats to civilian populations. Crucially, both had good links to senior parties to the conflict.

- In addition, the local NGO the Mindanao People's Caucus (MPC) worked at the grassroots level to broaden and expand the consultation processes among the various stakeholders in Mindanao in order to ensure transparency, participation and ownership of the peace process, yet also to connect this to other levels.
- During the peak of the crisis in the peace process, the EU and MS' representations in the Philippines created a favourable environment for the MILF to reach out to the diplomatic community in Manila and to raise awareness of its firm commitment not to let the peace process collapse. Reflection on how to bring forward the on-going efforts led to the EU's being party to the gestation of the idea of a mechanism to accompany the talks and to mobilise international support to the resolution of the conflict. Thus the MILF and the Government of the Philippines agreed in September 2009 on the establishment of an International Contact Group (ICG), inclusive of Japan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the UK, and four international NGOs.
- The EU's previous positive engagement in Aceh-Indonesia had somehow made the point that both in the region and within the EU, that we could fulfil a useful role in this type of action in Asia, smoothing the path for our own engagement.
- The EU was requested in 2009 by the Government and MILF to contribute by being an active participant in the International Monitoring Team and lead the supervision of both parties' compliance with their commitments on humanitarian, rehabilitation, and development activities in the south of the country.
- A politically significant financial commitment under our Instrument for Stability with a first tranche of €3 million was allocated in support of the EU's team. In parallel, the EU provided support to the political dialogue process, in particular to the innovative participation in the ICG of INGOs. This 'peacekeeping' and 'peace-making' programme has proven to be instrumental in improving, or at least preserving, the peaceful situation on the ground and in promoting political negotiations and ensuring these stay on track.
- In the crowded space of Mindanao's peace process, the EU was able to use its funding instruments in a strategic way which we understand was also appreciated by the parties. The EU was not seen as having a biased agenda and thus secured credibility with both the Government and the MILF.

- We believe Mindanao is one of those cases where the EU managed to draw on its internal experience in mediation and dialogue, leading to positive results. Through the initiative of the CHD and with the support of the UK as an ICG member several meetings were organised with two former negotiators in the Northern Ireland peace process, while separate visits to Northern Ireland in 2009 proved useful for the parties in determining the way forward to peace. These activities raised awareness of the Northern Ireland experience and the validity of the lessons learned from the peace process in Mindanao. I think it is fair to add that while EU officials were of the opinion that other internal EU experience of the devolution of political power might also have been instructive, this was not taken up.
- When all is said and done the Mindanao example represents, in our humble view, the lesson that the EU can find the space and the tools to provide crucial and appreciated support to a peace process by knowing the context, supporting and managing the right partners and by leveraging its more neutral profile.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I hope that I have managed to convey the message that mediation is at the core of European external action and very much at the centre of what we stand for. You could even say that, based on its internal peace-making experience, the EU as a value-based organisation should be confident enough to strive to provide the international community with the gold standard of mediation in its global engagement.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.