

## Message from the EU Ambassador His Excellency David Daly on Europe Day 2015



May is always a special month for the European Union because we remember how and why the European integration project came about. The EU was born out of war to prevent war in Europe such as we had seen every fifty years or so going back through the centuries; it was an attempt to break out of this destructive cycle of war. As such, the EU has been a clear success. Wars between historical former enemies in Europe have become unthinkable; negotiation around the Council table, with full respect for each and every Member State, is how we resolve problems. For this the EU received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012.

On 9 May 1950 the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed that European countries give up the purely national management of the industrial sectors which are needed to wage war - coal, iron, steel - in favour of a shared joint management of those sectors. This joint management system would be based on agreed rules at the European level, with independent institutions to ensure fair play. Answering his call, six European countries - Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands came together to form the European Coal and Steel Community which evolved into the EU of today.

The European Union of today comprises 28 Member States and a population of over 500m. It is the world's largest trader and donor of international development aid. It plays a leading role on major global issues: on development issues 2015 is the European Year of Development with an added focus on what we are doing around the world; on Climate change the EU has made ambitious commitments in advance of the Conference in Paris later this year with a view to achieving a global legally binding agreement: the EU has played a key role in coordinating the nuclear talks with Iran which successfully reached understandings on key issues last month: on fisheries the EU is a key player in the fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing which is very damaging to sustainable fishing for future generations.

The EU is a very strong partner of Sri Lanka, working on both global and bilateral issues. The EU is helping Sri Lanka on environmental works and on Climate change policy. On IUU fisheries we hope that Sri Lanka will make sufficient progress in its fisheries management work so that the EU could remove its ban on the imports of Sri Lankan fish.

This year we celebrate 40 years since the first EU-Sri Lanka Commercial Cooperation Agreement in 1975. Trade remains an important aspect of our bilateral relationship with the EU being the top market for Sri Lankan exports. Not only are we working on how the EU could help Sri Lanka develop its exports further - through help to the small and medium sized exporters and on Geographical Indications for major exports such as tea and cinnamon - but we are also working together on global issues at the World Trade Organisation such as Trade Facilitation, Government Procurement and the Doha Trade Round.

The EU has been a longstanding and generous development partner of Sri Lanka. In the past ten years the EU has allocated over LKR100 billion (€760m) to Sri Lanka. Our development and humanitarian assistance has helped rebuild lives and communities after the tsunami and the conflict; this rebuilding has been both physical, over 20,000 houses for IDPs and other local infrastructure, and personal, trainings and livelihood programmes. The EU gave over €200m for tsunami reconstruction and much more than this when the bilateral contributions of EU Member States and citizens are included. Today I see donated fishing boats along the Sri Lankan coast still with their original European names painted on them!

As a friend of Sri Lanka the EU has long advocated a strong reconciliation process to help heal the wounds of war. Our own bitter experiences in Europe have taught us that reconciliation is key to ensuring any sustainable peace. Reconciliation itself requires investigating the past so that the truth can emerge and appropriate judicial measures be taken accordingly. The EU is heartened by the commitments of President Sirisena, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and the government in this regard, including creation of the Presidential Task Force on Reconciliation headed by former President Mrs. Kumaratunga.

The EU has long listed the LTTE as a terrorist organisation and recently it has taken a new decision to safeguard this position within the EU legal framework.

Similarly, the EU welcomes the Government's commitments about improving governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights across Sri Lanka. Concrete sustainable improvements on these issues, as well as on labour and environmental issues, will be key to the issue of Sri Lanka again benefitting from the EU's trade preferences called the Generalised System of Preferences +. Sri Lanka must satisfactorily comply with a number of international conventions which it has signed up to, in order to qualify for the GSP+.

It's good to talk! Recently Sri Lanka hosted some high level meetings with the EU here in Colombo, the Sri Lanka-EU Joint Commission and the Working Group on Trade and Economic Affairs. We agreed in principle to establish an important new Working Group on Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights. We also started a process that may lead to granting the GSP+ to Sri Lanka. Later this year we will have the Working Group on Development Assistance. All these groups aim to strengthen our partnership further.

I am pleased to see how vibrant the people to people contacts are between Sri Lankans and the peoples across the EU, whether through education, business or tourism. This is natural, especially given the long history of contacts over centuries. These contacts remind us of the enduring strong links between Europe and Sri Lanka. I am honored to lead a team dedicated to this relationship.