



**Speech delivered by H.E. David Daly,
Ambassador of the European Union to Sri Lanka
on the occasion of the Europe Day reception, 14 May 2015, Colombo**

40 years of EU-Sri Lankan cooperation!

40 years since the first Sri Lanka-EU Commercial Cooperation Agreement was signed in 1975.

As a tribute to 40 years of cooperation I guarantee that my speech today will not exceed 40 minutes!

- 0 -

On 9 May 1950 the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, called on the nations of Europe to unite and make war on our continent impossible. 65 years later, his message of peace and unity is as relevant as ever.

Schuman's appeal to overcome age-old divisions just five years after the Second World War laid the foundations of what has become the European Union. Over the years our Union has grown from six to twenty eight member countries to become the world's largest peace project. The dreams of the founding fathers have become a reality.

But peace and prosperity - based on a deep commitment to fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law - cannot be taken for granted. It is a constant work in progress, something that must be nurtured and protected.

The European Union is an everyday peace project. Every member, big and small, old and new has a seat at the table and, in a fundamental way, an equal voice. Sadly the spectre of war has returned to our continent, reinforcing the importance of the peace that has been achieved within the EU, something not lost on our neighbours.

- 0 -

This evening I would like to share with you my top 5 FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions); 5 things which people ask me about, one of them being about what they expect me to produce out of my pocket!

Don't worry; the questions are long but the answers are short!

But first of all I would like to congratulate President Sirisena on his election as President of Sri Lanka on a platform of improving governance, rule of law and human rights, amongst other things. I also congratulate Prime Minister Wickremesinghe.

The EU welcomes their commitments on these issues and on reconciliation and we applaud the concrete measures the Government has already taken.

Now to the FAQs...

1. People often ask me about reconciliation.

On Reconciliation, the EU has longed urged Sri Lanka to go further on the issues underlying the ethnic tensions so that all Sri Lankans feel that they are treated equally and with dignity in their country. This is a plea to all Sri Lankans, not just to the Government.

Measures already taken, such as the appointment of civilian Governors to the Northern and Eastern Provinces, the release of some land back to its owners, the freeing up of travel in the North and East, are very much welcomed.

As a friend the EU urges Sri Lanka to address all the difficult issues, including creating a credible domestic investigative mechanism to allow the truth to emerge and to allow the judicial system to handle that truth - whatever it might be - appropriately .

As friends, European countries supported Sri Lanka's request to defer the UN OHCHR Report from the March to the September session of the UNHRC.

As a friend the EU urges Sri Lanka to continue to turn commitments into actions before the September HRC session.

In this context I should mention that last month the EU renewed its listing of the LTTE as a terrorist organisation, this time on even stronger legal grounds to protect against any challenge. There is no safe haven for the LTTE within the EU.

2. People often ask me about EU-Sri Lanka economic relations:

As I already mentioned, the EU and Sri Lanka signed a trade agreement 40 years ago - in 1975.

The agreement set a context for a strong economic relationship which has expanded over time. Today the EU remains Sri Lanka's biggest export market with our trade growing at 8% p.a.; around 25% of all FDI into Sri Lanka comes from the EU. Some 40% of tourists to this beautiful island come from EU countries.

We will further strengthen this by launching a new Trade Related Technical Assistance programme of around €8m later this year to help trade facilitation.

3. People sometimes ask me, isn't this the EU year of Development?

2015 is designated as the European Union Year of Development. Since the EU and its member countries give over half of all development assistance globally, it is natural that this is a priority area for us.

Here in Sri Lanka we have been helping rebuild lives and communities affected by the tsunami and by the war; helping resettle IDPs; helping children get back to school; helping farmers manage their crops, helping people train for better jobs. Around a million people have benefitted from our programmes; around 250,000 from our housing programmes building 20,000 houses - and we're working on another housing programme for around 3,000 more houses.

More topical examples:

Our next Annual Programme will inject some €30m into rural development in some of the poorest plantation areas of Central and Uva Provinces:

Our new cooperation with Agence Francaise de Developpement will transform the water and sanitation facilities in 12 towns across the country in a programme worth over €200m:

Our other programmes range from sustainable production and consumption (SWITCH) to strengthening Civil society Organisations.

4. People frequently ask me about fisheries:

The EU supports a strong sustainable fisheries sector globally, including for Sri Lanka. That is why we fight against Illegal Unreported and Unregistered fisheries. We hope that Sri Lanka will take the measures sufficient to enable the EU to lift its fisheries ban.

5. Finally, people very frequently ask me what do I have in my pocket?

These people tend to expect me to reach into my pocket and pull out ...GSP+!

However, when I reach into to my pocket, what I find there are ... Questions.

For those who think GSP+ is about T-Shirts or tuna, I must tell you that any discussion of GSP+ is about torture, or about labour rights, or about the Prevention of Terrorism Act, or about a host of other Human Rights, Labour or Environmental issues flowing from the 27 International Conventions which Sri Lanka must satisfactorily comply with.

That's why I have questions; I want to know what the Government has done on these issues and what it is going to do.

Now... this is where you come in!

It is for everybody in this room to help bring answers, whether you are the Government, NGOs, the business community, the UN or other diplomatic colleagues. Please tell me what has changed in your particular field; help me build up the complete picture of compliance with these 27 International Conventions.

The commitments of the Government on human rights have been vital in being able to start the new conversation on the GSP+.

A few weeks ago we held senior trade talks here in Colombo with colleagues from the EU in Brussels. I am delighted that we were able to start a process that may lead to the granting of the GSP+.

However, it is clear that much remains to be done by Sri Lanka and it will take time. Nonetheless, the EU hopes that the prospect of GSP+ will help energize the necessary transformation.

Ministers, Ladies and gentlemen. We all know that nothing happens of its own accord - it takes people to make things happen. I would like to thank the Hilton Residence Colombo for their great cooperation in making this event so nice for us all. I would also like to thank the musician who have played so beautifully. Finally I thank my colleagues at the EU Delegation for many of whom the organisation of this event was a first - thank you and well done!

- 0 -

Finally, I owe you all an apology.

I am sorry that I have not honored the 40 years of our cooperation by going the full 40 minutes in my speech.

Please forgive me.