

Europe Day 2013

Speech to be delivered by the Chargé d' Affairs, Ms Daniela Tramacere

Today we celebrate the 63rd Anniversary of Europe day. And once again for many of us it is an occasion for celebration as well as introspection. For the Europeans who live abroad it becomes easy to observe how we tend to take Europe for granted. And this is mindful of the difficulties we have been going through and the relentless reform process that the economic crisis has triggered. 27 countries, soon 28 (Croatia joins in July) are pooled together in an unprecedented level of integration for sovereign states that make this experiment unique, complex, fascinating, and in spite of its serious challenges, I would dare say inevitable!

The EU has enabled its citizens to reach unprecedented standards of living and prosperity. The EU is the world's largest economic bloc. But the EU is much more than that, Since the establishment of the then European Coal and Steel Community time and time again practical cooperation has reinforced the trend to political integration and shared problems have led to shared solutions. This move has not been without its challenges and the progress we have made over the last few years, is not always acknowledged.

The crisis has forced us, more than ever, to reassess our economic policies, to fundamentally revise our public finances and to deepen our economic and monetary union in a way that we had been unable – in some cases unwilling - to do before it. We are now steadily proceeding towards a banking union, which can be considered a milestone of the integration process. The oversight of the bloc's banks will be centralized starting from next year, giving the bailout fund the power to tackle the risk of banking failures. Such a step would have been unimaginable only a few years ago.....

All this is not surprising to many of us. It is sufficient to talk to businessmen in Europe to understand the immeasurable value of the European internal market and what the free movement of people, goods, services and capital entails and means for each and everyone of the European citizens; the use of a single currency for the countries of the Euro zone, and so much more....

Europe has a manufacturing trade surplus of almost 300 billion Euros, five times as large as it was in 2000. Sometimes people tend to forget this, that even in the crisis, Europe is in fact increasing its surplus. Our services surplus has expanded to over 100 billion euro. Europe remains the world's largest importer of both manufactured goods and services. And not only do we still have the largest stocks of foreign direct investment abroad, we are also the largest host of foreign direct investment in the world.

Croatia is expected to join the EU on 1st July and the "waiting room" is far from empty. Croatia's entry provides fresh evidence of the transformative power of the Union's enlargement policy: torn by conflict only two decades ago, the country is now a stable democracy, capable of taking on the obligations of European Union membership and of adhering to European Union standards.

EU's achievements in promoting democracy, human rights, peace and prosperity on the European continent have been recognized also with the award of Nobel Peace Prize last year. Even in today's Europe, democracy is a constant work in progress; it needs to be valued and protected and the Union's democratic foundations and legitimacy further strengthened. EU legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens should be nurtured. We share a responsibility to safeguard democracy, not just on our own continent, but also around the world. We have therefore made human rights the silver thread that runs through EU foreign policy, assisting democratic transitions around the globe

and helping oppressed minorities, social groups and NGOs to voice their concerns.

Europe is often synonymous with 'soft power', based on dialogue, cooperation and solidarity. Meanwhile, the EU continues to attract new members not just because it supports trade, jobs and investment, but because it stands for values, such as freedom and democracy, that inspire people round the world. Just a few days ago we saw it, once again, with the catalyst role Europe played for Serbia and Kosovo to reach the historic agreement on the normalization of their relations in the framework of the EU-facilitated dialogue. The agreement represents a major achievement as the parties have committed to jointly work towards a future in the European Union.

Within the Caribbean we have been building on our historical heritage and our aim is to harness an already strong and mature political relationship based on mutual interest in a rapidly globalised world. We share values and a vision on most of the burning issues the world faces today. The approval of the Small Arms Treaty at the UNGA is one example of how we can join forces in pursuing ambitious common objectives. I would like to seize the opportunity to acknowledge the leadership role played by T&T in the approval process of the Small Arms Treaty. Climate Change, environmental issues, sustainable development, the fight against transnational crimes, just to mention a few, are areas where our positions converge and common interests strengthen our already strong ties, as reflected in the recently adopted Caribbean –EU Joint Strategy that brings our relationship to a higher level of ambition. Security is an area where we will be working on very closely with our partners in the Caribbean region, Transnational crime and its collateral effects are causing significant difficulties in both sub-regions and that we intend to work together to address this challenge.

The EU is the biggest trading partner for developing countries. No other area in the world gives the CARICOM countries and DR equivalent wide access to its internal market for their goods as the EU does ... Together with its MS the EU, is the largest donor of development aid, providing more than 60 percent of the total Overseas Development Assistance. In Trinidad and Tobago our committed grants have surpassed more than €100 million (ca. TT\$850 million) over the last 5 years.

Recently I was asked by a journalist why we grant funds to the government to improve the competitiveness of this country, and particularly at a time of serious financial constraints in Europe. My answer was that we are partners and we share values and interests. We have an interest in T&T to have a competitive, open, transparent economy and accountable governance, because these are the bases for trade and foreign investments to grow....and for a partnership to flourish. The aim of the EU assistance is to support the building of stronger and more efficient public service institutions, delivering better and more relevant services, increasing the cooperation of the different actors, and improving aspects of good governance such as accountability and transparency of public administration. Private sector development also ties with public procurement. Value for money, public access to information on government contracts, and fair opportunities for suppliers to compete for government contracts, are all requirements for an efficient and transparent government procurement system. And all this is of interest to all.

The EU is supporting T&T also in the environmental sector to pursue a low-carbon development path through the sustainable management of environmental resources in the extractive, forestry and transportation sectors.

Since 2008, the EU has been supporting the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in the divestment and restructuring of the sugar industry. EU funding for the agricultural sector is part of the EU contribution to social and economic development and

diversification of the economy of T&T. In its efforts to encourage regional integration and to implement the CARIFORUM – EU Economic Partnership Agreement, the EU is also supporting a number of initiatives which are of concern to Trinidad and Tobago. We are convinced that a steadfast implementation of the EPA process is pivotal to position Trinidad and Tobago's economy on an equal footing with its European partners.

We also have a longstanding relationship assisting institutions in the Caribbean to strengthen the region's institutional response and capacity to combat illicit drug use and trafficking and the related transnational criminal activity and financial crime. We have also embarked upon the institutional strengthening and capacity building of civil society organizations

The European Union is a peace project in its origins. Therefore, citizens and leaders' across the EU share the determination to promote peace and stability and to build a world founded on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. These principles underpin all aspects of the internal and external policies of the European Union including those in the area of development cooperation. In Trinidad and Tobago, the EU has an ongoing dialogue with the government, and Civil Society, including Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). In this context we have been providing support in promoting Human Rights, in particular by defending victims of domestic violence, building capacity of judicial officers and empowering those victims who live in what are considered high risk communities. At the same time, we support the ongoing world-wide efforts towards abolition of the death penalty, and recognition of rights for minority groups. The EU is opposed to the use of capital punishment in all cases and under all circumstances and has consistently called for a global moratorium as a first step towards its universal abolition.

Let me acknowledge once again the dialogue that we foster not only with the Government of this country, but also with the business community and civil society. We look at this Country as one with a leading role in pursuing regional integration in the Caribbean through various mechanisms including the Cariforum-EU Economic Partnership Agreement. Integration is the way ahead even though there are no quick solutions and each integration process goes at its own pace. There is a tremendous mutual interest in deepening cooperation between the European Union and the Caribbean region and seizing the benefits that more integrated and open markets can offer.

63 years ago Robert Schuman called on the nations of Europe to make war on the continent impossible and spread peace and prosperity globally. This is the work we continue today. Peace and prosperity for all are common objective we pursue with this beautiful country working as partners.

Let me conclude by mentioning that today we are also pleased to launch the European Film Festival. The British HC, who is the coordinator of the festival this year will officially open the event after our cocktail. This will be followed by the showcasing of a very entertaining movie that I am sure you will enjoy.

I would also like to publicly express my most sincere appreciation and thanks to the team of the EU Delegation in Port of Spain. My competent, committed and cheerful colleagues make every day at the office a fruitful and pleasant one. And to all of you a warm "thank you" for joining us in the celebration of this day of Europe in Trinidad and Tobago!