



***Speech by the Ambassador
of the European Union,
H.E. Mr Kristian Schmidt
Europe Day, 8 May 2018
Nay Pyi Taw***

Your Excellency,

Honorable Members of Parliament,

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, Heads of Missions, Members of
the Diplomatic Corps,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

Peace, Democracy and Sustainable Development. These are
Myanmar's key political objectives.

Peace, Democracy and Sustainable Development. We all strive and
long for these precious things, to give us serenity, harmony and
happiness. But let us honestly recognise: No country in the world
has attained any of those objectives easily.

Take Peace: In Europe, we've now enjoyed more than 70 years' of
peace. But we're still at work to protect it, with instability and war
at our borders.

Or Democracy: some EU member states have it for centuries, others only for a few decades, after escaping Communist oppression. But we Europeans must fight against our own complacency, to avoid populism or outside interference in our elections.

Sustainable Development: Well, Europe has the technology, the plan and the political will – by we're certainly not there yet. For instance, while Europe is the global leader on clean energy and climate change, we're only just starting the "war on plastic".

So as we celebrate Europe Day in Myanmar, my main message is this:

Myanmar, you're not alone. The whole world is striving to secure peace, democracy and sustainable development for everyone.

So don't give up!

We cheered on you, as we saw you chose democracy. We cheer on you, as we see you reach for peace through negotiation and federalism, and build trust and legitimacy in the ethnic areas.

And we will continue to cheer on you as you put in place strong and independent institutions, and rule of law to protect human rights in a society, where your collective strength is based on equality, inclusion and tolerance.

In our enthusiasm, we probably underestimated how difficult and how hard your journey was going to be.

But rest assured, we understand. We understand your nation, like most nations really, is still under construction – that patience and perseverance is required.

Please forgive us: When we speak up and raise concerns, it's when we see you go backwards, like last year in Rakhine, or this year on media freedom. As your friend, we consider it our duty to be honest with you. But rest assured, we know from our own history: sometimes it's two steps forward and one step back.

So don't lose your determination – don't give up.

Your Excellency,

When taking oath on 30th March, President U Win Myint set out his priority goals:

1. Rule of law and improving the socio-economic life of the people,
2. National Reconciliation and internal peace,
3. Amending the Constitution as the foundation for building a Democratic Federal Republic.

Let me state clearly: the European Union is there to support you on that journey.

When you call on the country's "Collective strength" to embrace diversity, you may count us in.

When the Commander-in-Chief, in his message at Armed Forces Day, called for a "Myanmar spirit" without racial or religious discrimination, we hear the promise made.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe is far away, but a close friend. Myanmar is in the global news, but please do not feel threatened. Diplomacy is not always easy. But we can work it out. I am convinced that Myanmar can and

will find its place as a respected member of the community of nations.

In September, Her Excellency Daw Aung San Sui Kyi told the diplomatic corps that *"Hate and fear are the main scourges of our world," (...) "We don't want Myanmar to be a nation divided by religious beliefs or ethnicity... we all have the right to our diverse identities."*

This statement shows your commitment to the values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Let us all remain committed to the United Nations. If we stick to the values of the UN Charter and UN Conventions, every day, everywhere, things are going to be OK.

Dear Members of Parliament,

In the last elections, the people of Myanmar voted freely. They made a choice, and they chose you. As their representatives, they expect you to deliver.

We know it is hard work, with so many things to do at the same time.

I see the courage of your people – how hard you had to struggled to reach this point; to overcome colonial exploitation and dominion, war, dictatorship, isolation and poverty – I have never been in a country, where so many of the leaders and intellectuals have stories to tell from their time in prison. You have waited so long for democracy, for things to improve.

Well, things have improved. Perhaps you expected so much and are working so hard, you don't realise the many good news. So let me mention some areas of progress:

- Since you began opening up to the world, poverty in Myanmar is falling. There has been a sharp decline in the poverty rate, from 48 % in 2004-05 to 32% in 2015. That is progress!
- Since 2010, 180,000 children less suffer from chronic undernutrition, and Myanmar is likely to meet the Sustainable Development Goal of reducing stunting by 40% by 2025. I'm proud to note that the EU contributed more than € 150 million to food and nutrition security projects.
- Labour productivity is growing faster in Myanmar than anywhere else in the world. Myanmar still has a

significant trade deficit with the world. But you have a large and growing trade surplus with the EU. This is mostly due to continued rapid growth, above 60% in a year, in textiles, where the EU is the largest export market for the Myanmar garment sector. Overall, trade with us is balanced, and has great growth potential, in manufactured goods, creating jobs for skilled labour.

- The initial investment surge and a rebound in your exports have led to a growth take-off in Myanmar that is stronger than your fast-growing neighbours. Yes, to keep it up, a second wave of economic reforms is needed – but an ambitious blueprint is ready: the Myanmar Strategic Development Plan, a strong and clear vision that we fully support. There are ambitious new sector plans and legislation in education, health, Judiciary reform, Youth, Climate Change, marine spatial planning, investment, tourism, drug control and so on.
- In the area of politics, let me congratulate Myanmar on the peaceful handover of presidential authority. This is a sign of increasing maturity as a democracy.

- Hundreds of political prisoners have been released and the fight against corruption could be gaining momentum.
- Likewise, this year, New Mon State Party and Lahu Democratic Union joined the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. I was honoured to sign as an international witness on behalf of the EU. This is such an amazing opportunity! If your economy can grow at 7% while there is serious fighting in some areas, imagine how the lives of millions of citizen could be transformed if soldiers in Kachin, Shan, Kayin and other states were able to return to the barracks.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- As I conclude, let me prove that Europe is a true friend in more than words. The EU is already the world's leading donor of development assistance with 57% of global ODA in 2017. These are grants – not loans.
- But let me provide some breaking news -- true news – news that deserve to be on the front page of the Global New Light of Myanmar: For Myanmar, EU member states have decided to approve a

221,000,000 Euro grant for Myanmar to expand quality education for all across the country. We will channel this grant directly to the Ministry of Education, a sign of our partnership and trust, and that we share your government's ambition to dramatically improve Myanmar's education outcomes.

- The amount is equally ambitious: € 221 Million, that's 356,000,000,000 Myanmar Kyat. We think education is the best possible investment in your country's democratic future.
- And let me end with that: Myanmar has come a long, long way. I think everybody here tonight knows that there is still a long, long way to go. But you have made up your mind and set some very ambitious goals.
- We wish you well! Even if it's going to be a long and bumpy road, and even if we may have discussions on the way, the European Union will be honoured to walk the road with you.

Thank you.

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