TIES THAT BIND

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF EU IN THE PHILIPPINES
About the cover photo:
Lensman Reu Dawner Flores bagged the Silver Award for his entry “Wind Power” in the “Ic EUropsa in U” photography competition in April 2016. The competition was conducted to mark the 25th anniversary of the EU Delegation in the Philippines.
TIES THAT BIND

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF EU IN THE PHILIPPINES
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Foreword

This year is a special year as the European Union Delegation to the Philippines is celebrating its 25th year and what better way to mark the significant occasion other than to launch a coffee table book — “Ties that Bind Celebrating 25 Years of EU in the Philippines.”

Since its official inauguration in May 1991, the European Union has been sharing its values, knowledge, resources, experiences and culture with the Philippines. And all these are grounded in friendship and partnership. Europe, which is replete with history, especially as peace-building is in its DNA, is one of the best places to live in the world. The EU is an orderly bloc; it is a peaceful continent with a strong emphasis on values and human dignity.

With a GDP ten times that of the Philippines, trade is one obvious area that reflects our growing and deepening relations. The bilateral trade that was worth €2.5 billion in 1990 has grown to almost €13 billion in 2015. The EU has also increased its investments in the Philippines and is the largest foreign investor in the country. In 2014, the Philippines was granted the so-called Generalised System of Preference (GSP+) status to generate economic benefits that will help the country not only economically, but also to assume its responsibilities under core international conventions on human and labour rights, environmental protection and good governance.

In the coming years, the EU is hopeful that the negotiations on the free trade agreement with the Philippines will yield a positive conclusion to mutually benefit both parties. High-level exchanges have continuously taken place over the years. People-to-people links have never been stronger. In the Philippines, the increasing presence of the Member States’ embassies augurs very well the importance given to the country by the European Union, as Poland is expected to open its Embassy following in the footsteps of Hungary and Sweden this 2016.

Another bastion of our bilateral relationship is our development cooperation which has grown substantially as it focuses on inclusive growth and the strengthening of the rule of law from now until 2020. The EU will, of course, continue its valuable role in the peace process and we are hopeful that more significant gains will be made under the current administration.

The EU will likewise sustain its public diplomacy programmes including cultural linkages as it strengthens partnerships with government, private sector, academia and cultural stakeholders. The European Union has increased from 12 Member States in 1991 to 28 today, from a population of 37.5 million to more than 500 million. It has weathered many crises. As it tries to maintain its global and regional position, it looks at pushing even further its relations with ASEAN, including the Philippines, which assumes its chairmanship in 2017.

I hope that as you read through this book, you are able to cherish and relish all the more the friendship of the European Union and the Philippines.

FRANZ JESSEN
Ambassador

Message from the DFA

I take great pleasure in joining the EU Delegation’s celebration of its 25th year in the Philippines. On behalf of the Department of Foreign Affairs, I extend my warm felicitations and best wishes for this milestone anniversary.

The Philippines formally established diplomatic relations with the European Community in 1964. In 1980, these ties were strengthened when the EC signed a cooperation agreement with ASEAN. With the Philippines, diplomatic ties flourished into a true partnership and a deep friendship.

Twenty-five years ago, Philippine President Corazon Aquino and European Commissioner Abel Matutes officially inaugurated the office of the Delegation of the European Union in Manila. Since then, our relations have continuously grown stronger and more vibrant as exemplified by our deep political ties, increasing economic partnership and rich socio-cultural linkages. The friendship is even more evident in times of calamities and disasters. The EU has always been one of the first to offer humanitarian support and development assistance to the Filipino people.

The decades that followed were marked by high-level exchanges and bilateral meetings between the two sides. In 2012, the Framework Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between the Philippines and EU was signed. This binds us to work together and pursue dialogue on political matters, justice and security affairs, trade and investment, and development issues. Our economic cooperation is expected to be further bolstered by the grant of EU’s GSP+ status to the Philippines and the ongoing negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement. It is our profound hope that these will boost Philippine exports to the EU and provide wider market access for both sides.

The Philippines also appreciates the EU’s unfaltering commitment to the peace process, particularly in Mindanao. Its membership in the International Monitoring Team and funding support through various mechanisms have helped us in this challenging journey to lasting and sustainable peace.

The Philippines highly regards the EU’s principled stance for a rules-based and peaceful settlement of maritime disputes. The EU’s support, coupled with its deep engagement with ASEAN, clearly demonstrates our shared commitment to creating enduring solutions to pressing concerns.

With the hard work and dedication of the EU Delegation in Manila, the Philippine Mission in Brussels and the DFA-Office of European Affairs, what was once a blueprint is now an edifice built on solid foundation. Through the challenges, we shall remain unfazed as our relations are bound by the shared principles of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights.

The EU’s celebration of its silver anniversary in the Philippines is a testament to our dynamic and resilient partnership. Indeed, we look forward to exploring more areas for collaboration and to witnessing more milestones in our relations.

Mabuhay!

MARIA CLEOFÉ NATIVIDAD
Assistant Secretary
DFA Office of European Affairs
The EU Delegation officially opened its permanent premises in May 1991. It was graced by the late President Corazon Aquino and European Commissioner Abel Matutes.

Official toast by EU Ambassador Franz Jessen, Philippine Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Linglingay Lacanlale and Brunei Ambassador Haji Halimah Haji Yussof, vice dean of the diplomatic corps of the Philippines, to mark the 25th anniversary of the EU Delegation in the Philippines in May 2016.
LEADING TO YEAR 1

The first chronicled links between the Philippines and Europe date back to the 16th century when Ferdinand Magellan led a Spanish expedition to the archipelago and established the first European settlement in Cebu. As a Spanish colony for more than 300 years, the country’s rapid conversion to Christianity during the occupation period was to be the highlight of Europe’s legacy, leaving an indelible mark in the Philippines’ cultural heritage.

In 1521, the archipelago was named in honour of the then Spanish crown prince Philip, who later assumed the throne as Philip II. By 1579, Sir Francis Drake of England would reach the southern island of Mindanao, followed by British adventurers, with the East India Company sending Alexander Dalrymple in 1760 to open trade relations with the Sultan of Sulu. Meanwhile, early relations between the Netherlands and the Philippines commenced in the 1600s, with Dutch warships raiding Spanish outposts in the archipelago. Formalisation of economic relations transpired in 1866 with the appointment of G. van Polanen Petel as the first honorary Consul of the Netherlands in Manila. By the 20th century, relations with the Sultan of Sulu and the Philippines commenced in the 1600s, with Dutch warships raiding Spanish outposts in the archipelago.
Mogherini, and in 2016 between Foreign Affairs Secretary Perfecto Yasay Jr. and Mogherini. Under the present administration, Presidential Peace Adviser Jesus Dureza met with EU officials in Brussels to discuss the issue of human rights in the Philippines. “We share values on the protection of human rights and due process,” Dureza told the European officials who were eager to know the policies of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.

PCA: A MILESTONE FOR EU-PH RELATIONS

The alliance between Europe and the Philippines reached new heights with the signing of a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in July 2012, cementing a bilateral relationship that dates back 25 years. The accord marked a maturing friendship, which has broadened and deepened eminently with every passing year.

“We are confident with the overall state of relations between the Philippines and the European Union. The excellent work of our colleagues and predecessors has contributed to the significant strides in the political, economic and social aspects of our relations,” says Secretary Ernesto Abella, spokesman of President Duterte.

Correspondingly, EU Ambassador to the Philippines Franz Jessen describes the PCA as a “milestone” for both parties. “Once it has entered into force, it will constitute a firm basis for enhanced cooperation in areas such as trade, development cooperation, research and innovation, as well as political issues like maritime security, conflict resolution and human rights,” Jessen says.

The PCA, signed by then Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario and EU High Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton, focuses on a modern policy agenda that allows both sides to cooperate on issues in a more systematic and sustainable way.

Moreover, it is an important component of EU’s broader ambitions to deepen its engagement with Asia. In doing so, the EU brings to the table its proven expertise in non-traditional security assistance, including disaster preparedness, conflict prevention, emergency aid, post-crisis reconstruction, policing assistance, energy, climate change, product safety and maritime security.

In June 2016, the European Parliament approved the PCA in its plenary session in Strasbourg, France. The agreement will, however, require the ratification of three remaining individual EU Member States. On the part of the Philippines, preparations are under way to secure Senate concurrence of the agreement.

SHARED VALUES, MUTUAL RESPECT

According to Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary for European Affairs Maria Cleofe Natividad, significant milestones have marked EU-Philippines bilateral relations over the past 25 years. “Because it is a relationship based on shared values and objectives, mutual respect and mutual benefit, it has grown and advanced into a true partnership,
During the early 1990s, the relationship began to take on a new perspective following EU’s review of its ties with Asia in its entirety. This was to take into account some very changed realities such as the emergence of strong Asian economies in a new international order marked by the end of the Cold War. The EU shifted its relationship with Asia toward a “partnership between equals” where grounds for cooperation would be founded on mutual interest and business opportunities in each other’s region.

In 1996, the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) was launched as a process of reinforced dialogue between EU and the Asian region. Perceiving its relationship with the Philippines as a partner for innovative approaches within the EU-ASEAN process, the EU has given high priority to the strengthening of political dialogue and cooperation in the Philippines. In 1997, the first Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) was held in Manila, allowing EC and Philippine senior officials to engage in formal discussions to review political, economic, and cooperation issues with the vision of a stronger bilateral partnership. The EU Commission reiterated its intention to redirect bilateral cooperation toward a more economic orientation that would be mutually beneficial to both sides at the end of 1999 at a meeting in Brussels. It was agreed that future cooperation ought to be considered toward assisting the Philippines in the areas of institutional reform, particularly where it would improve the business environment.

Five years later, the EU emerged as a substantially enlarged political entity with the accession of 10 new member-states, marking a watershed in the evolution of the European Union. EU development cooperation with the Philippines also made exceptional progress in the same period. The revised 2002-2004 National Indicative Programme (NIP) and the 2005-2006 NIP for the Philippines were among the first in Southeast Asia to be decided in May 2004. A number of key projects funded by NIP were approved, including the Philippines Border Management Project (PBMP), the anti-money laundering project, and the Trade Related Technical Assistance (TRTA) Programme.

The EU was instrumental in the abolition of the death penalty during the time of Ambassador Jan de Kok. The Union and its Member States held a strong and principled position against the death penalty, stemming from the universal and fundamental right to life, even for someone who has committed the most atrocious crime. Amid heavy pressure from the EU and the influential Roman Catholic Church, President Gloria Arroyo signed the law scrapping capital punishment in June 2006.

According to Ambassador Victoria Bataclan, head of the Philippine mission in Brussels, another area where the Philippines has received support from the EU was during the country’s campaign to uphold its maritime rights in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

“Concern for environmental destruction in the South China Sea has been mentioned by the EU on various occasions. We expect the EU to continue to uphold these values in the coming years, as respect for international law must be upheld by as many states as possible at all times,” adds Bataclan.

OVERCOMING HUMPS

Evidently, the relationship was not without hitches along the way. In the 1990s, the Commission voiced its concern about a legislation on the taxation of alcoholic beverages that seemed to discriminate in favour of local producers. A note verbale was sent to the Department of Foreign Affairs in July 1999 warning of World Trade Organization (WTO) implications if no progress was made. According to Walter van Hattum, head of the Economic and Trade section of the EU Delegation to the Philippines, a case was eventually filed before the WTO which the EU won. The ruling ultimately led to the signing into law of the so-called sin taxes.

“It is a great example of how a WTO case led to a better health care program in the Philippines, funded by revenues from sin taxes,” says Van Hattum.

Subsequently, in 2010, Philippine air carriers were banned from flying into European skies following concerns on the aviation safety situation in the Philippines. The EU updated its air safety list and in July 2013, flag carrier Philippine Airlines was removed from the blacklist. A year after, the EU also removed the ban on budget carrier Cebu Pacific, and in 2016, the bloc decided...
to allow all Philippine commercial carriers to fly over Europe’s skies.

“These so-called kinks are part and parcel of a healthy relationship that sometimes undergoes fine-tuning and adjustments. In this respect, I could also mention the issue related to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUUF) and continued certification of Filipino seafarers allowing them to work in EU-flagged vessels. Both of these issues have also been resolved,” says Natividad.

In 2014, the EU issued a “yellow card” formal notice to the Philippines, urging the country to fulfill its commitment to deter and prevent illegal fishing to avoid the possibility of being identified as a non-cooperating country in the international fight against IUUF. Last year, the “yellow card” notice was lifted, with the EU citing achievements such as the adoption of a new Fisheries Code with a deterrent scheme of sanctions and the improvement of the traceability and catch certification schemes.

In addition, the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) had been conducting inspection missions to verify on site the country’s compliance with the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention. This prompted the Philippine government to enact measures toward the implementation of international standards and best practices.

“The important thing is that both parties remain engaged and continue to work together toward resolving any concerns or outstanding issues that may exist. There must also be a keen understanding of the circumstances of each party, a willingness to cooperate constructively, and extend assistance, if necessary. To its credit, the EU has manifested this to the Philippines with regard to these issues,” Natividad adds.

PROSPERITY FOR ALL

All things considered, the two-way trade between the Philippines and the EU has expanded over the past 25 years, culminating in a historic high in 2015 with €16.3 billion in goods and services. These are indeed exciting times for both parties, says EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström.

“Philippine’s economic growth is reaching 7 percent this year, and thanks to the economic reforms, the country is becoming easier to do business with,” she says. Malmström points to the granting of GSP+ (Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus) status to the Philippines in December 2014 as a positive development, resulting in zero-rate duties for over 6,200 tariff lines.

“The implementation of the GSP+ trade preferences, including a dialogue on human and labour rights, is important so that trade can indeed be a tool for development and prosperity for all,” she says.

According to Philippine Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez, exports to the EU increased by 1.9 percent since 2014 owing to the duty-free access to European markets. Largest increases include animal products, fish, cereals, flour, nuts, prepared food stuff, chemicals, plastics, wood and footwear.

In the long run, Lopez sees the arrangement to benefit more Filipino micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). “As the Philippine Department of Trade and Industry remains committed toward enhancing MSME competitiveness, I believe that the GSP+ will grant them the opportunity to explore and reach broader markets to showcase their products,” Lopez says.

The two-way trade in goods in 2015, which increased by four percent to €13 billion, saw a trade balance of €600 million in favour of the Philippines. On top of that, the country also inched two places up to become the EU’s...
The EU became the Philippines’ third largest export market, a development that EU Ambassador Jessen attributes to the country’s strong economic growth as well as bilateral efforts to increase trade.

EU services imports from the Philippines also posted a five percent increase to €3.3 billion, with a surplus of almost €400 million favouring Manila. These were dominated by transportation, travel and business process outsourcing, BPO, in particular, grew 15 percent, with the Philippines ranked second only to India as the favoured business process off-shore destination by companies from Europe, which represent the largest offshoring market of the world.

“The Philippines has emerged as one of the preferred destinations for outsourcing and offshoring of IT and business process management work. This is primarily because the Philippines offers a large, well-educated and English-speaking talent pool, as well as a cost picture that is considered very reasonable by European standards,” says Erik Nielsen, president of Global Process Manager and vice president of NordCham, which promotes and facilitates trade and investment between the Philippines and Nordic (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) and Baltic (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) countries.

TRADE PROMOTION

From 1986 to the early 1990s, economic cooperation activities addressed primarily the strengthening and promotion of the Philippine export sector, including tourism, to reinforce trade exchanges between the Philippines and the EU. This early-days trade promotion approach led to the financing of technical assistance and export promotion programmes in the sectors of marble, leather, timber, textiles and tourism.

A new approach to economic cooperation with the Philippines, and more generally with Asia, began in 1992 when an EU Council Regulation formalised the role of mutually beneficial economic cooperation with Asia. This was reinforced in 1994 by the “New EU Strategy for Asia”, put forward by the Essen European Council. The strategy recognised the importance of regional cooperation activities.

From 1992 to 1999, only five out of 26 new approach economic cooperation projects were financed through EU-Philippines bilateral cooperation, mainly in the area of business contracts facilitation. The remaining 21 projects were all financed through regional cooperation frameworks such as EU-Asia or EU-ASEAN.

EU exports to the Philippines increased to €4.7 billion from €3.6 billion the year before, a feat which Jessen says translates to 500,000 quality jobs across the Philippines.
were hit hard by the Asian crisis in 1998, plunging by at least 38 percent. The relatively balanced trade of the EU with the Philippines turned into a €2.9-billion deficit in 1998. Since the onset of the Asian financial crisis, the EU and its Member States have made additional funds managed by the World Bank available for the affected region through the ASEM Asian Financial Crisis Response Trust Fund. A total of 10 ASEM partners contributed €50 million, with the European Commission as the largest contributor.

From 1999 to 2002, grants extended to the Philippines that were covered by the ASEM Trust Fund included enhanced poverty monitoring, social protection and socialised housing, strengthening financial sector infrastructure, and a pilot project for the development of an out-of-school youth program.

The European Investment Bank (EBB) also supported capital investments in Asia and Latin America for projects that represented a mutual interest for both the recipient country and the EU. The framework agreement between the Philippines and the EBB was signed in April 1994 and extended in July 1997. Two important build-operate-transfer projects in the Philippines that were supported by the EBB are the 1,000-megawatt Santa Rita power plant in Batangas and the Water and Sewerage Manila West project.

In 2003, the first micro-finance rural bank in the Philippines, VisionBank, was established with the assistance of the EC’s Catanduanes Agricultural Support Programme (CATAC). The bank served over 14,000 poor households in Catanduanes.

Another way in which the EU helps the Philippines integrate deeper into international trading systems is through its Trade-Related Technical Assistance, which is now in its third phase. Since 2005, the programme’s total sector assistance has reached €1.8 million. It counts among its beneficiaries the Tnalak textile weavers in Mindanao and the mango growers of Guimaras who were assisted in developing their own Geographical Indication labels.

TOWARD A MUTUALLY-BENEFICIAL FTA

Despite these accomplishments, EU Ambassador Jessen says the Philippines’ potential to attract a larger share of foreign direct investments (FDI), as well as to increase two-way trade, remains high.

“The growth in trade and investment figures is impressive but it can be much more! A free trade agreement will easily double trade and investment figures,” EU Ambassador Jessen says. The Philippines and the EU initiated their first round of negotiations for a bilateral free-trade agreement in 2016, with both sides sharing an ambition to conclude an accord that covers a broad range of issues, including the elimination of customs duties and other barriers to trade, services and investment, investment protection as well as access to public procurement markets.

“We are very ambitious. We have something to offer – the biggest market, the biggest investor. Trade could easily double with an FTA,” EU Trade Counsellor Van Hattum says.

Trade Secretary Lopez, who says both sides are now preparing the texts to be discussed in the second round of negotiations by the end of 2016, adds: “The Philippines is expanding its bilateral ties with one of the largest economic blocs in the world. The Philippines-EU FTA is one of the priority trade agenda points of the new administration.”

EU Trade Commissioner Malmström, for her part, says moves to hammer out an FTA with the Philippines and Indonesia, and the conclusion of trade EU trade pacts with Singapore and Vietnam, reflect Europe’s commitment to “pursue a deeper strategic engagement with Asia.”

“Asia will take centre stage in our forward-looking programme of multilateral and bilateral trade negotiations... The EU is determined to use these agreements as stepping stones toward an ambitious region-to-region FTA with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations,” she says.

European investors in the Philippines are also optimistic that with the right government policies in place and the forthcoming FTA
sustained high level of trade and investments for both parties can be achieved.

Indeed, change is written all over the 10-point socio-economic agenda of Duterte administration and we positively note that most elements of the said agenda are amongst our priorities as well. The European business community in the Philippines and in Europe has long yearned for such change – change that will and must facilitate trade and investments,” European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines president Guenter Taus says.

“A new chapter unfolds in front of our very eyes. There has never been a better time for European businesses to grasp the opportunities that the Philippines has to offer,” he adds.

**DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

In the early years of EU development cooperation in the Philippines, the bloc focused on poverty alleviation. In 1988, the Central Cordillera Agricultural Programme (CECAP), which promoted sustainable and community-based rural development through micro projects in five provinces, was launched. The programme ran until 1995, after which CECAP-Phase 2, which involved community-based participatory approaches, was implemented from 1996 to 2004.

In 1999, it launched the Western Samar Agricultural Programme that aimed to increase household income and create additional employment opportunities in the province.

Two joint venture business corporations were also established with participation from community-based organisations, namely a multi-species hatchery and a fibreglass boat production facility.

At the same time, there was also focus on environment protection, with the Palawan Tropical Forestry Protection Programme that ran from 1995 to 2002 and aimed to assist in the preservation of Palawan’s protected forest areas. At least 60 percent of all public school teachers in the province received training in environmental awareness.

In 1998, the EU, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, executed the seven-year programme Upland Development Programme in Southern Mindanao (UDP), the programme developed and tested replicable models for sustainable development of the resources based in the uplands of Mindanao.

Notably, the EU also supported forest conservation in the Philippines through the Haribon Foundation’s GOLDEN Forests project (Governance and Local Development for Endangered Forests). The project sites include Mt. Irid-Angilo, Mt. Hilong-Hilong, Mt. Diwata, and a huge tract of forests in Zambales province – all of which were considered by Haribon to be among the country’s 117 important biodiversity areas.

Furthermore, the EU launched the Support to Agrarian Reform Communities in Central Mindanao (STARC), which covered agrarian reform communities in four provinces, namely Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, North Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat. STARC funded support infrastructure, agricultural productivity and livelihood requirements of 50 agrarian reform communities in the said provinces.

ACHIM TILLESSEN, Former Head of the Development Section of the EU Delegation in the Philippines, said cooperation has steadily evolved in terms of available funding as well as sectoral orientation.

“Although we had €130 million available for 2010-2013, that amount had a two-and-half fold increase to €325 million for the period 2014-2020. The decision on the focal sectors is taken jointly with the Philippine government and on the basis of EU development cooperation policy. In recent years the EU decided to concentrate their aid in fewer sectors – and for 2014-2020, the focal sectors are inclusive growth through sustainable energy and job creation and rule of law,” Tillessen says.

While the project approach was dominant in the first years of our cooperation, we entered into a more advanced relationship by providing budget support. Budget support is our preferred aid modality and as soon as the conditions for it are favourable,
To support the EU Peace Journalism contest, the EU Delegation has held several fora to identify gaps in the peace reportage. TV5’s Ed Lingao, Interaksyon’s Veronica Uy, and Photojournalists’ Center of the Philippines chairperson Jie Flores served as resource speakers during the Peace Journalism Forum at the Ateneo de Manila University in February 2015.

BUILDING PEACE

Building peace is at the heart of the European Union project – it is in its DNA. Based on its experience, the EU has set itself the goal of promoting peace in other parts of the world, including the Philippines.

Mindanao is a priority area for EU development assistance in order to help accelerate economic growth in the region and support the peace process after the signing of the 1996 peace agreement between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front.

The peace agreement established a Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD) to mark the priority provinces for development assistance. The EU responded with the SZOPAD Rehabilitation Project which provided vocational skills training to at least 500 former MNLF combatants. It also helped select MNLF communities in North Cotabato and Maguindanao to rebuild the infrastructures and institutions that were damaged or destroyed after decades of war.

With this in mind, the EU launched the Baslan Rehabilitation Programme which improved the health situation of disadvantaged people in the conflict-torn province by constructing and rehabilitating, among others, three health centres as well as by providing numerous other rural health centres with medicines and health care equipment.

As a matter of fact, the EU has supported the peace process between the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) since 2007, building on its peace-making experience and leading to the conclusion of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in March 2014. The EU assisted the two peace panels as well as the Bangsamoro Transition Commission through logistical support and the mobilisation of more than 30 eminent specialists. As a member of the International Monitoring team, the EU has deployed more than 185 accredited civilian protection monitors undertaking more than 700 support and verification missions.

The EU promoted inclusiveness and confidence in the peace process by supporting more than 500 community outreach activities and consultations. The bloc supported interventions to deliver quick peace dividends to conflict-affected communities to promote the long-term development of Mindanao.

The EU has also helped raise awareness on the value of the peace process through its Peace Journalism contest in 2015. Filipino journalists across the country were encouraged to promote responsible conflict-reporting through the contest.

Notably, the EU is the largest contributor (EU, together with Sweden, accounts for 80 percent of the funding) to the World Bank-administered Mindanao Trust Fund, a multi-donor trust fund that promotes social and economic recovery in the Bangsamoro areas, delivering tangible results for the people in conflict-affected communities.

From 2007 to the end of December 2013, the trust fund has benefitted at least 412,219 people through community-driven development projects spread over 75 municipalities. At least 71 percent of the 262 projects are community-based infrastructures.

In the long-run, the EU will sustain its role in the peace process and will continue to support peace mediators in the country.

In December 2015, the EU Delegation launched a new programme in support of the peace process, providing €5.5 million euros to allow for a smooth transition and to create favourable conditions for the establishment of the autonomous region of the Bangsamoro and the election of its government.

HEALTH OF THE NATION

Early cooperation in the health sector focused on two major fronts: the promotion of reproductive health and safe motherhood and the battle against the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) such as HIV/AIDS. Interventions included the Women’s Health and Safe Motherhood Project; assistance to the Department of Health in establishing a national strategic STD action plan as well as the Bangsamoro Development Programme which improved the health situation of disadvantaged communities.

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EU Ambassador to the Philippines Alistair MacDonald (second from left) and Health Secretary Esperanza Cabral lead a forum on reproductive health in 2009.

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In the long-run, the EU will sustain its role in the peace process and will continue to support peace mediators in the country.

In December 2015, the EU Delegation launched a new programme in support of the peace process, providing €5.5 million euros to allow for a smooth transition and to create favourable conditions for the establishment of the autonomous region of the Bangsamoro and the election of its government.

Early cooperation in the health sector focused on two major fronts: the promotion of reproductive health and safe motherhood and the battle against the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) such as HIV/AIDS. Interventions included the Women’s Health and Safe Motherhood Project; assistance to the Department of Health in establishing a national strategic STD action plan as well as the Bangsamoro Development Programme which improved the health situation of disadvantaged communities.

EU Ambassador to the Philippines Alistair MacDonald (second from left) and Health Secretary Esperanza Cabral lead a forum on reproductive health in 2009.
as to the Department of Labor and Employment in developing an STD/HIV/AIDS plan for the workplace.

Since 2007, the European Union has directly provided €118 million grants for the Philippine health sector. Aside from providing expertise, EU’s financial support has helped implement the government’s Universal Health Care agenda, with the following results: 34 percent increase in health care system enrollment (from 62 percent in 2010 to 92 percent in 2016); 108 percent increase in births in health facility (from 38 percent in 2008 to 84 percent in 2014); 48 percent decrease in under-five mortality between 1998 and 2011; deployment of 59,510 health professionals in poor communities between 2010 and 2013; 28 malaria-free provinces in 2014; and 90 percent tuberculosis patients treated in 2014.

Overall, the EU-funded Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health and Nutrition Needs of Indigenous Cultural Communities / Indigenous People (ICC/IP) and other Disadvantaged Communities in Mindanao project, launched in 2012, amounted to €7 million.

The EU poured in €3.2 million to the Philippines for the prevention and control of malnutrition and anaemia in children 0-23 months old and in pregnant and postpartum women. The partnership focused on providing support to nutrition policy-making, capacity development, knowledge sharing, and scaling up evidence-based key nutrition interventions. It also funded actions of NGOs Save the Children and Likhaan that seek to promote and advocate appropriate information and access to quality family planning services among the inhabitants of the three poorest districts of the city of Manila.

In 2014, the EU and the Philippines signed the Philippines Health Sector Reform Contract (PHSRIC), providing a €80 million grant to support Philippine government initiatives in developing the country’s health sector. The signing of the agreement increased the total support of the EU to the health sector to €118 million, between 2006 and 2018.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND RENEWABLE ENERGY

Climate change is high on the agenda of the EU and the Philippines. This is an area where both parties work closely together. The EU is currently funding a large capacity-building project to promote low emission growth jointly with the Climate Change Commission. It has also been supporting disaster preparedness efforts in the Philippines, in coordination with its Member States’ bilateral agencies.

Meanwhile, the EU and the Philippines consult each other regularly on crucial international climate negotiations. For instance, the need for an ambitious and legally binding agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris in December 2015 was a shared priority for both parties.

The EU has also been instrumental in planting seeds of hope for the promotion of renewable energy sources in the Philippines. In 2006, it approved several grants, which included a series of capacity-building seminars on the operation and maintenance of a biogas facility that is estimated to benefit at least 6,000 households in Calaca, Batangas, training for project developers on wind power that will look into the experiences of EU Member States such as Denmark and Germany, which have successfully implemented wind farm projects.

The EU is currently working with the Philippines to find innovative solutions to bring sustainable power to the poor to move toward the 90 percent electrification target. With support from the EU, women from Mamasapano in Maguindanao were trained on reproductive health services and family planning.
The European wind turbine manufacturers that provided almost 50 percent of the wind power capacity installed worldwide in the last decade are also the preferred partners in the Philippines.

The EU has also supported various energy efficiency actions under its SWITCH Project. The SWITCH-Asia Programme is implemented both through grants to business associations and other non-profit organisations as well as technical assistance to national governments.

To date, 80 grant projects have been implemented in 16 countries. Five pilot policy support components are ongoing in partnership with the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand to implement an ambitious clean production regulatory framework.

In the tourism sector, for example, limited availability of power in off grid areas is a major constraint that pushes electricity prices and carbon footprints higher. With SWITCH’s Zero Carbon Resorts project, energy consumption is down up to 60 percent among beneficiary resorts. It also offers energy management advisory services tailored to the needs of small hotels operating in areas where power availability is an issue. Obsolete technologies for cooking or water heating were replaced with simple and more efficient ones while air ventilation was given priority to reduce the use of air conditioners where possible.

In October 2016, the EU announced a PHP6 billion funding for energy projects in the Philippines that will run for the next three to four years. Jessen, during the sidelines of the 4th EU-Philippine Energy Meeting, said the budget may be used to replicate the EU’s Access to Sustainable Energy Programme (ASEP) which aims to provide clean energy solutions to 100,000 households or around 500,000 people; add 20 megawatts (MW) of new renewable energy projects; and improve energy efficiency and generate savings of greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to a 50-MW power plant. Furthermore, in 2015, the EU allocated €60 million for ASEP projects.

“We are grateful to the EU for remaining an ever staunch and proactive partner of the Philippines in the improvement of our energy policy and in the fortification of our energy infrastructure. Your vital assistance will surely work wonders for the underprivileged and underserved among our people,” says Philippine Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi.

SECURITY AND STABILITY

Through its Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, the EU has been supporting Southeast Asia in improving security and safety.

According to Robert Frank, EU’s Regional Cooperation Officer for Southeast Asia, the Philippines took the lead in the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Risk Mitigation by hosting the Regional Secretariat of the Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Southeast Asia with its 10 member countries since 2013.

With support from the EU, the Philippines nominated a National CBRN Focal Point, established its inter-agency National CBRN Team, used a systematic Needs Assessment Questionnaire to determine where it stands in terms of CBRN risk mitigation and drafted its National CBRN Action Plan in a series of workshops.

The Philippines has participated in 19 CBRN projects in various areas, from the training of CBRN First Responders to the safety of biological laboratories, chemical and biological waste management, legal framework, awareness raising, border control, nuclear forensics to a Master of Science Study Programme on Nuclear Safety, Security and Safeguards.

In addition, the EU supported the
elaboration of the Strategic Trade Management Act which became law in 2015 and is the Philippines’ legal basis for export control of dual use goods, an area where the EU continues to share its rich experience with the Philippines through technical assistance and training.

“The Philippines has become a regional promoter of CBRN Risk Mitigation and should step up to become an important regional actor in the fight against cybercrime within the next years. The Philippines is about to accede to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime and, hence, will be qualified as a country to get special EU support through the project Global Action on Cybercrime (GLACY),” says Frank.

Raising awareness, legal support, judicial training, training of law enforcement, international cooperation, information sharing and progress assessment were areas addressed by GLACY in the Philippines during the last three years.

The Philippines was also one of five countries in the region supported by the EU to strengthen its capacities to counter terrorism. Law enforcement and judicial staff were trained in collaborative investigation and prosecution of terrorist cases, including related national inter-agency collaboration and increased regional cooperation. A study on the drivers of radicalisation was undertaken, enabling a better understanding of what and who has to be addressed to not only counter, but to prevent radicalisation.

SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER IN TIMES OF DISASTERS

The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. The country has well-developed crisis management capacities but with the incessant occurrence of strong cyclones and storms, often back-to-back, the EU has recurrently stepped in to deliver urgently needed humanitarian assistance. The European Commission started channeling assistance through the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) in 1992. Operations are implemented by European and local NGOs, covering natural and man-made catastrophes.

Since 1997, the EU has released €74.7 million for emergency relief interventions following natural disasters. In 2009, the then EC President Jose Manuel Barroso wrote to then President Arroyo in the aftermath of Typhoon Ondoy (international name Ketsana), one of the worst natural disasters to hit the country. The Commission dispatched an expert team to assess the humanitarian needs of the victims of the storm, and released through ECHO €2 million in urgent relief funding.

When the Philippines was struck by Super Typhoon Yolanda (international name Haiyan), which battered the archipelago in early November 2013, the EU released a total of €30 million to enable its partners to deliver humanitarian aid, early recovery and rehabilitation while an additional €10 million in development funds were allocated for infrastructure reconstruction.

CULTURAL LINKAGES

The cultural profile of the EU in the Philippines is well known. The European film festival Cine Europa is on its 19th edition, and reaches ever larger audiences since its first run in 1998 that featured only 11 films. In 2016, 24 films were featured. The EU Delegation in the Philippines has also organised special festivals such as “Lakbayin Natin Ang EU” (children’s festival) “Musica FEUropa” (choral festival) and “Bersong EuroPinoy” (poetry reading) over the last decade. Bersong EuroPinoy – a recital of European and Filipino poetry by European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response Kristalina Georgieva visits Tacloban City which has been battered by typhoon Yolanda (international name: Haiyan) in November 2013.
EU diplomats and well-known Filipino writers, has been awarded the Gawad Jaime C. De Veyra – Natatanging Parangal from the Commission of the Filipino Language for “its continuous support and contribution to the awareness and growth of the Filipino language and literature, culture and the arts.”

Through its scholarship programme, Erasmus+, the EU financially supports Filipino students, academics and researchers to pursue their higher education at European universities. It also supports Filipino higher education institutions and universities that engage in partnerships with their counterparts in the European Union.

About 25 new scholarships are awarded every year. The scholarship covers air travel to Europe, tuition fees and a monthly living allowance of between PHP80,000 and PHP120,000. In the Philippines, more than 200 students and lecturers have benefitted from the Erasmus+ scholarship since 2004.

MOVING FORWARD

According to Presidential Spokesperson Ernesto Abella, there is an “uptick” in activities in the pursuit of better EU-Philippines relations.

“There is strong momentum complemented by bilateral links with Member States. Sweden, Hungary and Poland are soon to be opening their resident missions here in Manila,” he says.

For DFA Assistant Secretary Natividad, the past 25 years have built a “solid foundation” for even stronger relations in the future.

“The trust and confidence that have been built over the years are not easily broken,” Natividad says. “We are confident that the goodwill, friendship and partnership that already exist between the Philippines and the EU will be maintained.”
I started my tenure as Head of Delegation in Manila on 26 June 2002. At that time the European Commission’s development assistance activities were concentrated mainly in Mindanao and central and northern Luzon. This way we tried to assist the government in its peace initiatives with the various groups of insurgents in those regions. Despite the large amounts of funds spent to improve the living standards of the people there, the local populations had very limited knowledge of the European Community/European Union.

During my initial rounds of consultations with political leaders in Manila and in the provinces, it became clear that the European Union (EU) lacked visibility in the Philippines, and overall knowledge of the EU’s objectives and values was very sketchy at best. I therefore made it a priority to better explain the fundamental values of the EU and its s.

On the whole, human rights, democracy, good governance and rule of law are among the basic principles on which the EU is founded. Advocating these same principles in the Philippines became an important part of our daily work. It allowed us to make the EU more visible and to give it a “human face.”

Providing more information to the wider public through the publication of a regular EU newsletter and meeting more often with legislators, politicians, community leaders, local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the business community, and of course the media, became a daily routine. Ensuring that the European Commission’s development assistance programmes were supplementing and complementing this work was an obvious consequence.

The media in particular showed an increased interest when journalists realised that we had a story to tell. It obviously meant that I had to do a lot of travelling throughout the country to interact with provincial governors (including leading politicians of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), municipal mayors, barangay captains, and local community and business leaders.

What stood out during my four-and-a-half years in the Philippines was the enactment by the government of legislation to abolish the death penalty. This was a clear highlight and I recall with much fondness the numerous breakfast meetings I had with the then Speaker of the House of Representatives to discuss ways and means to make this come about. I must stress that this could not have been done without the strong support of all EU Member States’ representatives to the Philippines at the time. It certainly stands out as the best EU collaborative action I have been involved with during my career with the EC/EU for over three decades. I consider the abolition of the death penalty in the Philippines my strongest legacy.

When I first arrived in Manila the EC Delegation had 19 members of staff (both local and expatriate). After about 12 months this number had increased to over 40, with many new local professionals recruited. Much of the decision-making process regarding development assistance was transferred from Brussels (EC’s headquarters) to Manila. This resulted in a much more effective and faster delivery of the assistance provided.

When I think back to my days as Head of Delegation in Manila, I cannot help but smile. Smile because I was surrounded by so many dedicated members of staff who all carried out their duties to the best of their abilities and at the highest level of professionalism, and always with great happiness to contribute to making the Philippines a better place. For me it was a privilege to lead the team, together with my Deputy and other Heads of Section; their hard work made my task so much easier and so much more pleasant.
Gli Guiamelon’s soiled hands tell so much of his life’s struggle against poverty and ignorance, and only the vast natural richness of Liguasan Marsh and his precious possession – his small and old paddled banca – can attest. His worn out face tells how Guiamelon has longed for economic freedom and liberation from ignorance, how his cultural beliefs and traditions molded his dreams and desires.

The 52-year old fisherman started trawling fish at the age of 15 using only his inherited pulot (fishing net), tarik (fishing corral) and banca. “My banca is so small that it can only carry 20 bundles of fish,” said Guiamelon.

“Life before had never been abundant, that I had to sacrifice everything for myself. Our income would only allow us to survive for a day and nothing more,” he said. This did not hinder Guiamelon from dreaming big, however, believing that his experiences will bring great opportunities for him.

Behind Guiamelon’s perseverance and determination is his wife, Phay, a 48-year old Maguindanaoan who has been his constant shadow in his every struggle. They got married when Guiamelon was 20 years old and Phay was 16, and were blessed with five children.

But selling fish and vegetables was not enough to send their first three children to school. “Having five children, how could you survive with only PHP100 income a day? It’s just enough for our household daily consumption,” he said. This did not hinder Guiamelon from dreaming big, however, believing that his experiences will bring great opportunities for him.

Through the European Union’s Support to Agrarian Reform Communities in Central Mindanao (STARCM) programme, Guiamelon now owns a bigger banca, enough to carry 50 bundles of fish.

“It’s a different situation for my family and the community as a whole,” he said. “Life to us is not as bad as before. My old banca was replaced. Above all, the belief of STARCM in the capacity of the Muslim people changed my outlook, placing my dignity into a higher level.”

Sarrah Jane A. Corpuz-Guerrero

Fisherman Gli Guiamelon proudly shows his catch of the day and his bigger banca which he received from the EU through its Support to Agrarian Reform Communities in Central Mindanao (STARCM) programme. Photo credit: Sarrah Jane Corpuz-Guerrero

And what about our other basic needs?

Through the European Union’s Support to Agrarian Reform Communities in Central Mindanao (STARCM) programme, Guiamelon now owns a bigger banca, enough to carry 50 bundles of fish.
Disaster-proofing a village

When a village is bound by a bay, a river and a stream, and its elevation is just slightly above sea level, one does not need to be a rocket scientist or a marine biologist to conclude that its inhabitants are very vulnerable to disasters brought about by typhoons and storm surges.

“We know, we are aware of the risks,” said Salvacion Templonuevo, 62, one of the residents of Punta Tarawal, a community of 90 families situated in San Miguel Bay by the mouth of the Bicol River in Calabanga, Camarines Sur. “But fishing is our only means of livelihood. We have courageously stood strong typhoons in the past decades and we just meted out our survival,” she continued.

“We are glad that our vulnerability was noticed and our village was selected as a beneficiary of ACCORD,” Barangay Captain Alberto R. Coner said.

Punta Tarawal is one of the barangays in five Philippine provinces covered by ACCORD or the Strengthening Assets and Capacities of Communities and Local Governments for Resilience to Disasters project which is funded by the European Commission through its Humanitarian Aid Department.

When ACCORD started in 2007, there was very low participation rate in the initial activities involving disaster information dissemination. Coner lamented: “Only about half of the village heads came to meetings because they are asleep during the day after fishing the night before.”

Until one day when the lady mayor of Calabanga sort of scolded the villagers. Coner, who also chairs the Barangay Disaster Coordinating Council, still vividly remembers the words of the mayor: “You are wasting money and resources. You should feel very lucky that an NGO is ready to help you.”

“In a way, we also helped in educating the viewers when our drills were even covered by local television stations,” said Templonuevo. “Many know that when typhoon Reming struck in December of 2006, the destruction was televised; our village was submerged and most of us were not able to evacuate cramped in the roof top of the two-story elementary school,” she recalled.

With support from the Calabanga Municipal Government, the villagers of Punta Tarawal have also developed and implemented small-scale disaster mitigation projects such as the planting of mangrove propagules and seedings of talisay, kuyapi, and lipata along the shores of the river and the bay to lessen the impact of storm surge and flooding.

“Still, we still remember the words of the mayor up to now but we have developed our own action call thru slogan-making contests among the pupils in the school,” Coner said. And the action call is this: a prepared community is far from calamity.”

Jimmy A. Domingo

Propagating seeds of hope

Solar driers provided by the European Union and the World Food Programme are helping farmers in the Philippines adapt to changing weather patterns, boost their harvests and access markets more quickly.

The small community of Barangay Tingaringin in Lanao Del Norte in the Philippines is home to about 200 households, or roughly 1,000 people, most of whom have experienced the effects of clashes between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Philippine Army first-hand.

Almost a decade has passed since the conflict which affected their village and many other areas in Lanao del Norte has ended. However, it is apparent that for many, the memory is still vivid, with no shortage of stories relating to past conflicts being told in conversation with the locals. In the intervening years, residents have been steadily rebuilding their lives.

Carmina is one of those individuals, a farmer who, for over forty years, has tilled the earth for a variety of crops including rice and corn.

Traditionally, following the harvest, she and other fellow farmers would use concrete-paved areas such as basketball courts, roads, or vacant lots to dry their crops. While it was easier, it’s not that easy anymore. Nowadays, a sunny morning can be followed by a strong downpour in the afternoon.

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Jimmy A. Domingo

A farmer from the small community of Barangay Tingaringin in Lanao Del Norte lays down her harvest of organic rice for drying. In 2014, the EU donated post-harvest facilities, including portable solar driers. The farmers were among the first beneficiaries of the program. Photo credit: World Food Programme/Anthony Chase

WFP Manila Team
Improving lives through potable water

“For almost 43 years since 1960, the residents of Sitios Casia, Campo, Kilambay and Lalawigan of Barangay Kibudtungan had to sacrifice hiking for almost two kilometres daily just to fetch water for drinking and other household needs,” said Tiburcio Balanaig, founding chairman of the Campo, Casia, Kilambay and Lalawigan Water and Sanitation Association in North Cotabato.

Residents of four remote sitios in North Cotabato now enjoy potable water through a project funded by the EU’s Support to Agrarian Reform Communities in Central Mindanao programme, in partnership with the Department of Agrarian Reform, helped improve the lives of the residents of these remote sitios.

“During the construction of the PWS, the people were very cooperative and willing to involve in the ‘bayanihan’ to speed up the completion of the project,” said Jimmy Cabaillos, who served as councilor of Carmen municipality in 2004.

With the strong support of the Barangay Council and beneficiaries, the sub-project – the first to be turned over by DAR-STARM – was completed ahead of time. The total project cost was at P52.6 million, with a P1.26 million grant assistance from DAR-STARM.

The water system benefited 245 household-members in January 2003. Since its operation, the local water association also reported a 100 percent collection rate of water fees. The project has also dramatically reduced travel time for the residents to fetch water from 30 minutes to less than five minutes.

Efren Catedrilla

Building back better shelters

“After Super Typhoon Yolanda, we were worried since we didn’t know what to do. We lost our house and all our belongings. My wife, my children and I didn’t know where to begin,” said Noel Obedientes, 37-year-old father of two from Barangay 3, Poblacion, Hernani, Eastern Samar. He echoed the devastation and despair of hundreds of families living along the coastal areas left homeless by the disaster.

Obedientes was one of the beneficiaries of the Shelter Project funded by the European Union in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme. He is the vice president of the community-based Hernani Yolanda Survivors Beneficiaries Association composed of 56 homeless families selected by the local government as recipients of the Shelter Project.

Under the project, 165 model disaster resilient permanent shelters will be built in resettlement areas designated by local government units. These are located in Barangay Cabalawan in Tacloban City, Barangay Canclines in the Municipality of Hernani, and Barangay Cabugahan inOrmoc City.

The project sought to contribute in addressing the shelter gap in the three typhoon-affected areas. Each core shelter has an individual toilet facility, a connection to a Level III water supply system, and electrical supply facilities. Once completed, the shelters will be ready for occupancy by the displaced typhoon survivors.

The shelter project adopted a “build back better principle” by building permanent row housing units that adhere to higher construction standards and are away from flooding and danger zones. It highlighted a disaster-resistant construction design that exceeds the standards of the Department of Public Works and Highways to address inherent hazards such as storm surge, excessive wind speeds, and flooding brought by heavy rainfall. It incorporated design innovations that increase structural soundness and integrity, thereby enhancing resiliency features of each housing unit.

“All the beneficiaries of the housing project are very happy because we will now have our own house. We will not fear every time a storm is coming,” said Obedientes.

Apart from the fact that we, as beneficiaries, are building our own houses, we receive daily salaries enough to fend for our household needs. We also provide sweat equity hours and pintakasi (local term for volunteer work) as our personal contribution in the construction of our respective houses,” he added.

Mary Susan C. Saballa

Residents of Hernani, Eastern Samar build their own houses after their homes were flattened by Super Typhoon Yolanda in 2013. The Shelter Project was funded by the EU, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme. Photo credit: Mary Susan C. Saballa.

Photo credit: Mary Susan C. Saballa
Rising from the ashes

Bea, a 28 year old ‘tool’ day-care teacher, could still vividly recall how children would frantically rush home, some fetched by their worried parents, whenever there was gunfire or explosion near their village in Kapanal, a community nestled along the mountains in Barangay Gasi, Kamba town in Sarangani. Gasi, tagged as a conflict-affected barangay, is predominantly Tboli, an ethnic group that inhabits the hinterlands of South-Central Mindanao.

“The kids would be gone in a matter of minutes and then I’d be the only one left in the shanty we use as classroom,” she said.

Bea said the incidents of harassment and attacks by armed men left a strong imprint in the minds of the children and their parents, even after psycho-social sessions to help them cope with traumas.

Barangay Captain Mariano Fado narrated that in the early dawn of October 4, 2008, armed men swooped down on their area and fired at the barangay health station (store for peace) and a waiting stage, “tindahan sa kalinaw” day-care center, multi-purpose projects. Now, we do not only burn down the barangay center, day-care center, multi-purpose stage, “indahan sa kalinaw” (store for peace) and a waiting shed. The barangay health station was spared.

Resident were forced to evacuate, and some 946 families from Bea’s sitio Kapanal joined other displaced families from other communities, enduring for weeks the difficulties of being displaced.

To help the displaced residents cope with their difficulties, Bea said an array of projects was introduced by the Action for Conflict Transformation (ACT) Peace Programme, which is backed by the EU as a support mechanism to the 1996 Final Peace Agreement between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

The PHP 2.9 million project covered the construction of about 20 core houses to replace the ones burned during the attack.

“With this project, we have observed the convergence of various stakeholders striving for a common goal, which is to attain peace and development of Mindanao. It was a great experience and a model for cooperation,” Bea said.

“The project did not only build houses, but also friendship and values for each of us who took part in the construction of core houses and other infrastructure projects. Now, we do not only have new houses and livelihood skills, we also have dignity,” she added.

Rommel G. Rebollido

Claiming an ancestral domain, rebuilding a community

The ancestral land of the Higaonons in the hinterlands of Balingasag town in Misamis Oriental province was a former battle field where brothers were pitted against each other and families torn apart by differing ideologies.

“My nephew was a sniper for the rebels. My uncle was their mayor. Some members of my family was also with the Philippine military,” Adela Castanos, a member of the tribe, said.

At the peak of the insurgency war in the 80s, the Higaonon tribal land in the village of Samay in the town of Balingasag in Misamis Oriental province was torn by bitter fighting between the government and the communist New People’s Army.

Both sides were recruiting Higaonon tribesmen to work as guides, a task they excel because it was their ancestral land that had become the battleground.

Castanos and the rest of the Higaonon tribes who did not want to participate fled, never to return to their homes for several years. They stayed away for four years and returned only when the fighting ended.

“….When we returned to our village we found our houses were burned. We lost our homes. Our coffee trees destroyed,” Castanos said.

“But we wanted to survive, we wanted to rebuild our lives and our community.”

When they heard that they can legitimize their claim to their ancestral land, Castanos and the others prepared the documentation and the papers. It was not an easy road, however.

Eventually all the hard work and sacrifice worked. The award was given covering 15,700 hectares covering ten villages in the towns of Balingasag and Davao in Misamis Oriental province.

The Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title was finally awarded to the tribe on April 7, 2006.

“I cannot remember how many times I have climbed to seek approval in the government offices. It must be a million of times,” she said.

AnthroWatch, a non-governmental organisation supported by the EU, helped them in the documentation process and importantly, the evidence to support the ancestral claim of the tribe.

Adela Castanos said it took them 14 years to help indigenous people in their ancestral claims. Came to Barangay Samay and things began to turn in favor of the tribe. AnthroWatch helped them in the documentation process.

Eventually, all the hard work and sacrifice worked. The award was

Froilan Gallardo

Members of the Higaonon tribe have received titles for the ancestral land with the help of AnthroWatch, a non-governmental organisation supported by the EU. Photo credit: Froilan Gallardo

Froilan Gallardo
Feeding the country’s future

In times of conflict, women and the children suffer the most. Scarcity of food, inadequate potable water, and unsanitary living conditions confront internally displaced persons, resulting in malnutrition among child evacuees.

In Barangay Buayan in Datu Piang, Maguindanao, thousands of IDPs stayed in schools at the height of the war in 2008, which erupted following the aborted signing of the controversial Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

A local group called Mindanao Tulugan Bakwet (MTB) has identified at least 100 children suffering malnutrition at the evacuation centers. MTB sought assistance from ACT for Peace Programme to provide supplemental feeding to the malnourished children.

The feeding program, that ran for at least 3 months, monitored the progress of health and nutrition status of the children to ensure positive result of the intervention.

MTB staff Mohamnad Kuday said a pool of volunteer cooks, mostly mothers of the malnourished kids, helped prepare the food. “The food is made up of iron and vitamin fortified rice, vegetables and fish,” he said.

Mohannes Mukamad, who volunteered to help in the feeding program, said children evacuees suffered the most at the height of the evacuation during the war.

“They squeezed themselves in the evacuation centers, the food was scarce, and bad weather conditions brought illnesses to the evacuees, particularly the kids,” she said.

The kids’ health condition improved after the daily feeding,” she added. The IDPs in Barangay Buayan in Datu Piang have long returned to their homes, and the children have all grown a little stronger through the years.

Keith Bacongco

Protecting indigenous people’s rights

“Please bring these with you,” said Negro Domino, an officer of the Pig-akuman Lumad organization, gesturing to the bananas his wife had prepared in a basket. They hosted the project staff of Healing the Hurt, fed them, and then gave them fruits upon their departure.

“It is the Lumad tradition to give to our visitors. It is our gesture showing how thankful and happy we are that you were able to reach our remote community,” Domino said.

The road to Sitio Linaw-inaw of Barangay Sanagay, Buenavista, Agusan del Norte in good weather was very rough and rocky at best. It is an almost three hour-ride on a ‘skylab,’ a motorcycle fitted by wooden planks to transport up to 8 people and to carry goods.

But residents of Sitio Linaw-inaw, more known to the locals as Bulak, prefer to walk to the center of the barangay Buenavista especially during the rainy season.

“You have to have at least three clear days straight for the roads to be dry enough,” said Aljen Hilagao, a member of the local cooperative. The community has three major products they bring to the Buenavista market – corn, bananas, and abaca. SkyLab drivers charge PHP4 per kilo of whatever product they are transporting.

“Their realization is that if they transact business per individual, they incur more costs,” said Evelyn Naguio, the Healing the Hurt project officer in charge of the component setting up the cooperatives.

The residents decided to put up a cooperative that would cut costs and at the same time increase their income through a buy and sell center. The Pig-akuman Multi-Purpose Cooperative is one of the nine community-based cooperatives established by the Healing the Hurt Project in various indigenous villages of Northern Mindanao.

An EU initiative with a funding of €623,766, the project sought to protect Lumad communities by raising awareness on indigenous rights and providing access to justice and capacity building. It was implemented mainly through the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines.”

Naguio said.

“Now, the cooperative is allowing them to have ready funds that would aid them during times of emergency,” Naguio said.
I arrived in Manila as Head of Delegation in November 2006, and served as Ambassador until January 2011. In fact I should say “I returned” to Manila, since I had already served as Political and Development Counsellor in the Delegation from November 1990, when the Delegation was established, to August 1995. And in fact this was my third posting working with the Philippines, since from 1985 to 1990 I had covered the Philippines from the EU’s regional Delegation in Bangkok.

In many respects I was very fortunate, since the administration of the Delegation was running like clockwork, and we had just moved into sparkling new premises in the RCBC Building at the corner of Ayala and Buendia the year before I arrived. I was also able to catch up with several old friends, staff members of the Delegation who had joined us already during my first posting.

Looking back on that period, every aspect of the Delegation’s work was stretched to the full over these years. In the economic sphere, for example, the EU was the largest single source of foreign direct investments into the Philippines, and the country’s third largest trading partner. It was important to put these economic relations on a firm footing, so in 2009 we began negotiations for a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (negotiations were completed in 2012).

We also had a number of serious issues to work on. In 2006-07, for example, a lot of attention was focused on the extrajudicial killing of left-wing political activists, and by 2007 the press was reporting that nearly 400 such murders had taken place over the previous three years. The Philippine government asked the EU for assistance in addressing these issues, and after looking very carefully at the issue we put together a technical assistance project, EP JUST, aimed at strengthening the capacity of the police and the Department of Justice to investigate and prosecute these murders (which thankfully tailed off from 2007 onwards).

Our development co-operation programmes also took up a large part of my time (as well as giving me the opportunity to visit many far-flung parts of the country). In those years our development programmes were focused on the health sector, and more generally on poverty alleviation and on addressing the consequences of conflict. This last issue became particularly crucial in 2008-09, when the breakdown in the peace talks with the MILF following the failure to sign the MoA-AD led to renewed fighting in Central Mindanao, and to an upsurge in internal displacement. At its height, there were more than 700,000 “bakwit” (evacuees) living in very difficult circumstances in IDP camps. The EU was at the forefront in helping to ease the plight of those displaced, and in calling for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

On a brighter note, it was encouraging to see that an increasing number of Philippine students were taking advantage of the EU’s Erasmus programme to undertake post-graduate studies in Europe. I was particularly delighted when a number of these returning students took the initiative to establish an Erasmus Alumni Association, which I believe is still going strong today.

Finally, I would like to mention that on 1 December 2009 the EU’s Treaty of Lisbon came into force, with one immediate consequence being that the Delegation became the “Delegation of the European Union to the Philippines” rather than the “Delegation of the European Commission”. And precisely at midnight on the 30th of November the new brass plate was placed outside the Delegation’s door.

It’s not always easy to return to a place where one has worked before, but in my case I was absolutely delighted to be given the opportunity to return to the Philippines for a second posting. And ever since I retired at the end of 2013, I’ve been glad to continue to contribute to EU-Philippine relations in whatever way I can.
CHAPTER 3

SILVER LININGS

EU in the eyes of its Philippine partners

Photo credit: John Samuel Nunez for the "Ic EUropa in U" photography competition in April 2016.
Believing that justice delayed is justice denied, the European Union embarked on a €17-million initiative in 2016 to reduce backlog in the courts and prosecution services in the Philippines. The programme, called Governance in Justice (GOJUST), could significantly improve the administration of justice in the country, says Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno.

GOJUST, Sereno says, builds on previous EU-supported initiatives, including the EU-Philippines Justice Support Programme (EUJUST), through an inter-agency council made up of the Supreme Court, the Justice Department and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG).

Sereno notes that one of the key success stories of EUJUST was the launch of the Justice Zone project. A justice zone is an area or locality where a minimum number of inter-agency coordinative reforms are present.

The project’s activities cover the entire lifetime of a criminal case: from case start-up (complaint, arrest, investigation, case build-up), to case adjudication (prosecution, pre-judgment detention, decision) to post-judgment incidents (probation, parole, service of sentence).

“A key example of these coordinated activities is the eSubpoena system, which is done in cooperation with the Philippine National Police through the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Supreme Court. It is a simple solution to the problem of poor attendance of police witnesses, whose testimonies are vital especially in drug cases. Any delay in the trial means longer unjust detention and more prison congestion,” she says.

“By the plain email transmission of the subpoena from our trial court to the police station, with a copy furnished to the PNP Headquarters, police attendance improved by an estimated 97 percent in Quezon City, for example. Any report of non-attendance will automatically lead to an administrative show-cause order to the non-attending police.”

By the end of 2016, eSubpoena should be rolled out completely in Metro Manila.

Since 2006, the European Union has been working with
the Philippines to promote equitable access to justice and its efficient enforcement for all citizens, particularly the poor and the disadvantaged.

“At a time when a great number of the population remain economically, socially, and politically disempowered, it is not surprising that justice systems are perceived to be biased towards the rich and the corrupt,” says Austere Panadero, undersecretary at the DILG. “The value of the EU assistance cannot be overemphasized as the task falls upon the government to balance the scale and to move the nation towards equitable and efficient delivery of justice.”

The most recently concluded venue of cooperation was the second phase of the EPJUST, with the theme “Justice for All: Enhancing Accessibility, Fighting Impunity.” EPJUST II sought to give the poor and the disadvantaged better access to the civil and criminal justice systems. It also sought to combat impunity by strengthening institutional capacities to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate cases involving extra-legal killings and enforced disappearances; and to promote transparency and accountability in the justice system by putting in place mechanisms for oversight and monitoring performance.

“Under the auspices of EPJUST, the department was able to draw up manuals to activate the Violence Against Women desks at the barangay level,” Panadero says. EPJUST also trained stakeholders in the barangay justice system to be gender-fair, child-friendly and sensitive to the needs of indigenous people, Panadero says.

EPJUST II also supported the Muslim Filipino Community Paralegal Programme, which complements the work of agencies within the justice system while lessening religion-related conflict. With EU support, the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos has developed comprehensive paralegal training modules and trained volunteer paralegals in more than 12 Muslim Filipino communities in Metro Manila, Zamboanga, Cebu, Davao, and Palawan.

The EU also promoted Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) or arbitration, which offers an affordable, more socially and culturally appropriate and speedy parallel system of resolving grievances among the poor and marginalized, Panadero says.

“With the help of the EU, we hope to strengthen the culture of arbitration in the Philippines as a driver of meaningful access to justice,” he adds.

The newly launched GOJUST Programme will play a crucial role going forward, Sereno says. The initial successes in previous EU-supported programmes, including the eCourts, are “low-hanging fruit” that the GOJUST Programme can build upon, she adds.

“We want to institutionalize these reform initiatives,” Sereno says. “The sector has a long way to go in achieving truly efficient and real-time justice, but with the unflagging support of the EU, I am confident we can make big leaps forward in furthering criminal justice administration and, ultimately, the rule of law in the Philippines.”
Filipino filmmaker Brillante Ma. Mendoza has been described as a “living treasure of Philippine independent cinema” by EU Ambassador to the Philippines Franz Jessen. And rightly so: Mendoza is the first Filipino to have been awarded in three major international film festivals, all based in Europe, showing authentic Filipino stories to the world.

“Most of my films discuss the lives of ordinary Filipinos – real life stories of the voiceless people in our society, those who are invisible because we choose not to give them importance and significance,” Mendoza says.

International film critics have regarded him as a “neo-realist” for depicting social realities and lives of ordinary people in extraordinary situations. “Some say my movies are like poverty porn. But these are stories that happen every day. These are real stories, and it so happened that Europeans appreciate the truthfulness, the honesty of my stories – that given such miserable conditions, people still struggle to live with dignity,” Mendoza says.

In 2009, Mendoza won Best Director at Cannes for his film “Kinatay”, which tells the grisly tale of a kidnap-rape victim who was hacked to pieces. He also won the Cannes-Ecumenical Jury-Prize Special Mention for his movie “Taklub,” which follows the intersecting lives of three survivors of the Super Typhoon Yolanda that hit the country in 2013. His film “Tirador,” which won the Caligari Film Award in the 2007 Berlin Film Festival, while “Thy Womb,” which showcased the beauty of Tawi-Tawi and the life of the Badjaos, won the La Navicella Venezia Cinema Award in the prestigious Venice Film Festival in 2012. His debut film “Masahista,” which showed a young masseur caught in a tailspin of sex, greed and death, won the Golden Leopard Award in the 2005 Locarno International Film Festival in Switzerland, a feat that Jessen says paved the way for the rise of alternative cinema in the Philippines.

“Filmmakers such as Brillante Ma. Mendoza are a source of inspiration not only to Filipinos but also to Europeans for his craftsmanship, dynamism.

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A scene from Brillante Mendoza’s film “Taklub,” which tells the story of three survivors of Super Typhoon Yolanda. Photo credit: Brillante Mendoza’s website

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Bridging cultures with cinema

Europeans appreciate the truthfulness and honesty of my stories.

— Brillante Ma. Mendoza
“Mendoza is the perfect ambassador of goodwill between the EU and the Philippines mainly because of his significant role in bridging the cultural divide between and among the peoples of Europe and the Philippines,” Jessen says.

Indeed, cinema, as Mexican director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu said, is universal, beyond flags and borders and passports.

This could easily explain the continuing popularity of Cine Europa, the country’s longest-running annual film festival, bringing contemporary European movies to Filipino audiences for almost two decades.

On its 19th run, Cine Europa opened in September 2016 at the Shangri-La Plaza in Mandaluyong City, and traveled for four months to 10 other cities and municipalities with 24 movies. Celebrating the 25th year anniversary of the EU Delegation in the Philippines, the organizers of Cine Europa chose “Friendship” as the festival’s theme.

“Friendship, the theme for this year’s Cine Europa, is most fitting and special, especially as this year marks 25 years of the EU Delegation in the Philippines,” said Mattias Lentz, Minister Counsellor of the EU Delegation to the Philippines.

Santos says the festival is also instrumental in elevating the Philippine film industry as active filmmakers in the country gain access to honing their craft and skills and draw inspiration from the exemplars of fine cinema that the annual Cine Europa embodies.

“Cine Europa’s driving force and mandate has always been to be such a bridge, especially now that the world has so much need for bridges and links to build good relations among nations and find a way out for divisiveness, hatred and animosity brought about by differences in cultures and world views,” he says.
Waging peace, healing the wounds

Building peace is at the heart of the European Union. Based on the collective experience of its member-states, the EU has set itself the goal of promoting peace in other parts of the world, including the Philippines. Since 2007, the EU has supported the peace process between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The bloc’s engagement in the peace process underwent an evolutionary process, first focusing on small-scale projects in Mindanao that addressed the pervasiveness of poverty in the region.

The EU eventually felt the need to progressively monitor the peace process to ensure that it achieved its development goals. The European Community-Philippines Strategy Paper 2007-2013 for the first time explicitly stated that “support to the Mindanao peace process” was a priority for the EU.

“More than the financial, personnel and logistical support provided by the EU to the Bangsamoro peace process infrastructure, the EU’s unwavering moral and diplomatic support for the peace negotiations, the signed Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, and its implementation have been most valuable,” said former government chief negotiator Miriam Coronel-Ferrer.

The EU, given its norms and objectives - has certainly embraced and invested in our cause. Through its words and deeds, it has provided legitimacy to the cause, showing that peace is worth fighting for.”

Indeed, peace is a battle for the hearts and minds of the people. A process that seeks to transform a complex and historical question such as the Bangsamoro needs the trust and support of the people,” she added.

The EU has funded the operations of the Third Party Monitoring Team, whose mandate is to monitor, review, and assess the implementation of all concluded agreements. It has also been member of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) since 2011. As part of the IMT, EU leads the “Humanitarian, Rehabilitation and Development Component” given its track record in development and humanitarian work in Mindanao.

“The EU – given its norms and objectives - has certainly embraced and invested in our cause. Through its words and deeds, it has provided legitimacy to the cause, showing that peace is worth fighting for.”

President Benigno Aquino III and Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak witness the signing of the peace deal between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in March 2014. Also in the photo are \( \text{(left to right)} \) MILF chairman Murad Ebrahim, MILF chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal, facilitator Tengku Ghafar, government chief negotiator Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, and presidential adviser on the peace process Teresita Quintos-Deles. Photo credit: Malacañang Photo Bureau.

Peace advocacy is not an easy theme.
— MILF chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal
Programme (MIF-RDP), which from 2007 has benefited more than 500,000 people through community-driven development projects spread across the conflict-affected areas.

Through its partner, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD), the EU provided assistance to the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC), including technical support to the printing of a peace process primer that was translated into six local languages in February 2014.

The EU also channeled grants “to allow for a smooth transition and to create conditions for the establishment of the autonomous region of the Bangsamoro” through NGOs such as the Non-Violent Peace Forces, Fondation Suisse de Deminage, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, United Nations Development Programme and CHD.

In addition, the EU also supported the work of the Philippine Campaign To Ban Landmines and the Swiss Demining Foundation, which had special terms of reference signed by the government and the MILF to assist in disarming mines and educating the public about their danger.

“The EU, in particular, has been requested by both parties to provide the International Election Monitoring Team for the conduct of the plebiscite that would ratify the Bangsamoro Basic Law but unfortunately the BBL hasn’t been passed by Congress. Election monitoring is a strength of the EU given that it has played this role in many parts of the world,” Coronel-Ferrer said.

The Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro was signed by the government and the MILF on March 27, 2014, concluding 17 years of peace negotiations. The proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law, however, failed to get the nod from Congress in the wake of a public outcry over an anti-terrorist operation that went wrong in January 2015, in which 44 police commandos were killed in a 12-hour firefight against hundreds of MILF, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, and private armed groups.

“Sometimes the domestic constituency may not fully appreciate the problem and the solutions. Ironically enough, those from the outside, especially those with global perspectives as to the challenges and threats to human security and development and the exposure to successes along this line in other countries, more easily embrace the goals of a negotiated political settlement to a divisive conflict,” Coronel-Ferrer said.

MILF chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal, for his part, said the EU is “in every way involved in the GPH-MILF peace process. Job creation is also a field worth exploring now,” the MILF official said.

Ferrer has credited the EU for staying the course in supporting the peace process despite the bumps along the way.

“As we know, this process is not like clockwork. Things don’t often happen as scheduled or as planned and it’s good enough that things are still moving forward somehow. I remember a particularly disappointing meeting with EU executives as we explained the difficulties affecting an EU project. But somehow we managed to find a silver lining or to squeeze in a joke and this kept our spirits up,” she said.

“They know how difficult it was to get this far in this process and so we trust that they will continue to give it the morale boost and needed sustenance under the new administration,” Ferrer added.
Those who have gone through the Erasmus+ programme invariably describe the opportunity to pursue advanced studies in the finest educational institutions in Europe as a life-changing experience.

“I was enticed by the prospect of studying at three universities and doing the final year at the university where I would specialize,” says Rose Eclarinal, who was already a seasoned journalist for ABS-CBN when she earned a spot in the programme in 2005. Eclarinal finished her Masters in Journalism and Media within Globalisation, specializing in War and Conflict in 2008, graduating with distinction. Her foundation year was split between University of Aarhus in Denmark and University of Amsterdam in The Netherlands, while her final year was spent in Swansea University Wales.

“It was looking forward to the cultural and social experience in the three countries.... I have not seen any other program offering this kind of academic and cultural learning. It was a life-changing, life-enriching experience for me. I have grown, developed and become a better person and a better journalist.”

Sheila Balbutin, who completed her Masters in Media, Communication and Cultural Studies through an Erasmus+ scholarship, describes studying in Europe as an experience of a lifetime. Balbutin, who taught Development Communication courses at Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan, pursued her studies at Aarhus University in Denmark and the University of London in England from 2005 to 2007.

“Aside from enhancing my academic capacities, studying in Europe immensely improved my interpersonal and intercultural communication skills,” Balbutin says. “I met amazing people from all over the world who became my friends. Lastly, it allowed me to experience the beauty of the continent through my travels. It is definitely life-changing.”

Kate Ramil, who completed a Masters in Women’s and Gender Studies, attended the University of Hull in the UK and the Universidad de Granada in Spain from 2009 to 2011. “Studying in Europe gave me an

Marie-An Santos finished her Master’s in Advertising at the Lucian Blaga University in Romania. “It was given a rich resource of European thinkers and scholars that broadened my horizons,” says Santos. Photo credit: Marie-An Santos

It was a life-changing, life-enriching experience for me. I have become a better person and a better journalist.

— Rose Eclarinal
“It was the opportunity to engage in insightful discussions with students, journalists and scholars from different parts of the world, get valuable feedback from great minds — our tutors and professors, and reflect on both my work and the state of journalism at that time,” she says.

“When I rejoined ABS-CBN via ABS-CBN Global or more popularly known now as The Filipino Channel, I was confident I had a better grasp of world events: the global recession, London riots in 2011, changing of leadership in the Vatican with the resignation of Pope Benedict and the conclave, and most recently, Brexit and terror attacks, among many other issues.”

Ramil says her studies gave her practical knowledge of different gender and women’s issues all over the world, particularly in developing countries. “I realised how different and similar our issues are,” she says.

“For instance, those in the North will no longer talk about the food on the table and access to economic opportunities to women. Their concern is on the self, the individual joys and self-fulfillment. Scholars like me, coming from the Global South, still fight for equality and access to government services like reproductive health.”

Now, Balbutin says, Erasmus graduates are giving back in terms of being ambassadors of goodwill and agents of change to help strengthen the partnership between the EU and the Philippines.

“I am very proud to say that the Filipino Erasmus students and graduates have been very active in working and collaborating with the EU Delegation in Manila on activities and events,” says Balbutin, who is president of the Erasmus Mundus Association (EMA) South East Asian Chapter.

“We are very much involved in two major events — the pre-departure orientation and send-off for new scholars and the European Higher Education Fairs. We’ve also conducted activities like sharing sessions; promotional faked networking events; and alumni hangouts. We do all these as a way of giving back and paying it forward.”

Ramil, president of EMA Philippines, says she promotes the programme wherever she goes. “As country representative, I see to it that we have representation to encourage young peoples and teachers to aspire to become world-class scholars because our country needs this kind,” she says. “Learn as much and give as much in return.”
Forging academic partnerships

Among the many fields the European Union provides supports is education. Its projects range from student and faculty exchanges to content development and capacity building, all of which are currently aggregated under the umbrella programme Erasmus+. Beneficiaries of these highly successful programmes include students, professors and institutions not only in EU Member States but in third countries such as the Philippines.

One important project was the European Studies Consortium, which included Ateneo de Manila University, the University of the Philippines and De La Salle University. Launched in the 1990s between the government of the Philippines and the then Commission of the European Communities, its aim was to increase awareness of European affairs and create a “pool of experts” on European issues. Partnering with the three Philippine universities were five European universities. Together they conducted various activities, which included intensive workshops in Belgium for Filipino teachers. It was “specifically designed to provide training and research opportunities for university faculty,” says Dr. Marissa Maricosa Paderon, one of the participants of the project.

One important outcome of this education project was the establishment of Ateneo’s European Studies Program (ESP), which administers an undergraduate course on contemporary Europe. Paderon currently heads the department whose course is “recognised by the European Commission as the only academic program solely dedicated to the study of Europe” in the Philippines.

But why study Europe? Is there really a specific need for such a programme for Filipinos? For members of the Ateneo faculty, the answers are wide-ranging. For BJ Enverga, “the discipline of European Studies gives students the requisite knowledge and skills to contribute to building mutually beneficial relationships between Europe and the Philippines.” Irwin Cruz, on the
other hand, thinks it is essential for anyone who seriously wants to go into diplomacy or international business.

Meanwhile, Jeric Tionloc believes Europe provides “new concepts in politics, economics, sociology and anthropology.” He adds that “Europe’s political experiences provide possible insight to the Philippines’ own attempts to sustainably empower its democratic institutions.”

Since the inception of Ateneo’s programme in 1998, the number of students taking European Studies has grown from 49 to an average of 200 every year. Graduates of the course have found their way into the different branches of government, foreign embassies, the international public sector as well as multinational companies. Others pursued graduate studies in Europe. Meanwhile, its faculty members are regularly tapped by business groups and media for their expertise on European matters.

Ateneo’s ESP regularly runs public events and seminars on European issues, which the EU Delegation has coordinated and supported. Paderon stresses that these non-classroom activities are important as they help the broader public “understand better contemporary issues affecting EU and their eventual consequences on EU and Philippine relations.”

The 25th year of the EU-Philippine relations is also a memorable year for Ateneo ESP. It is a founding member of the European Studies Association of the Philippines, which was officially incorporated as a non-profit organisation this year. In July 2016, Ateneo ESP was awarded a Jean Monnet grant from the European Commission under the Erasmus+ programme. It is the first for a Philippine institution. As much as it is a recognition of the programme’s work and vision, it is also a testament of the enduring partnership between the EU and the Philippines on education and scholarly work.
Much has happened during the term of Ambassador Victoria Bataclan as head of the Philippine mission to the European Union that has defined bilateral relations between the EU and the Philippines, including the signing of the landmark Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

“The PCA may be regarded as the framework agreement that solidifies our relationship in major areas of cooperation,” said Bataclan, who assumed her post in October 2011 after presenting her credentials to the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, and to the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso.

“The PCA commits the Philippines and the EU to pursue dialogue and cooperation on political matters, including the peace process and conflict prevention, counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, and human rights; on justice and security affairs, encompassing legal cooperation, combating transnational crimes, and protection of refugees and internally displaced persons; on trade and investment, covering customs and trade facilitation, investment, competition policy, intellectual property rights, migration and many other economic, development and sectoral issues,” she said.

The PCA, signed in July 2012 in Phnom Penh on the sidelines of the Ministerial Meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations by former Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario and former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Lady Catherine Ashton, is now awaiting the ratification of a few more EU Member States to complete the process.

Bataclan also spearheaded campaigns in Brussels for the country’s application for the EU’s Generalized System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) in 2013, which was approved by the EC a year after.

“Through this program, Philippine exporters are now able to enjoy zero tariffs on products covered by the scheme, including big-ticket items that used to have only reduced tariff under the regular GSP. This has boosted our exports to the EU, and has allowed the creation of more jobs, particularly among small and medium-scale enterprises in the countryside,” she said.

“It should be noted that GSP+...”
requires its beneficiary countries to strictly implement the 27 core human and labor rights and principles of sustainable development and good governance. We can look at this conditionality as further proof that we are duly observing the universal conventions. In other words, GSP+ serves as a concrete recognition by the EU of the Philippines’ unwavering commitment to promote and protect human rights,” she added.

It was also during Bataclan’s term that outstanding issues were addressed by both sides, including the EU ban on some Philippine air carriers that were still included in its safety list; the recognition by the EU of Philippine-issued certificates for seafarers under the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers; as well as the possibility of the Philippines being identified by the EU as a non-cooperating third country in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

“Through the active participation of home-based agencies and officials, all three issues were addressed successfully. Nevertheless, the Philippines government has to ensure its compliance with EU regulations,” she said.

Bataclan said the area of trade, the EU is among the top four trade partners of the country, along with China, Japan and the United States.

“The breadth of the products we trade with the EU is truly assorted: we export integrated circuits, coconut oil, and transport vessels, while we import die-related materials, aircraft, and semi-conductors, among other goods,” she said.

In terms of investments, the EU has also remained a top investor in the Philippines, with many companies in the power generation industry having equity from EU firms.

EU development assistance, according to Bataclan, is also “special” as the Philippines enjoys a more generous arrangement than the traditional ODA loans from other countries. The current allocation for the Philippines has been more than doubled in the present ODA cycle (the seven-year Multi-Annual Indicative Programme), from Euro 130 million to Euro 325 million. Most of this assistance is directed at impoverished regions of the country, especially in Mindanao, and is focused on inclusive growth through the energy sector and support for the rule of law.

The Philippines also engages the EU through ASEAN for a region-to-region relationship as well as through the Asia-Europe Meeting, Bataclan said.

“The EU is the world’s largest economy, but Asia continues to be on an ascendant path, both economically and politically. It is said that the 21st century would be Asia’s Century, and the EU has been preparing and working for deeper and more meaningful relations with the countries of Asia,” she said.

But for the country’s top diplomat to Europe, the country’s bilateral relationship with the EU goes far beyond the official statistics.

“Out of the 10 million Filipinos estimated to be working abroad or who have migrated to other countries, there are more than 700,000 Filipinos living in the EU Member States. They tend to concentrate in a few cities, such as London, Milan, and Rome, but you will find Filipinos everywhere in Europe,” she said.

“We welcome almost half a million EU nationals every year,” Bataclan said. “This is important not only in terms of tourism receipts and supporting the tourism industry in our provinces, but also in fostering mutual understanding.”
For generations of T’boli women, the t’nalak – a traditional abaca-based cloth – represents the fabric of their culture and identity.

At the centre of this success story is the t’nalak, a traditional abaca-based cloth woven by generations of T’boli women, who are often called “dream weavers” because their designs are believed to come to them in their dreams, inspired by their ancestors.

“To them, this unique fabric represents birth, life, union in marriage and death. It is often used as blankets and clothing and on rare occasions, and is also used in royal wedding ceremonies. The t’nalak is sacred and represents the T’bolis’ ‘identity’, says Nenita Kinan, president of the Lake Sebu Culture and Arts Council and vice president of the Tnalak Tau S’bu, an association of t’nalak weavers from Lake Sebu.

Making the t’nalak is a tedious process taking up to several months to finish, depending on the length and the intricacy of the design.

For generations of T’boli women, the t’nalak – a traditional abaca-based cloth – represents the fabric of their culture and identity.

Preserving the fabric of their culture

For a few hundred women from the T’boli tribe, indigenous people who make their home in the town of Lake Sebu in South Cotabato, timely help from the European Union meant the ability to preserve the fabric of their culture while looking ahead to a more promising future.

This unique fabric represents birth, life, union in marriage, and death.

— Nenita Kinan
of the Tnalak Tau S’bu
of the pattern. It is made from natural abaca fibers (Manila hemp) and hand-dyed with pigments gathered from certain roots, leaves and bark of the “loko” plant and the “k’nalum” tree. The abaca fibers give the textile strength and the natural dyes are almost permanent. Its surface is coated with beeswax and burnished with a cowry shell to give it a smooth sheen.

T’boli women design the t’nalak without using drawn patterns or guides, but instead, rely on a mental image of the designs. These designs are handed down or shared but not every t’nalak weaver knows every design. Usually, a few of the original designs stay within a certain family while others are shared.

Today, the tradition of the t’nalak lives on through the few weavers that strive to safeguard this tradition, but surviving and growing in a modern, commercial world is a challenge.

The EU helped the weavers meet this challenge through its Trade Related Technical Assistance Project 3 (TRTA 3), assisting them in protecting their intellectual property and in marketing their products and services effectively.

TRTA 3 project officer Caridad Victorino said the EU programme provided two short-term experts to teach the weavers how to come up with a code of practice. The team of experts documented each procedure in producing t’nalak and helped the weavers come up with a marketing plan and a better organisation, Victorino said.

A code of practice, Victorino said, is a prerequisite to having the t’nalak designs protected by the Intellectual Property Office and branded for marketing.

A few years ago, the Lake Sebu Women Weavers Association tried to patent the t’nalak but was denied on the grounds that the weaves had become generic and were part of the public domain after having been in production for so long.

“The t’nalak of Lake Sebu can be an export winner, especially for the high-end international market. But first, we have to apply for property rights as a prerequisite to having their own brand and to protect the designs of the weavers,” Victorino said.

The t’nalak already has a community seal and is registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission. The branding application, Victorino said, should be complete by 2017 or 2018.

The Lake Sebu Women Weavers Association, meanwhile, has received equipment from the Department of Trade and Industry under the Shared Service Facility programme. The equipment will allow the group to double its current production of 100 metres of t’nalak every two months.

T’nalak cloth and finished products are currently being exported to some European countries as well as Japan, but Victorino pointed out that the volume is still minimal compared to the potential market once the brand is developed and commercialized.

T’nalak was introduced during the 2015 design and lifestyle event Manila FAME and was one of the products showcased at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Boracay. Traditionally worn by the T’boli tribe for special occasions, t’nalak has since been adopted for commercially-sold bags, handicrafts and various souvenir items.

A few years ago, the Lake Sebu Women Weavers Association tried to patent the t’nalak but was denied on the grounds that the weaves had become generic and were part of the public domain after having been in production for so long.

“Traditionally, indigenous people are not business-minded, but now they can start their own business and manage their income,” she adds.

Working with the EU has taught the weavers how to compete in the global market, Kinan says. “They have learned to value their skills, how to manage their time, become entrepreneurs, all while maintaining the traditional t’nalak fabric.”
The European Union Visitors Programme (EUVP) is the regional bloc’s oldest exchange programme, inviting young leaders from outside the EU for study visits to European institutions, and giving them first-hand information about EU values, functions, activities, and policies since 1974.

In more than four decades, the programme has evolved to reflect the EU’s growing importance in the international arena, expanding its collaboration with EU Delegations in 75 countries around the world.

One beneficiary of the programme was Senator Juan Edgardo Angara, a lawyer who is now on his second term in the Senate. Angara was a representative of the province of Aurora when he went to Europe in 2012.

“I went to Europe as a guest of the EU in 2012 on the invitation of then Ambassador Guy Ledoux. The trip was packed into three to four days and we visited the EU Parliament and EU institutions in Brussels, Strasbourg, and Luxembourg,” said Angara, who has been recognised as one of the most productive congressmen during his nine-year stint as member of the House of Representatives.

“I met a few fellow parliamentarians from Southeast Asia as well as one from Eastern Europe. We had the chance to chat with European Members of Parliament. I also had a meeting with a professor who was specialising in Asian and European matters,” he added.

Each study visit is individually tailored to meet the participant’s work profile and interests, composed of about 15 to 20 meetings on topics of mutual interest. Forging deeper understanding of the EU and its institutions, Angara said, was the best way to create synergies on both sides, not just on a government-to-government level but also on a people-to-people level.

There is huge potential for people-to-people exchanges on so many levels.

— Senator Juan Edgardo Angara
Angara recalled that during his stay in Europe, among other issues facing both the EU and the Philippines were discussions on whether to grant wider access to Philippine products under the bloc’s GSP+ duty-free program as well as the lifting of the ban on domestic airlines from flying to countries in the EU after the International Civil Aviation Organization found “significant safety concerns” in the aviation standards of the Philippines.

“In hindsight, we succeeded in obtaining these but with intense lobbying with friends and allies at personal, national and political party levels,” he said.

Angara said through the visitors programme, the bloc is able to create an external network of contacts for the European Parliament and the European Commission, a result that benefits also countries where participants are chosen from.

On a yearly basis, about 200 high-level participants of the EUVP are selected. They must be in their mid-twenties to mid-forties, and may include government officials, researchers, academics, journalists, trade unionists, and officials of NGOs.

The EUVP is the only unit belonging officially to two different institutions, jointly managed and financed by the European Parliament and the European Commission and with staff members from both institutions. This not only guarantees that the most appropriate speakers from the Parliament and the EU are identified for every study-tour, but also that both institutions have the opportunity to meet the participant.

With the takeaways he gleaned from his visit to Europe, Angara said he recognises the “huge potential” for greater EU-Philippine ties, not just in trade but also in tourism and people-to-people exchanges.

“The Philippines is still receiving low numbers of tourists from EU countries, even from places like Spain. There is much room for improvement. The imminent addition of direct flights should contribute somewhat. The Philippines will also be embarking on a lot of infrastructure development in the coming years and it is a chance for partnerships between Philippine and EU countries, especially in the building of roads, bridges, and airport development and management,” he said.

“There is also huge potential for people-to-people exchanges on many levels. Education exchanges should be encouraged, as many Filipinos have discovered European universities for further studies,” Angara added.
For two months every year, European culture is celebrated through art exhibits, film showings, poetry recitals, a choral competition and a European culinary festival under the umbrella of Viva Europa.

The Viva Europa festival is presented by the European Union Cultural Group, comprising with the Embassies of Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The Delegation of the European Union to the Philippines and the European cultural institutes also play a key part in the programme, as do local partners Museo Pambata, which hosts a children’s festival called Lakbayin Natin Ang EU; and Far Eastern University (FEU), which organises Musica FEUropa, a choral competition to promote culture through music.

In 2015, the Embassies of Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Spain with the EU Delegation to the Philippines held Lakbayin Natin Ang EU to enable disadvantaged Filipino children to experience a day-long festival of children’s films, literature, storytelling, arts and crafts.

Cultural Counsellors of the EU Cultural Group joined 116 children and 35 volunteers, including student-volunteers from the University of the Philippines’ Euro-Filipino Understanding and Relations Organisation.

Museo Pambata Director Marcel Montero says they aim to share the diverse cultures of Europe with the children through the children’s festival.

The project began with an idea in 2009 from the Czech Republic Consul at the time, Monika Kazdova, to highlight the Philippine national hero Jose Rizal’s travels through Europe, says Noreen G. Parafina, program director at the Museo Pambata Foundation, Inc.

It is a chance to look outside and learn, and to appreciate and love what is ours.

—Museo Pambata director Noreen Parafina
“It was a chance for EU countries to get together and share the culture of their countries with the children,” Parafina says.

Since Museo Pambata is a children’s museum, the participating countries and cultural agencies had to come up with creative activities to share on their chosen topic or themes. The activities focused on games, stories, food and customs. Mini exhibits or displays also shared books, clothes and national symbols.

Museo Pambata was responsible for securing the venue and coordinating with the children. It also handled the logistical requirements of the yearly event.

“Museo Pambata takes its role as a child’s window to the world to heart, through our various theme rooms with exhibits on issues that greatly affect a child’s life - heritage, environment, community life, health and even individual rights,” Parafina says. “Museo Pambata likes the children to see that the world is bigger than the world they experience daily. "Viva Europa introduces Filipinos to the rest of Europe. For the children, it is learning about other people but also reflecting back on their own culture and way of life. I think children are always interested to meet new friends. The children are taught implicitly to accept and respect diversity among people.”

Parafina says the children’s festival would not be possible without the active involvement of its partners, the people tasked to plan and facilitate the activities to the children participants.

“Most have not had the experience to teach children but they all made an effort to make the learning sessions fun. Another aspect is the children’s ready and welcome participation. Most of the things shared with them are things they will not encounter in their communities and in their schools. Children remember what their facilitators shared with them. Languages have always been a good start. Various hellos and thank you are always great to hear."

Parafina says she appreciates the EU’s focus on reaching children from disadvantaged communities, which dovetails with the museum’s own thrust.

“I’m thankful that we agree on that priority, of helping the marginalised with great potential,” she says.

Despite the diversity in cultures, some things are held in common.

“I think the best topic is family. The children appreciate the families they come from as well as the thought that we are welcoming new friends. Strong partnerships are always key to success,” Parafina says.

Over the years, Lakbayin Natin Ang EU has enabled children to learn, not just about European culture, but also about themselves.

“It is a chance to look outside and learn,” Parafina says. “But it’s also a way to appreciate and love what we own.”

In 2009, Martin Lopez of the President’s Committee on Culture of the Far Eastern University (FEU) was instrumental in forming the FEU European Union Choral Competition in the Philippines (FEUCCP), which became Musica FEUropa.

Musica FEUropa has grown significantly since then, with two categories: High School and Open.

In 2016, 28 choirs from Luzon to Mindanao flocked to FEU to join the three-day competition.

“The basic rules remain unchanged,” says Lopez. “All qualified choir groups will perform two pieces: one written by a composer whose nationality is rooted in any European Union country and one by a Filipino composer in any genre - popular, sacred, folk, contemporary and language or dialect.”

Audiences and the choirs themselves get to hear or learn songs that they might not otherwise come across, including those from the Philippines’ indigenous peoples. The competition has also given rise to new arrangements and compositions for Filipino composers.

So that a greater number of audiences can hear the music, there is now a dedicated Musica FEUropa YouTube Channel, which has also enabled the families of the performers who cannot be physically present to still be able to witness the competition. Furthermore, DZFE 98.7 FM has agreed to air the performance of the winning choirs.

“One of the memorable highlights of Musica FEUropa is the traditional singing of the EU Anthem or Ode to Joy by all participating choirs before the announcement of winners,” Lopez says. “There is a certain magic in being surrounded by over 500 voices as the choirs who do not fit on stage sing all participating choirs before the announcing of winners,“ Lopez says. “There is a certain magic in being surrounded by over 500 voices as the choirs who do not fit on stage sing from all around the competition venue, whether it be the FEU Auditorium or Chapel. Videos of these performances have been sent to the EU Headquarters in Brussels and may have contributed to the continued support for Musica FEUropa.

Over the years, judges for the competition have come from EU countries such as Romania, France, Germany and Spain, but most are Filipinos and among the most respected choir masters in the Philippines. One such judge is Nicanor Infante, who entered his children’s choir in the Open category to compete against adults—becoming the first children’s choir to compete and placing fourth against 20 choirs.

Looking back on the history of Musica FEUropa, Lopez talks about music as a unifying agent.

“Music can unite peoples,” he says. “It can transcend political and economic challenges. It can transform lives, communities and nations. Initiatives like our choral competition continue to promote the solid relations and partnership between the Philippines and the EU.”

Children collect stars to form the EU flag during the 2013 Lakbayin Natin Ang EU program at the Museo Pambata. Photo credit: Museo Pambata.
Supporting press freedom and strong democracies

The European Union has always been a champion of media freedom, believing in the principle that "an independent, pluralistic, and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation, and for economic development."

The bloc has consistently affirmed that freedoms of opinion and expression are rights to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality – through any media and regardless of frontiers.

“You really feel that they are passionate about promoting and protecting these rights. They are genuinely concerned. They share our value – the universal value – for press freedom,” said Rowena Caransanz Paraan, former chairperson of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines.

“Media as an institution in the Philippines – as the fourth estate – has an important role to play: that of being a watchdog. Amid efforts to undermine this watchdog function of the media, it has become more important for the media to be alert, to fight more resolutely to protect press freedom,” she added.

Carranza-Paraan, who landed in Reporters Without Border’s (RWB) list of “100 Information Heroes” in 2014, handled for a long time NUJP’s Safety Office. She also led a fact-finding mission on the November 2009 Maguindanao massacre where 57 civilians, including 32 media workers, were killed – the worst case of election-related violence in Philippine history.

“The EU was among the first to issue a strong statement condemning the massacre. They also made follow-up actions. And for us, that made a difference because you need international pressure to prod the government into action. In fact, then EU Ambassador Guy Ledoux was present in one of the earliest protest actions after the massacre,” she said.

The EU has also supported NUJP through various collaboration projects, either directly or through NGOs. The International Media Support, which receives funding from EU governments,
Carranza-Paraan (right), together with Presidential (Top) Philippine Star reporter Pia Lee-Brago shows photo exhibit for the EU Peace Journalism Awards (Bottom) Journalists Joe Torres (left) and Rowena Ambassador Guy Ledoux lead the opening of her support for the EU Peace Journalism Awards. Former Manila Times’ correspondent Jefry Tupas bagged the top prize of the EU Peace Journalism Awards in 2015.

Norway. “The Cagayan de Oro extension of the NUJP Safety Office office is very crucial. The issue of journalists becoming unsafe has to be understood at the local level. Since the people who man the office are from Mindanao themselves, they are familiar to the terrain. They can also respond faster,” she added.

The Norwegian Union of Journalists has also been supporting NUJP since 2005. The Union facilitated five batches of Filipino journalists. Carranza-Paraan said the exposure trips highlight common concerns of media workers in the Philippines and in Norway.

The EU has also supported Filipino photographers, especially those who focus on peace-building. Award-winning photographer Veejay Villafranca, who won the first prize of the EU-Philippine Center for Photojournalism contest in 2006, said the EU-sponsored competition had an impact on his work, especially in covering Mindanao.

“I sent the images of daily life that I had been shooting apart from the daily news images connected to the armed clashes in Mindanao. I believe that news that was coming out of Mindanao had a certain slant on conflict and ‘negativity’ which in turn gave a negative image to the whole region. One cannot provide context on the issues that involve the southern Philippines if one were only to look at the clashes and blatant blaming of sides,” Villafranca said.

“After winning the EU contest, I was urged by friends and also Mandaricaon journalists and photographers to look for stories that don’t only reflect a conflicted state but [those that offer a] cultural and indigenous perspective as well. It was humbling and it also gave me a good perspective on visual reporting that I still use today,” he added.

Equally important, the EU Delegation to the Philippines organised a Peace Journalism Award that aimed at raising awareness about the impact and value of peace and the peace process in general, as well as to generate information and a deeper understanding of the Bangsamoro peace process in particular. The Awards were highly successful in acknowledging the role of Philippine journalists as agents of peaceful social transformation through balanced, responsible, culturally-sensitive and conflict-sensitive reporting on peace and conflict stories. The Awards were held in collaboration with the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, NUJP, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology, Konrad Adenauer Center for Journalism at the Ateneo de Manila University, philstar.com, and the Photojournalists’ Center of the Philippines.

“Just by being there for us, by being a reliable champion of press freedom and expression, that is already an invaluable contribution of the EU,” she added.

The people’s right to information on matters of public concern has been constitutionally recognised. The Philippine Supreme Court has already ruled that the constitutional mandate is enforceable, but there is no enabling law yet on access to information.

“The EU believes in strong democracies. They see it as their responsibility to help to strengthen sectors like the media to attain or move toward that direction. They believe that freedom of expression and of the press is a fundamental right,” Carranza-Paraan said.

“The EU believes in strong democracies. They see it as their responsibility to help to strengthen sectors like the media to attain or move toward that direction. They believe that freedom of expression and of the press is a fundamental right,” Carranza-Paraan said.

The EU also believes that the right to freedom of opinion and expression includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information—a key component of democratic governance and development. People need to be fully informed to be able to form an opinion and participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives. This is why the EU has also supported efforts to have a Freedom of Information law passed in the Philippines, Carranza-Paraan said.

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“It is important to encourage peace stories and recognize journalists who write about peace. This is why NUJP supported the EU Peace Journalism Awards,” Carranza-Paraan said.

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“Just by being there for us, by being a reliable champion of press freedom and expression, that is already an invaluable contribution of the EU,” she added.
My arrival in the Philippines in January 2011 coincided with the beginning of a new administration committed to the pursuit of good governance and stability.

The creation of the European External Action Service in January 2011 established for the first time a true European diplomatic service. This greatly expanded the competence and the role of the EU Head of Mission, including in particular in the political field.

After several years of banning Philippine carriers landing in the EU and after years of effort by Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines, the EU finally lifted the ban – first for Philippine Airlines in 2013 and then for the other carriers.

Since 2006, the European Union had expressed concern regarding the quality of the seafarers’ training schools and a report published by the EU in December 2013 was very alarming. This situation was threatening the recruitment of Filipino seafarers by European shipping lines. The creation of a single administration in charge of the training of the seafarers and the dedication of the leaders of the Maritime Industry Authority significantly improved the quality of the monitoring of the training system and relieved the concerns of the European Maritime Safety Agency.

In June 2014, the EU, which is at the forefront of the fight against illegal fishing, handed a warning to the Philippines (so-called yellow card). At the time, the Philippine authorities were already conscious of the weakness of the domestic legislation and amendments were being discussed by Congress and Senate. The adoption of those amendments as well as other technical measures convinced the EU that the issue was being addressed and the warning was lifted in April 2015.

The resolution of these issues illustrates the improvement in governance that took place during those years. This was also noticed by many international organisations like the World Economic Forum, Transparency International and others who every year upgraded the ranking of the Philippines compared with other nations. In the financial sector, credit rating agencies upgraded the Philippines to “investment grade” in 2012, and further improvements were endorsed in the following years.

This string of achievements did not go unnoticed. As the saying goes, one good thing leads to another. In December 2014, the European Union unilaterally granted preferential tariff treatment to the Philippines, eliminating tariffs completely for two-thirds of the products exported to the EU. This measure contributed to the creation of more than 270,000 new jobs in the Philippines in the following years. Earlier in the same year, the European Union also decided to increase its development cooperation envelope for the Philippines from an average of P1 billion to P2.3 billion per year for the period 2014 to 2020.

Of course, EU-Philippines economic matters were not the only areas that saw expansion. The EU success in maintaining peace across the 28 member states was given recognition with the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. One of the objectives of the European Union External Action Service is to promote Peace in the world. Putting this into practice, the European Union had, since 2010, been supporting the Mindanao Peace Process, through various diplomatic and development cooperation initiatives.

The strengthening of EU-Philippines relations was consolidated and endorsed by a flurry of bilateral visits. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and three EU Commissioners for cooperation, environment and humanitarian assistance came to spend time in the Philippines. The visit of then President Benigno Aquino III to the EU headquarters in Brussels in September 2014 confirmed the importance of this expanding, mutually beneficial relationship.
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