Dear Readers

Europe Day is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the European Union’s achievements in promoting democracy, human rights, peace and prosperity in the European continent. For these efforts, the EU was awarded the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize. We see this great honour as a call to not only commemorate our past achievements but also look forward to how we can take this work further in the future.

The 9th of May bears special significance in European history. 63 years ago, Robert Schuman called on the nations of Europe to make war on the continent impossible and spread peace and prosperity globally. This was to be initiated through gradual steps, starting with the creation of a coal and steel community. Since then, the process of European integration has come through a long journey culminating with the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, signed by the Member States in December 2007.

Since the beginning, EU Members have worked to find common solutions to collective problems. This has resulted in the gradual development of a number of policies aimed at promoting prosperity and solidarity in Europe. These include the creation of an integrated economic area involving the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital and common rules for competition and external trade. It has also led to measures to protect the environment, citizen’s rights and to develop the poorest regions of the EU, just to mention a few examples.

The EU is committed to reflecting the culture of consensus, cooperation and mutual respect in its external action. Following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has brought under one umbrella all the elements of its external action – diplomatic, political, development, humanitarian aid, trade as well as security with a view to providing a comprehensive response to global challenges, including energy and water security and climate change.

Over the years, the EU has emerged as the largest contributor of overseas development assistance across the globe. EU external assistance includes both emergency and short-term and long-term assistance. The European Union has earned an international reputation by being responsive to the needs of those struck by natural and man-made disasters. The latest intervention in African countries hit by floods resulting in an acute food insecurity affecting millions of people underscores the effectiveness of EU’s response to crises.

One of the key objectives of the EU action in the world is the promotion of peace, democracy and human rights. Through the provision of electoral assistance and observation, the EU has become a leading actor in the strengthening of democratic institutions, building public confidence in electoral processes and helping to deter fraud, intimidation and violence. Election observation provides the opportunity to assess an electoral process according to international standards. Additionally, the EU supports the reinforcement of electoral systems across the world, for example, through building capacity in, inter alia, independent election commissions and civil society organisations.

The presence of the EU in Nepal deserves special mention on this auspicious day. EU-Nepal cooperation has grown and broadened over the last three decades. Today, the European Union and its Member States combined donate nearly 40 percent of the total development assistance flowing into Nepal. The EU has become a trusted development partner of the Nepali Government. The EU has been working with the Government and the people of Nepal in the fields of human rights and democracy, education, health, environment, trade, renewable energy, peace building and democracy. I am pleased to mention here that, like in 2008, the EU is committed to supporting the election process in Nepal in 2013 and it is seriously considering the deployment of an EU Election Observation Mission to Nepal for the forthcoming elections.

The EU’s objective in Nepal is to contribute to the consolidation of its peace process and to its sustainable development. Hence we wish to renew our pledge to continue assisting Nepal in the days ahead. Long live the EU-Nepal Friendship!

Dr. Alexander Spachis
Ambassador
Head of European Union Delegation to Nepal

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Currency Conversion

as of 31 March, 2013

EUR 1 = NPR 114.365
EUR1 = US$ 1.3097
EU joins hands with partners to ensure education opportunities for Nepali girls and boys

Getting a good education is considered by many around the world to be one of the most powerful ways to change lives and uplift local communities, as well as promoting positive and sustainable development. This belief in the transformative power of education is no exception in Nepal and in recent years, tremendous gains have been made within government community schools in relation to access and equity - increased net enrolment, the achievement of near 100% gender parity in primary schools and more recently, an increasingly important focus given to developing and strengthening the quality of education for all students who attend government community schools. However, although access to formal education in these schools has improved tremendously there are thousands of girls and boys, who for a variety of reasons, such as poverty and geographical isolation, still don't get to go to school in Nepal.

Working with over 400 schools and making a big difference

In order to help increase the number of girls and boys in school, particularly from the poorest and most marginalised communities, the EU supports and funds four Non State Actor (NSA) education projects to complement the substantial funding and technical support the EU provides to the Government of Nepal's national education strategy, the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) 2009-2015. These four projects benefit from a €3.5 million EU NSA fund and are being implemented by four established international and national NGOs - VSO Nepal, Naulo Ghumti, KIRDARC and Rural Reconstruction Nepal. The projects are running over a period of four years, working across 17 districts, with additional support from local implementing partners, such as Asamsan Nepal. The project areas include remote districts in the Far West and Mid Western Development regions. Overall, the projects are reaching approximately 110,250 children in over 400 schools and have so far successfully managed to integrate around 3,100 out of school children into their local community school. Once enrolled in school, the projects provide ongoing support to the student and their family, as well as at school and community levels to ensure the children can continue in school.

Supporting the early years - hope in action

On recent visits to monitor two of these education projects, run by VSO Nepal and Naulo Ghumti, the EU Education Team (Louise Banham, First Secretary and Kerry Aryan, Programme Manager) were extremely impressed by the high quality and inspirational work being implemented by both the projects. In Dhangadi, in the Far West of Nepal, the team visited Ewa Ledziaszeewska, VSO Nepal's Early Childhood Development (ECD) Volunteer, where they observed an outstanding training event run by Ewa for the sixteen ECD teachers and the local education resource person she supports. The two day training programme focused on developing relevant monthly, weekly and daily planning, using interactive teaching techniques and ideas for making highly effective, low cost resources from local materials. The team also visited two of the government schools in the project, where they were able to participate in lessons and witness the huge, positive impact Ewa's and VSO Nepal's support has had in raising the attendance of out of school children in the local area and improving both the status and quality of early years' education within their schools. VSO Nepal are currently working in six districts under the EU education project, supporting 36 schools and reaching 29,500 children through a holistic model of simultaneously supporting Early Years, Basic Education and school level management.

Hundreds of children back in school!

In Arghakhanchi, one of the three districts where the Nepali NGO Naulo Ghumti is working on reducing the numbers of out of school children in mid hill communities, the team visited four local government schools. They were able to see first-hand the positive impact that well-managed local schools, with strong parental and community involvement, led by dynamic head teachers, can have on bringing out of school children into formal education. The Naulo Ghumti project, which works with 90 schools across the three districts has significantly reduced the number of out of school children in the district through door-to-door enrollment awareness campaigns and 586 out of school children have been enrolled as a direct result of this campaigning. Naulo Ghumti also provides continued support to the children once enrolled by providing financial assistance with school uniforms, notebooks, pencils etc. It has also supported a local government school in the district headquarters, Sandikkharkha, with the successful integration of visually impaired children into mainstream education by helping to fund Braille textbooks. Strong family support for education is also engendered through regular parental and community education initiatives, such as actively involving the whole school community in developing School Improvement Plans and establishing student-led Child Clubs. This integrated approach is promoting inclusion and ensures that the whole community has a valuable stake in the success of their local school.

With the success of the ongoing projects, the European Union has recently launched a new Non State Actor call for proposals for 2013 including education, to encourage more NGOs to support improvements in teaching and learning and further progress towards the EFA and MDG education goals in Nepal.
EU Ambassador distributes safety equipments to waste pickers in Lalitpur

The clarion call to respect waste pickers for their contributions to keep the city clean was further amplified when the EU Ambassador Dr. Alexander Spachis distributed gloves, masks, jackets, glasses, boots and other materials to a group of informal workers working in the garbage collection and management sector at Kharibot of Lalitpur Sub Metropolitan City on Tuesday, 10 April.

Addressing a gathering of waste pickers and project partners, Dr. Spachis said, “I respect all the waste pickers gathered here for the programme and would like to stress that their roles are important for the cleanliness and survival of the city.”

The safety equipments were distributed to the five different municipalities in the Kathmandu Valley and some 180 waste pickers under the project ‘Poverty Reduction of Informal Workers in Solid Waste Management Sector’ funded by the European Union. The project is running in its second year.

The project aims to benefit nearly 5000 waste pickers in the five municipalities of the Kathmandu Valley—Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Kirtipur and Madhyapur Thimi through the dissemination of training on group management, saving and mobilization and health awareness among others. The EU has provided a support of Euro 1,253,125.00 to the project.

The changes that have been observed following the implementation of the project are that the waste pickers now communicate frequently about their problems and issues with each other and in groups, which they did not do earlier. They are now more concerned about their health and hygiene practices and are performing regular saving activities in groups.

Speaking at the function, Mr. Achyut Luitel, Regional Director, of the Practical Action, South Asia Office said that 48 committees of the waste pickers had been formed in five municipalities of the Kathmandu Valley with the view of mobilizing them to form saving cooperatives and train them on the safety matters related to waste disposal. Praveen Shrestha, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Lalitpur Sub Metropolitan City said that the safety equipments would help to protect the waste pickers from different health hazards that they were likely to face during their routine clean up campaigns of the city areas.

The project is being jointly implemented by Practical Action, Centre for Integrated Urban Development, Solid Waste Management and Resource Mobilization Centre of the Nepal Government and the Lalitpur Sub metropolitan city with the goal of addressing many cross cutting issues such as health, education, and skills development directly linked with the informal workers in the five major cities.

EU creates opportunities for poor students to achieve academic excellence

Hima Kasera, 20, permanent resident of Gulariya-5, Basantapur, daughter of Gangadhar Kasera and Kalpana Kasera passed her School Leaving Certificate (SLC) four years back. She belongs to an impoverished Dalit family. Her mother is affiliated with the Dhurbataaraa Dalit Women group.

She has one younger sister and two younger brothers. They have only five acres of land, which has not been registered at the Land Revenue Office. With the production barely enough to sustain the family of five, her father frequently goes to India in search of livelihood.

Kasera did not stand any chance of enrolling in college because of the economic hardships of the family. Things began to change suddenly for her when she came in touch with the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) that offered to support her education. She then wasted no time and joined the Sushma Koirala Memorial Campus in Nepalgunj to take up a course on Community Medical Assistant (CMA). She finished the fifteen months long course two years back with flying colours scoring 85.83% and coming at the top of the list of 32 students.

Equal Access for Dalit Women to Health Services (EADWHS) project of FEDO funded by European Union had supported Kasera to make her dreams come true.

She began volunteering for FEDO after her training was over. She worked at the Kharapur Health Post for two years. FEDO has been doing a grand job of coordinating with the government to provide further educational opportunities for industrious students like Kasera. The efforts of FEDO paid off like always and Kasera got a government scholarship to take up the course of a staff nurse at the Seti Mahakaal Nursing Campus in the far western district of Kanchanpur.

Her brief stint at FEDO was indeed quite productive since she received training on social mobilization, leadership development and institutional development. She also actively participated in facilitating Dalit Women Health Workers of the EADWHS project while working with FEDO.

Given her sound track record, it can be well perceived that Kasera is likely to repeat her feat and excel academically. She is thankful to the European Union for funding her studies and helping her see the light of the day.
EU supported project to step up peoples' awareness level on their right to information for greater accountability and transparency

Citizens in countries where their Right to Information (RTI) is well protected are better informed and can presumably make informed choices when it comes to taking important decisions. The Nepalis were fortunate enough to have the right enshrined in the previous constitution of Nepal 1990. But since the political parties that were in the helm of state affairs in the nineties did not show the urgency to draft the laws and bylaws necessary to implement the RTI, nearly two decades went by without the important provision in the Constitution being implemented in its letter and spirit. The necessary laws and bylaws for the RTI were enacted nearly six years back and the government also formed the National Information Commission (NIC) to ensure effective implementation of the Act. Madhav Prasad Pokhrel of the Commission says that the NIC is now heading in the right direction. Each month the Commission gets 15 to 20 applications related to RTI.

“We, however, do not have the record of how many RTI-related applications are being received in the district government offices,” he says. Elaborating on the tasks being carried out by the Commission, Pokhrel informed that steps were underway to ensure that each government department or office appoints an information officer. RTI is being included in the curriculum of 19 different training centres in the Kathmandu valley. Similarly, those ministries that have been spending close to 70% of the national budget have been asked to install Management Information Systems (MIS). Besides, the Commission has also been carrying out regular monitoring of the government offices in the districts about their response to applications related to RTI. Pokhrel told the launching of the project entitled “Empowering people to enjoy their Right to Information for greater accountability of Nepal's power holders.”

The project, funded by the European Union under its European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, will be managed by UNESCO. The European Union has extended a contribution of € 290,000 (NPR 20.9 Million) for the Euros 365,606 project. Main project partners are the Federation of Nepali Journalists, representing a majority of Nepal’s journalists, and Citizen’s Campaign for Right to Information, specialized in campaigning related to the Right to Information.

Addressing the project launch, Dr. Alexander Spachis, Ambassador, Head of the European Union Delegation to Nepal said RTI is all the more important in the context that Nepal is preparing to go to the polls. Being an ardent supporter of RTI, The European Union has decided to work together with UNESCO, Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) and the Citizen’s Campaign for Right to Information to make the citizen’s aware about their rights and enable them to benefit from it. He said efforts have to be made towards developing a culture of communication between those who demand information and those who are supposed to provide it. Dr. Spachis also highlighted the need to strengthen RTI given the reality that the press in Nepal is subjected to implicit intimidation.

“The European Union has stepped in to support the efforts of its partners in ensuring the effective implementation of the Right to Information Act since it is hoped that doing so will contribute to better good governance, more transparency, accountability and democratic consolidation in the long run,” Dr. Spachis said. “One of the cornerstones of the success of Nepal’s peace process is an open and informed society. The project intends to improve transparency and accountability of decision-making,” said Axel Plahte, Head of the UNESCO Office in Kathmandu. Nepal adopted the 2007 Right to Information Act with great expectations for improved transparency and accountability of the government. Despite the legal guarantee and establishment of the NIC, the implementation of the law has been facing challenges. The aim of the RTI Act, to make the decision-making transparent and hold the State accountable, is still far from being realized. People do not have easy access to public information, and public agencies are not proactively providing this information.

Working with three main target groups: journalists, local “change agents” and government officials, the project aims to improve the transparency of Nepal’s government and the accountability of decision-making through a broader implementation of the Right to Information Act.

It works towards three specific objectives: citizens have access to information that is relevant to them and are hence motivated to exercise their democratic rights; journalists recognize their role as the watchdogs of the power holders and proactively seek and publish correct and timely information; and local level government officials understand their role as public servants and are more willing to share public information. The project will contribute to the expected result of transparent and inclusive decision-making processes and prevalence of democratic practices within the political institutions and increased media-responsiveness.

From left to right: Teesriw Oshah, president, Citizens Campaign for Right to Information, Dr. Alexander Spachis, Ambassador, Head of the European Union Delegation to Nepal and Axel Plahte, UNESCO country representative at the launching of the EU-funded project ‘Empowering people to enjoy their right to information for greater accountability of the power holders’ project in Kathmandu.

EU NEPAL NEWS

Newsletter of the Delegation of the European Union to Nepal
EU donated mobile food testing van on its wheels now

Isn’t it quite enchanting and at the same time somewhat worrying when a mobile food testing van stops before your food outlet, dairy or vegetable shop? The sight is captivating for many in that nothing of the sort was seen in Nepal before the handing over of the mobile food testing van to the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control (DFTQC) in January this year under the European Commission-WTO project. It could turn out to be somewhat upsetting for those who are up to making quick money by compromising with the health of their clients.

The European Union donated mobile food testing van has come as a welcome surprise to much health conscious Nepalis in different parts of the Kathmandu valley and even beyond. The van in its four month long journey has travelled to Kavrepalanchok, Dhading, Chitwan, Banepa and Dhuskhal.

“We travelled to Kavre to conduct tests on milk being supplied to the Diary Development Corporation (DDC) and found that it contained sodium carbonate,” said Ishwar Subedi, food inspector at DFTQC.

The contractors who buy the milk from the farmers and supply it to the DDC were found to be adding sodium bicarbonate in the milk to whiten it further. “We have alerted the DDC about the practice and have discovered that it has been corrected,” Subedi claimed.

The mobile van went on a surprise check to Malekhu in Dhading district to investigate into the complaints that inedible colour was being used in fried fish sold in the hotels. Before the DFTQC received the EU donated van, the samples of the fried fish had to be carried all the way to the capital for conducting the tests. But this time around, it has become lot easier; since the Department has been able to conduct on the spot checks. The results revealed that no more harmful colours were used in the fried fish like the case was last year, Subedi said.

One other improvement was seen in Muglin along the Prithivi Highway where the vegetable vendors were found to be using sodium bicarbonate to keep the stale vegetables green. After the mobile van visited the area and conducted the tests, the practice seems to have waned significantly.

Other tests conducted were related to the inedible colours used in sweets in Gausaha and Kalimati, which were later corrected after drawing the attention of the concerned authorities.

“We do not have adequate manpower to conduct many tests, but still whatever being done in a small way is indeed contributing significantly to safeguard the health of the denizens,” said Subedi.

DFTQC Director General, Jeevan Prabha Lama said that the DFTQC does not have any legal authority to take action against the violators but it goes forth to inform the concerned authorities about its findings.

Croatia: Last Monitoring Report concludes country ready to join the EU

The European Commission adopted its last Monitoring Report on Croatia’s preparations for joining the EU on the 26th of March. The Commission assesses that Croatia has completed the ten priority actions identified in the previous report in October, and has shown the will and ability to fulfil all outstanding commitments in good time before accession. The Commission concludes that Croatia will be ready to join the European Union on 1 July 2013.

“This report is positive news. Croatia has worked hard and kept the pace of reforms. It made great strides not only since the end of the accession negotiations, but also since the previous Monitoring report. The results it has achieved are directly benefiting its citizens. The country is now ready to take its place in the EU as planned and we are all looking forward to completion of the ratification of the Accession Treaty and welcoming Croatia in the EU on the 1 July,” Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Füle said upon presenting the report to the Croatian government in Zagreb.

Croatia’s is a success for enlargement. It is a proof of the credibility of the enlargement policy: when candidate country delivers on the criteria and commitments, the EU delivers on the membership perspective. This is also a good example for the rest of the region as it moves closer to the EU,” he added.

The Monitoring Report focuses on Croatia’s competition policy, the judiciary and fundamental rights as well as justice, freedom and security. It also assesses that the country has demonstrated its ability to fulfill other commitments related to EU membership, such as getting ready to receive structural funds, in good time before accession. The report states that the EU membership is an additional incentive to carry on with reforms and Croatia is expected to continue developing its track record in the field of the rule of law, notably in the fight against corruption.
Photo Feature

Ambassador Spachi giving away safety equipment to waste pickers in Lalitpur.

Members of the EU exploratory mission for elections interacting with media representatives at the delegation office.

Mr. Gerard Van Driessen, Head of Finance, Contract and Audit at the EU Delegation to Nepal participating in the launching of the 2015 campaign for tree plantation in the valley.

Ambassador Spachi joins a rally with school children as part of the awareness raising campaign to protect the Bishnumati river.

Ambassador Spachi joins the members and the invitees for a snap at the training organized by the EU Delegation for auditors and financial managers.

Aryam Drontech, Project Manager at the EU Delegation giving away a cheque to the Rastriya Malak Friendship Trust on behalf of EU for the medical check-up of the waste pickers working in the informal sector.

Mr. Samantha Marie Forsten, Rapid Response Coordinator of the Humanitarian and Civil Protection Office at the European Commission, addressing the launching of the EU’s 7th Disaster Preparedness Action Plan for S. Asia in Kathmandu.

Ambassador Narendra Harbansh Charya inaugurating the rally organized by the EU-India Action Project at Patan Durbar Square.

EU NEPAL NEWS  Newsletter of the Delegation of the European Union to Nepal
EU supported project to help women take the lead in politics

Women in Nepal have come a long way in their struggle for equality. The state of women rights has witnessed a sea change in the recent years. The reason for this is no other than the political and civil rights achieved through the successive democratic movements that took place in the past three decades. Here, it would be relevant to refer to the second popular movement, which raised the awareness levels of political leaders prompting them to increase women’s participation in the 2008 elections to the Constituent Assembly. Most of the political parties agreed to provide 33 percent of the electoral candidates to women. The outcome of the election was such that 24 women from the Maoist party, one each from the CPN (UML) and Nepali Congress were elected to the Constituent Assembly (CA) under the first-past-the-post system.

The participation of women candidates in the elections was indeed quite encouraging. The case in the present situation is a little bit different in that the number of CA seats has been brought down to 491 from the earlier 601. As the seats have been decreased and as the first priority is often awarded to a male while giving out electoral tickets, the likelihood of many women being elected has grown slimmer. This has raised the eyebrows of many citizens and given way to worries that women might once again lag behind in the political front.

Women rights groups are now stepping up pressure on the political parties to give a serious thought to the possible impact that the slashing in the number of electoral seats could have on overall representation of women in the CA. Women rights activists are demanding that the political parties press for a law that would make it mandatory for all to secure 33% of the electoral seats for women candidates to compete in the elections.

The struggle to provide women their political rights is an ongoing one in Nepal where women have had to face subjugation for many decades. In the same pretext, a play that was staged during the launching of the EU funded project ‘Mobilising Youth for Gender Equality in Politics’ in the first week of March made a clarion call to all that women need to be given more opportunities and their due share in politics. The launching of the project coincided with the International Women’s Day.

The play staged by the ‘Bardali’ group of artists had a female character who seemed to be running from pillar to post after finally discovering how her male counterparts were attempting to take away her share of the pie in the upcoming student elections. The play ended in a positive note by justifying that women must be given more opportunities in politics to rise and become successful leaders.

Youth political leaders representing the Joint Youth and Political Platform (JYSP), who participated in the project launch voiced for ensuring social, economic and political equality for women in Nepal.

All the youth leaders spoke of the need to take ahead the women rights movement and agreed that Nepal would continue to face a big economic and political setback if women are not encouraged to compete for leadership positions.

Extending her gratitude to the European Union and DEMO Finland for launching a project on gender equality in politics, central treasurer of Nepali Congress party, Chitra Lekha Yadav said the political parties should strive to fulfill their commitments to have equal citizens with equal rights, opportunities and privileges.

Migration of young and productive population is a major challenge for Nepal. Nepal must strive to prepare enlightened and informed youth who are capable of leading the country, Yadav said.

Two other speakers -- Mahesh Basnet, Chairman, Youth Federation Nepal, and Himal Sharma, President of the All Nepal National Revolutionary Students' Union called on the respective political parties to enact laws that ensure the rights of women in the political, social and economic sectors.

Addressing the function, Mr. Luis Navarro, Chargé d’Affaires of the European Union Delegation to Nepal said that the EU is contributing eighty percent of the total project cost amounting to NPR 28.5 million and is optimistic about seeing more programmes and activities for the youths across the nation.

He said that the EU has already supported nearly twenty projects related to women empowerment and welfare across Nepal in partnership with different Non State Actors in the past couple of years. Some of them are: support to single women, empowering women in Dadeldhura district to abolish Chhaupadi practice, Women and Youth as Pillars for Sustainable Peace and Equal Access of Dalit Women to health services.

The total EU contribution committed for ongoing projects related to women welfare and empowerment is EUR 5,035,135.92 (NPR approx 575 million) for the next three years. The funds are disbursed on the basis of open competition and the issuing of call for proposals.

Rikka Jalonen, Country Representative, Demo Finland, said the Youth for Gender Equality in politics is a cooperation project of eighteen Nepalese political youth and student organizations. These organizations are organized under a common umbrella of Joint youth & Students Platform (JYSP), which was supported by Demo Finland since its establishment in 2007.

The past five years of engagement of JYSP in the field of gender equality has now resulted in the development of a 29 months project (2013–2015) Youth for Gender Equality in Politics, supported by European Union and DEMO, she said.