

Speech by H.E. U Thaung Tun, Union Minister for the Office of the
Union Government delivered at the Europe Day Reception
(Nay Pyi Taw, 8 May 2018)

Excellency Ambassador Schmidt,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mingalapar! God aften

Thank you for the warm words of welcome. I am delighted to join you this evening in celebrating Europe Day, an annual celebration of peace and unity in Europe. My pleasure is double. First, I consider it a privilege and honour to represent the Myanmar government on this auspicious occasion and second it brings back fond memories of the days I served in Brussels as Myanmar Ambassador to the European Union.

On behalf of the Government and the people of Myanmar, and on my own behalf, I would like to convey our warmest congratulations to you Mr. Ambassador and to your colleagues, the Heads of Mission of the Member States of the European Union on this happy occasion.

It has been more than four decades since Myanmar and the EU first established diplomatic relations. Today, the EU is one of Myanmar's most important partners, supporting many development programs that are crucial for ensuring that democracy takes firm root in Myanmar.

The opening of the EU office in Myanmar in 2011, increased development assistance and the restoration of GSP privilege to Myanmar, and high-level visits between the two sides, clearly reflect the progress we have made in our bilateral relations.

Taking this opportunity, I wish to express our deep appreciation to the European Union for its consistent support to our government's efforts to consolidate democratic transition, advance the national reconciliation and peace process, and foster socio-economic development for all our peoples.

We live in times of change and transformation in Myanmar. We face many challenges as we nurture democratic values, strive to establish peace, seek national reconciliation and lay the foundation for sustainable development.

The European Union has been at the forefront of supporting Myanmar's peace-building efforts from the outset. We appreciate the fact that in October 2015, the EU signed the government's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement as an international witness and that did the same again in February this year when two more ethnic armed groups came on board.

During a period in our history where Myanmar is increasingly opening up to the world, investment in human resource development is essential. It is, therefore, encouraging to note that EU's development assistance cooperation with Myanmar gives priority to education. We are pleased that the European Union has taken a lead role in assisting Myanmar to reform its education

sector, improve access to education, and modernize the national curricula and teaching methods.

Today, Myanmar students and academics can benefit from Europe's largest scholarship and exchange program "ERASMUS". Mr. Ambassador, the story of your own success as one of the first ERASMUS students in Europe,¹ will certainly will certainly inspire the youth of Myanmar who yearn to study in Europe, home to some of the best universities in the world.

Cooperation between the Myanmar Police Force and the EU is another noteworthy success story. The EU support for this area has been ongoing since 2016. The EU assistance to modernize and enhance the capacity of the Myanmar Police Force has yielded tangible results. Under the program, 450 Police officers have been trained in crowd control and community policing skills. As a result, trust and confidence of communities in the police force has grown appreciably.

Before I conclude, I would like to touch on issue that has been at the centre of International attention in recent month. Here I am referring to the situation in Rakhine. As you are aware, the government of Myanmar has been making every effort to resolve the longstanding issue. Throughout the past year, we have pursued every avenue to establish peace and harmony in Rakhine and have redoubled our efforts to promote development in that state.

A durable solution to the situation in Rakhine can only be achieved through the joint efforts of Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Based on good neighborliness, we have been working closely with our counterparts in Dhaka to make headway. Three bilateral agreements have been signed between November 2017 and January 2018.

We are committed to continuing to work with our neighbor to ensure that repatriation take place expeditiously in keeping with the bilateral agreements. Myanmar is willing and ready to commence the repatriation process.

With the monsoon just around the corner, the plight of those living in make-shift shelter can only grow worse. We continue to work for the reparation process to proceed as agreed by Myanmar and Bangladesh last November.

At this challenging time, we are grateful for the understanding of the European Union with regard to our endeavours to establish peace and prosperity in Myanmar and to build a democratic, federal union.

Excellency Ambassador Schmidt, Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I now invite you to join me in the toast:

To continued success of the EU;

To everlasting friendship between Myanmar and the EU; and

To the health and happiness of all our friends present here this evening.