



**Remarks by Ambassador Attilio Pacifici
Head of the European Union Delegation to Uganda**

Europe Day – 7th May 2021

(EU Residence, 7 Hill Lane Kololo, Kampala, Uganda)

(15 minutes)

The **Guest of Honour**, Honourable Sam Kutesa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uganda,

Honourable Ministers,

Members of Parliament,

My fellow EU Ambassadors,

Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners

Members of the diplomatic and consular corps

Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome to **Europe Day 2021** and thank you, Honourable Foreign Minister, for the great honour that you are according us by being here tonight.

Let me first of all apologise for the COVID-19 restrictions which obliged me to limit the number of partners, friends and spouses invited tonight.

I am really sorry about it and I never thought I would one day face the dilemma of who, among the many friends of Europe, I should invite to Europe Day. It was a decision necessary to keep our number limited for very good public health reasons.

Last year we cancelled all social events planned to celebrate Europe Day. Deplorable as this may be, it looked to us as the most reasonable and safest course of action at an uncertain and difficult time. Europe Day is for all Europeans a very important date and a key occasion to demonstrate what the EU stands for and to celebrate the values of the EU. However, a public reception in a moment in which

none of us saw any light at the end of the long tunnel created by the COVID-19 pandemic, was out of place.

Last year we stood by the Ugandan authorities and helped as we could to handle the pandemic. We provided concrete actions of solidarity and we also worked closely with Minister Kutesa and his team to repatriate thousands of Europeans stranded in Uganda due to lockdowns and travel restrictions enforced all over the world to contain the spread of the pandemic.

Since last year the situation has deteriorated worldwide. To date more than 154 million people have contracted the virus and over 3.2 million people have lost their lives. Nearly 695,000 of them were citizens of the European Union.

There seems to be even less to celebrate this year as the situation is seriously worsening in many countries. However, this year there is hope and we see some light at the end of the tunnel. At a global level, vaccines are being inoculated to an increasing

number of people and at a local level Uganda has been both lucky and very successful in confronting the challenges of the pandemic.

This makes some of us feel that if we comply with the required health procedures, if we are careful and vigilant, perhaps we can dare to take the first small steps to get back to our normal lives. Crucial for this to happen will be for all of us to profit fully of the vaccines that the Government of Uganda has obtained. Not a single dose of them should be wasted. Those who have doubts should look at the world and the devastations caused by this virus, overcome their hesitations and get vaccinated.

Let's all hope that the journey to get back to our normal lives is starting and that we will soon see visitors and tourists coming back to Uganda to safely enjoy the sceneries, the facilities, the culture and the friendship of this country and to contribute to its economic progress and wealth.

I will now say few words about Europe Day, the European Union and finally about the relations between the European Union and Uganda.

Concerning **EUROPE DAY**, as European Union Ambassador I cannot fail to remind my European fellows and our partners how important the anniversary of the **Schuman Declaration** is for modern Europe. There might be doubts among our friends about what we celebrate today and I must ensure that doubts are cleared.

We do not celebrate the end of a war or the victory of an alliance, nor do we celebrate today the liberation of a country or a successful revolution. We celebrate on the **9th of May a vision** and the beginning of a new reality built by the very countries which had been fighting against each other for too long and which chose to follow a new path for their joint future focussed on peace, prosperity and solidarity.

On Europe Day we celebrate peace and unity in Europe and I am delighted to celebrate the 71st

anniversary of the **Schuman declaration** among many friends and along with the resident Ambassadors and Heads of Mission of **Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria and Hungary.**

Concerning **EUROPE**, where we are and where we are going, I will take inspiration from the 2020 State of the Union Address by President Ursula von der Leyen. Her address is too rich to be summarised but I will still try to extract few key points:

1. She recognised the severity and the impact of the pandemic and presented a vision and the key actions for us Europeans to pull ourselves through the crisis and for Europe to make good on its promise.

The key concept is that the pandemic has brought a long period of profound suffering and anxiety for millions people. The first priority is to pull each other through this situation and to be there for those that need it. Thanks to Europe unique social

market economy, it is possible to protect people against the great risks of life such as: illness, ill-fortune, unemployment and poverty and to deliver on the promise of protection, stability and opportunity. Protecting lives and livelihoods is the first priority and many actions are being taken in Europe to ensure it. They include:

- Creating a stronger European Health Union
- Strengthening our crisis preparedness and management of cross-border health threats
- Reinforcing the European Medicines Agency and the EU centre for disease prevention and control
- Building a European agency for biomedical advanced research and development
- Addressing strategic issues such as stockpiling and supply chain dependencies, notably for pharmaceutical products

- Supporting Member States to ensure the dignity of work and that everyone has access to minimum wages
- Relaxing European funds and State aid rules and authorising financial support to companies and industry in distress.

2. Then President von der Leyen spoke about propelling Europe forward to build a world in which we will all live better. This is so important. Building a better future for our fragile planet requires global cooperation and our vision is being shared with all partners, including Uganda. This very vision will provide the foundation for the programming of our cooperation with Uganda over the next 7 years.

The key actions for Europe to achieve its vision include:

- Becoming the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 starting to increase the 2030 target for emission reduction to at least 55%;

- Modernising across our economy, society and industry. Our current levels of consumption of raw materials, energy, water, food and land are not sustainable. We need to change how we treat nature, how we produce and consume, live and work, travel and transport. Huge amounts of money will be raised and spent to make our economy, society and industry become greener.
- An example of the green transformation will be the creation of European Hydrogen Valleys to modernise our industries & power our vehicles.
- Making the current decade “Europe’s Digital Decade” is a key objective too which will require to radically improve connectivity, skills and digital public services; use better industrial data; focus on technology and on artificial intelligence as well as develop connection infrastructures to keep pace with the speed of change.

3. Finally, as to the role of Europe in the world, the pandemic has shown the fragility of the global system and the importance of cooperation to tackle collective challenges. Some around the world chose to retreat into isolation, others to destabilise. Europe has chosen to reach out, to deliver protective equipment to other countries, to join the COVAX global facility and to support the international organisations responsible to prepare for and to respond to global challenges.

Europe is not without issues and we discuss our issues, even the most serious ones, publicly with criticism and opposition accepted and legally protected. We believe in the universal value of democracy and the rights of the individual and we will always call out human rights abuses whenever and wherever they occur. New tools are now available to convey more clearly our position and I personally hope that one day EU Member States

will agree to make decisions by qualified majority voting, at least on human rights issues.

ON THE EU RELATIONS WITH UGANDA

Firstly, Honourable Foreign Minister, let me thank you – and through you H.E. the President - for the regular dialogue we have. Our dialogue is the appropriate instrument to understand each other, to appreciate the reasons for the different views we hold and to address them candidly and always respectfully.

Last year has been difficult. Uganda has gone through the same global challenges as Europe but it has been sailing through them more successfully. We salute and praise Uganda's success but we also encourage Uganda's leaders and citizens not to lower their guard as COVID-19 is a nasty enemy. The vaccination campaign must succeed fully.

Honourable Minister, our cooperation in areas that the Government sees as crucial for the development of the country - such as infrastructure, energy,

agriculture – which receive the bulk of the EU development aid - proceeds exceedingly well. My mind goes to ongoing projects – all financed by almost 100% grants – such as: the construction of the Kampala Northern by-pass, the Atiak-Laropi road, the rehabilitation of the Tororo-Gulu railway, the construction of the Gulu Logistics Hub, the Development Initiative for Northern Uganda and many more. I hope soon the construction of the Kampala-Jinja toll expressway will join this long list.

Actually our support to the rehabilitation of the Tororo-Gulu railway has stimulated an interesting cultural cooperation which has led to publish the beautiful book about the history of Uganda Railways which you saw when you came in and which will also lead to establish a National Railway Museum in Jinja.

In other areas the success and impact of our longstanding interaction have been less pronounced and some agreed projects even suffered setbacks. There is scope to improve our cooperation in areas

such as civil society, human rights protection, access to justice and gender equality, climate change, environment conservation and wildlife protection, education, etc..

For instance, the visits of the EU Ambassadors to the fragile area of the Ishasha sector of the Queen Elizabeth NP, to primary forests blessed by unique biodiversity and threatened by the expansion of commercial plantations (such as Bugoma Forest) or by illegal charcoal exploitations (such as Zoka Forest), showed that there is a vast scope for cooperation and even more for Government to firmly enforce simple preservation actions proving care, determination and leadership in addressing issues & challenges going well beyond the national dimension.

One of the projects that suffered setbacks is the DGF, a flagship project financed by several European countries to support civil society, non-state actors and Government institutions. The project is under suspension since February and several high level

meetings have taken place to identify a mutually acceptable way forward to unblock the project. Some progress has been made and just today I heard that perhaps a way forward has been found. I hope there is truth in these rumours.

Honourable Foreign Minister, we have noticed during the electoral campaign a significant increase of political polarisation; unlawful behaviours; the use of inflammatory language; the excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies; the targeting of partners - including the EU Ambassadors - in local newspapers and social media with inappropriate messages, false accusations and disinformation actions and finally the deterioration of the situation into deadly violence. This is all worrying and actions should be taken, in our opinion, to address misgivings and grievances.

On our side and looking forward, the message of the President of the European Council - Charles MICHEL - in his recent letter of best wishes to H.E. President Museveni, is clear. President Michel wrote: "*I look*

forward to continue working with you and your Government, as well as the Ugandan civil society and private sector. Creating more job opportunities for youth, strengthening their voice in decision-making and the upholding of civil and political rights are of critical importance. I also encourage continued efforts in order to ensure accountability for the violence that regrettably affected the electoral campaign period and transparency regarding recent cases of abductions”.

There is work to do in many areas, Honourable Foreign Minister, and we are here.

To conclude let me thank you and through you all Ugandans and Uganda. This is a country blessed by natural resources and beauty and even more so by people whose kindness, tolerance, courage and resilience we enjoy and admire every day.

TOAST

Ladies and Gentlemen, as we celebrate today the 71st Anniversary of the declaration of Robert Schuman, I ask you to raise your glasses for a toast:

- ***to the President of Uganda, the prosperity of the country and the people of Uganda; and***
- ***to the European Union and its past, current and future Leaders***

Thank you
