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Speech by Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore TD, at High Level Panel

EU as a Peacemaker: enhancing EU mediation capacity European Parliament, Brussels, 28 May 2013

Members of the European Parliament, Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you this afternoon.

I would like to thank Elmar Brok and the European Parliament for hosting us today. As Presidency, it has been a real pleasure to work jointly with Parliament colleagues, High Representative Ashton and her team on this initiative to promote the EU's role in mediation and dialogue.

Last year, during Ireland's Chairmanship in Office of the OSCE, I had some personal involvement in mediation activity on a number of issues and saw at first hand its importance for conflict prevention. I am pleased that during our Chairmanship we were able to achieve some progress in the Transdniestrian settlement process.

Building on our OSCE experience, I made conflict prevention a priority for our current EU Presidency. I did so for two reasons in particular:

First, Ireland's own national experience of conflict resolution and peacebuilding has given us a strong sense of the need to devote greater attention to the *prevention* of conflicts. We sought last year to share the lessons from this experience in addressing the 'protracted conflicts' in the OSCE region.

Second, we see considerable potential for the EU as a peacemaker and conflict broker and we would like to see the Union playing a steadily more important role in this area.

I will take each of these points in turn.

Regarding Ireland's national experience, in recent weeks we celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which brought about a comprehensive political settlement of the Northern Ireland problem and ended decades, indeed centuries, of conflict and unrest.

On Good Friday of this year, I participated in the reading at a Dublin church of the names of the more than 3,500 victims of the Northern Ireland conflict. The reading of the names was a poignant reminder of the lives lost, the families devastated and a society traumatised by violence. We should never forget those victims or our shared responsibility to ensure that Northern Ireland never returns to those dark days.

The Good Friday Agreement succeeded in putting that conflict behind us. It was a seminal moment in our history, a huge achievement. In the creation of that agreement, dialogue and mediation were of pivotal importance.

Multi-level dialogue paved the way for the peace which, in the words of our poet William Butler Yeats, came "*dropping slow*". In addition to dialogue within each community and between them, a distinctive feature of the Northern Ireland peace negotiations was what might be termed 'dual mediation'. During the talks process, the Irish and British Governments acting in concert provided effective mediation with the nationalist and unionist communities respectively.

A third channel of dialogue and mediation was provided by external partners. The involvement of US President Clinton, Senator George Mitchell and others is well known. They demonstrated unprecedented levels of commitment both during the talks and thereafter, in particular at moments when the process was faltering.

The crucial support provided by the European Union is perhaps less well known. Throughout the years of violence and division, European Union leaders and institutions played a key role – often behind the scenes – in encouraging moves towards peace and a shared future based on equality and fairness. In 1994 Jacques Delors, then President of the European Commission, indicated that the EU would respond to a credible IRA ceasefire with a package of support for the people of Northern Ireland. He was true to his word. Since then three successive "PEACE" programmes have supported dialogue, partnership, cross-border cooperation and reconciliation as well as employment creation and economic recovery. A rich range of activities has impacted on town and villages in Northern Ireland and the border areas. I am pleased that, during our EU Presidency, we have been able to ensure a commitment to further EU support, totalling €150 million, for a PEACE IV Programme. This brings support to date to well over €2 billion. I am also delighted that the Maze/Long Kesh Project is to be generously funded by the EU.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ireland was delighted when the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last year. At a difficult moment, when many of our citizens associate the EU primarily with economic crisis, this award was a timely reminder of the Union's most fundamental achievement. From the devastation caused by two world wars in the last century, a Europe emerged which is at peace with itself and which is built on solid foundations of democracy, human rights and justice.

However, now is not the time to sit back comfortably. We face a responsibility to live up to the honour of the Nobel Prize and to ensure that Europe continues to make a strong contribution to the search for peace, stability and justice beyond our own borders.

Mediation has a critical role to play in conflict prevention. The EU, with a well-defined set of values guiding its policies and actions, is particularly well placed to serve as mediator in situations of actual or incipient conflict. The EU is usually present in a given country or region before conflict emerges and, unlike other partners, it stays there for the long haul. There is also the scale and quality of the assistance the EU can provide.

As we have heard today the High Representative and the EEAS are already involved in important and diverse mediation work. Cathy Ashton's recent role in brokering a positive outcome to the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue was an outstanding example of successful mediation.

Beyond direct involvement of this kind, the EEAS lends indirect support to mediation work carried out by partner organizations in the field. With us today are mediation practitioners of various backgrounds whose work would not be possible without the encouragement and support of the EU. With us in spirit also are "insider mediators" who have received practical support from EU Delegations and EU Special Representatives in regions which are struggling to defuse conflict.

All of these activities are guided by the 2009 Concept on Mediation, which was agreed by the Commission and Member States.

Within the EEAS, the Mediation Support Team has been in place for just over one year. It works discreetly to mainstream knowledge of mediation work throughout the EEAS and the network of EU Delegations. I would like to see priority given to supporting this Team, with appropriate resourcing, as it pushes forward with activities foreseen in the 2009 Concept. Training in mediation skills is a key dimension; the EU's capacity to act as a mediator will be greatly strengthened in my view when mediation training has been provided to all of the EU Delegations.

These activities will be implemented in close consultation with the European Parliament. I very much share the Parliament's desire to see the EU's role in mediation and dialogue reinforced and its capacities strengthened.

We are fortunate to have, in addition to the EEAS and the Commission, so many individual practitioners, NGOs and member States who are active in the field of mediation. That is why I welcome the Instrument for Stability project which will identify, train and connect mediation specialists.

In the same spirit, I commend the determination of the EEAS to cooperate closely with UN partners and with the "Friends of Mediation" network, of which Ireland is an active member.

Overall, I favour an approach which would involve strengthening the capacity of the EEAS, in the field of conflict prevention and mediation. While I can see merit in some of the arguments advanced in support of creating a stand-alone institution, there are budgetary and legal difficulties attaching to this option and my preference on balance is to build on what already exists. To supplement the EEAS work, however, and to strengthen the external capacities available to the Union in this field, I could envisage an informal network being formed which would facilitate greater exchanges of information and expertise among mediation experts attached to relevant organizations in the individual member States.

As for Ireland's own work in this field, we have in recent years supported a wide range of dedicated dialogue and peace-building projects, with a total financial contribution to date of over 12million euros. Both the EU and the UN, I am happy to say, regularly call on Irish conflict resolution specialists – in particular those with experience of the Northern Ireland peace process -- for mediation and training activities.

However, more needs to be done to increase the percentage of women mediators at all levels -- not just for basic reasons of justice and equality but to enhance the quality of peace agreements and to support economic recovery, social inclusion and political legitimacy.

I am pleased to be able to say that Ireland, in cooperation with UN Special Envoy Mary Robinson, is facilitating a high-level panel discussion next week on "Women and Peace-building in the Great Lakes region". This will be held in New York, with the participation of the UN Special Representative for Sexual Violence, Zainab Bangura. We are also supporting a unique event in Burundi which will galvanise 100 women leaders from the Great Lakes region in support of peace. They will develop a way forward for women's engagement in the peace process, including the monitoring of commitments in the recently concluded "Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement" for the DRC and the surrounding region.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In conclusion, let me express the hope that this conference will help to create new awareness of the contribution which the EU and its institutions can make in the field of conflict resolution generally, but with particular reference to conflict prevention and mediation. These are issues which, as I have explained, have special resonance for my country. I see enormous potential for the EU to provide effective mediation in conflict situations around the world. And I hope that, in the context of the EEAS Review which will take place this summer, attention will be paid to reinforcing EEAS structures and resources so that more of this potential can be realised.

This, combined with the activities of specialist NGOs and of member States, will help us to live up to the high expectations created by the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Peace to the EU.

Thank you.