

Mr. Erkki Tuomioja, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Opening Words at ARF EEP Meeting

Helsinki, March 12, 2015

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege for Finland, as a Member State of the European Union, to host this important meeting and welcome the Experts and Eminent Persons of the ASEAN Regional Forum to Helsinki. I hope that your discussions here, at the birthplace of the Helsinki Final Act, will bring many new ideas and initiatives for the future work of the ARF.

In Europe, we have followed with great interest how closer regional cooperation has gathered momentum in Asia. In Europe we know full well the challenges involved. But even more we recognize the vital benefits integration has brought to the security and well-being of our continent. Each continent and all countries, of course, have to look for the ways of cooperation which serve their countries best.

The ties between Europe and Asia are more important than ever. I am not talking only about economics, although we all know how close the economic and trade ties between Asia and Europe have grown. But I would also like to refer to a number of other areas of shared interest, such as political and security issues and the need to solve a number of pressing global challenges together. Our futures are more intertwined than ever. And we share the vision of the need to build regional structures as cornerstones of global governance.

The European Union sees the ARF as an essential and long-standing dialogue forum in Asia. The ARF is about security dialogue, which is a basis for all efforts to increase mutual understanding and improve common security. The ARF also aims at increasing mutual confidence through confidence-building measures and preventive diplomacy. This is today more important than ever. Personally, I am confident that this kind of regional cooperation is a vital element for a peaceful, prosperous, sustainable future in an interdependent Asia and the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we are meeting here in the city of Helsinki, I would like to recall that Helsinki is the birth-place of the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or the CSCE as it was called at the time. Helsinki Final Act provided the groundwork for the future developments in Europe, at a time when European nations represented very different views about policies and societies, and even about economics.

I understand that the OSCE was one of the reference points when the ARF was established. I hope the OSCE, together with the European integration process, can still serve as a source of inspiration for cooperative efforts elsewhere. Both processes provide a useful set of different options and choices in different areas of cooperation, which are already tested in real life. After all, the entire EU has sometimes been called a giant Confidence Building Measure, CBM. It is needless to say, of course, that no solution can be given or even suggested from outside. It is up to the Asian countries to find the arrangements that serve them best.

Let me also mention peace mediation which is on the agenda of this meeting. Mediation is a cost-effective tool in preventive diplomacy that can be used in all phases of the conflict cycle. Finland has worked hard in the past years to strengthen the normative basis of mediation in international organizations, and we are committed to continue this work. The ultimate goal is to enhance mediation capacities and help actors operating in real situations.

One important element I would also like to highlight in this context is women's' role in peace processes. We must put serious efforts in increasing the number of women in mediation teams and involving local women in peace processes. Women must be taken in the forefront of decision-making.

Together with Turkey we have launched a Friends of Mediation Group at the UN. This group has currently 48 members: countries, regional organizations and the UN. Numerous Asian countries and ASEAN are already represented. The group has led

preparations and discussions for three UN General Assembly approved resolutions on mediation. The latest one, approved unanimously by the UN General Assembly in July 2014, focuses on the role of regional organizations in mediation. Peace mediation could be an issue where you all, as eminent persons of the ARF, could offer a valuable contribution for the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I mentioned earlier that progress on the road of integration, or even on the road towards better CBMs and preventive diplomacy, may be hard. Finding consensus, in the midst of many individual points of contention, is not easy. Various principles, such as issues related to sovereignty, are bound to come up. But one should not be discouraged. Benefits that can be gained through closer cooperation to improve security and well-being are worth all efforts, no matter how difficult.

The Experts and Eminent Persons have a crucial role in creating ideas and initiatives for the ARF. The EEPs have already given impetus for many initiatives. I am confident that this will be the case for your Helsinki meeting as well. The more concrete ideas and proposals you can come up with, the better.

I once again warmly welcome you to Helsinki, and wish you a fruitful meeting.