

Hon Louis Michel,
Member of the EP and Co- president of the ACP- EU Parliamentary
Assembly,
Hon Tesfaye Daba, Chairperson of Foreign Affairs Committee, HOPR, FDRE
Amb Francis CORNET d'ELZIUS, Director for Africa SSA, at the Belgian MOF
Excellency, ASG of the ACP
Dr Claudia Wiedey, Representing the EEAS
Excellencies Ambassadors
Members of the European Parliament,
Dear friends and colleagues
Ladies and gentlemen

Let me at the outset express my sincere gratitude to you all for your presence at this event, an event aimed at forming a friendship group in EP with Ethiopia. Let me also express our deepest appreciation to our dear friend, Hon Louis Michel for playing host to this event. Without his support and the support of his able assistants, this would have not been possible. We have waited along and worked hard to make this a reality. Hon Michel is indeed a friend not only to Ethiopia but also to Africa. He has a very deep understanding and knowledge of our region and its challenges. During his tenure of office as development Commissioner of the EU and in his current position, he has eloquently spoke and wrote about the importance of EU Africa partnership. We are very grateful to your friendship and partnership. He has always stood for his principled, balanced and fair position no matter come what may. We respect him for that and look forward to continue working with him on issues that matter to both sides.

Ladies and gentlemen,

EP is one of the key institutions of the EU. Since the Lisbon treaty, the European Parliament is mandated to play more crucial roles in legislating, overseeing and appointing members of the college of commissioners and approving the union's budget. It is a democratic institution representing over half a billion citizens of the member states. We look for inspiration, best practices and sharing experiences from EP, which in turn would help in building democratic

institutions and culture of democracy in countries like Ethiopia where democracy is at its early stage of construction.

In over 3,000 years of our existence as a nation, democracy is just a new phenomenon of only two decades in Ethiopia. In our desire and aspiration for democratic rule, we fought a brutal military regime and paid heavy sacrifice not because it was fashion to be seen as a democratic society but out of necessity. Ethiopia is a very diverse nation with its mosaic nations, nationalities, cultures and traditions, languages and religious beliefs and different shades of political opinions. No other form of governance could enable us to manage such diversity. It can only be managed by democratic means where there is justice, equity and inclusivity. We in Ethiopia may not need to learn the importance of democracy from others, as we know from our own history what lack of it meant. Our past has taught us enough lessons as to what kind of choices we should make so that we could live in peace, harmony and prosperity. Thus, for us in Ethiopia, democracy is not a matter of choice but it is an existential issue. So is development. That is why we are vigorously pursuing both democracy and development agenda simultaneously. One without the other will not do the trick. That is exactly what we have been tolling in the last 2 decades.

Excellences,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We embarked upon the long journey of democratisation by stipulating a democratic constitution that recognised all rights, both democratic and human, without any limitations whatsoever. Subsequently, focus was given to what we call the essential elements for democratisation process; namely creating democratic institutions, formulating appropriate policies and strategies and instituting legal frameworks. This was augmented by building the culture of democracy via media and our education system. We believe we have made significant strides but still face formidable challenges, simply because this is just a work in progress. We have no illusion that ensuring a full pledged democratic system will need more time and strengthening and consolidating the achievements made so far and addressing the gaps and limitations in the

process. Our experience clearly shows that democracy is not something that can be exported from abroad. Nor is it something that can be imposed from outside. This is not because it is contradiction in terms but because it will not be sustainable. Secondly, democratic discourse should take into account the prevailing political economy of each society. One thing I can assure you is that, how challenging the journey might be, there is no backtracking on democracy and development. Because it is not an option. The proof to this is clearly spelt out in our second growth and transformation plan (GTP2) for the next five years, which will create the basis for ushering Ethiopia into a lower middle income country in 2025.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Like many ACP countries, Ethiopia's relation with EU goes as far back to 1975. We just celebrated 40th anniversary of our relations in October last year. Not only did we celebrate our past cooperation, but we also agreed to enhance our future partnership. Today, Ethiopia is the largest recipient of the 11th EDF. We partner in peace, security and stability in the horn of Africa and beyond. Fight against terrorism and managing irregular migration are other areas where we collaborate with EU; in this regard, we have signed CAMM to better manage irregular migration, which is a very serious challenge to EU and its member states. Today, Ethiopia, with its open door policy, is host to the largest refugee population in Africa. It is also the largest troop contributor to peacekeeping missions under the blue helmets in Africa and second globally.

Ethiopia is one of the fastest growing economies not only in Africa but also globally. With its fast growing economy and immense opportunity, it is not only market with close to 100 million people but also investment attraction for European private sector. EU remains Ethiopia's major trading block. In our desire to enhance our business relations, preparations are underway to organise Ethio-EU Business Forum here in Brussels. As the outcome of the recent exchanges between the two sides, Ethiopia and EU will soon sign the strategic engagement agreement. That makes our partnership imperative and mutually beneficiary.

Dear Friends,

Like any partnership, ours is also not without its challenges. As much as we would have liked to move fast in the democratisation process, the pace with which we move is constrained by some objective realities on the ground. This is not because we lacked commitment but lacked the necessary capacity to implement our policies and strategies effectively. That is why we would like to work very closely with EP so that we could benchmark some of its best practices and build our capacity. I hope EP could be our partner in this regard and that is exactly what this friendship group is all about.

In any partnership, understanding each other is important. In order to create that understanding, it is essential that partners regularly engage and exchange information with each other. It is my hope that this group will play its part in this endeavour. I count on the active participation of each and every one of you to do your part in bringing the two sides more closer.

Once again, on behalf of my government and the House of People's Representatives, I thank you all for your willingness to be in the group. On our part we are ready to provide all the necessary inputs that might be required by the friendship group.

I thank you for your kind attention.