

## **Foreign Minister Tilak Marapana holds high level discussions with the European Union in Brussels on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

Foreign Minister Tilak Marapana who is on his first official visit to the European Union Headquarters in Brussels held discussions with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and European Commissioner Christos Stylianides. The Foreign Minister was accompanied by Deputy Minister of National Policies and Economic Affairs Dr. Harsha De Silva, Ambassador to the European Union Rodney Perera and senior officials.

The Foreign Minister conveyed appreciation to the European Union for restoration of the GSP+ facility to Sri Lanka. It was noted that as the EU is Sri Lanka's largest trading partner with an annual trade turnover of over USD 5 billion and that the GSP+ facility would provide for a significant increase in Sri Lanka's exports to the EU market. At the meeting the European Commission announced that an additional sum of Euro 40 million will be allocated shortly for trade facilitation and to support Sri Lanka's reconciliation efforts.

The EU High Representative and Commissioner Stylianides welcomed the significant improvements that have taken place in Sri Lanka since the election of the new Government and expressed their confidence in the ability of the Government to continue to honour commitments arising from GSP+ requirements despite the apparent slow progress in some areas of concern.

Foreign Minister Marapana exchanged views on areas of mutual concern related to improving human rights standards through reform of legislation to bring it in line with international standards and the implementation of the UNHRC Resolution on Sri Lanka. Foreign Minister Marapana reiterated that since the election of the present Government under the leadership of President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe that a bipartisan approach is being taken by the two major political parties to address issues of national importance and that new mechanisms have been introduced in Parliament to have wider consultations with all political parties on bringing about reforms. He stated that this process takes more time but the Government is firmly committed to respecting human rights and making progress in the implementation of its international obligations. Foreign Minister Marapana explained to the EU High Representative and Commissioner Stylianides progress being made on constitutional reforms.

Discussion also took place on the new security challenges, particularly global terrorism and the need for closer cooperation between Sri Lanka and the EU in this area. The Foreign Minister also discussed regional bilateral issues. The EU leaders emphasized that the Indian Ocean region was an area of particular priority to the EU.

Embassy of Sri Lanka

Brussels

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