



Ministry of Foreign & European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

Lukáš PARÍZEK

State Secretary

Goodwill Message

Opening Ceremony: Eko Hotel, Lagos

November 10, 2016, 09:00 – 10:00 | Thursday

Lagos | Nigeria

Good morning,

Thank you for the kind introduction,

Your Excellency Ambassador Arrion,

Dear President of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry Madam Akande,

Dear President of the African Development Bank Adesina,

Dear Senator Udoma,

Dear Executive Governor Ambode,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am truly glad to be here and to address the 5th- may I say only 5th - EU-Nigeria Business Forum. A long tradition of lively economic relations, between EU Member States and Nigeria, deserve and promise a long tradition of such meetings.

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to express a word of gratitude to the Nigerian Government as well as to the EU representatives for this unique event to enhance our mutual economic relations.

I am truly convinced that the Forum is a valuable platform to bring our business communities together. The interaction between European and Nigerian businesses is a clear two-way avenue.

It contributes to the increasing domestic investments, promoting access to the EU market and building strategic partnerships.

As a representative of the country, which currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, I believe that I can express on behalf of the whole EU and Member States appreciation for this meeting.

I consider this event as an opportunity to show to our citizens that we are serious in delivering results for them. Thanks to promotion of mutual businesses we create jobs, ensure development of our societies and spread risks to our economies.

After coping with unprecedented banking and financial crises in past 10 years we have the chance to create a generation of success.

Slovakia has taken the EU Presidency at a critical time marked by uncertainty after the British referendum. We are

Nevertheless, I am of the view that the current European Semester has been, is and will be successful. As a Presidency, we promised to be realistic, humble and result-oriented in fulfilling the key priorities of the Slovak EU Presidency programme.

Only through such an approach, we can foster confidence of European citizens in the common European project that ensured 70 years of peace in most of our Continent.

In brief - the Slovak Presidency has four key priorities:

- 1) to make Europe economically stronger,
- 2) to overcome the fragmentation and barriers between Member States by the modernisation of the Single Market,
- 3) to develop sustainable migration and asylum policies
- and 4) to make Europe globally engaged.

These priorities may sound a bit remote, but all are relevant to Nigeria as well.

The EU is a global player. It is the biggest economy, which offers a number of opportunities for doing a business.

During our Presidency we have contributed to modernisation of the Single Market. I am very pleased that specifically the progress in building of the Digital Single Market has been made. This is very important for partners like Nigeria to blend into the new, more quick and flexible part of economy that generated huge revenues.

By the end of the year, we expect progress in creating the Energy Union that is also an opportunity for external partners from Africa to enrich European energy supplies.

We successfully coordinated all EU members in order to ratify the Paris Agreement on climate. As a result, this historic Agreement came into force at the global level just a few days ago, on 4 November 2016. I am very happy to say also because of our effort.

Most recently, in the foreign-policy area, the signature of the CETA is an important step for the credibility of EU's trade policy.

Significant steps forward have been achieved in the European enlargement policy. For instance, we have opened another accession chapter with Serbia. This may sound easy for outsiders, but decision was very important acknowledgment of political processes in Western Balkans that are crucial for the stability of the region.

All these efforts follow a simple line –to ensure equal access to the European economic space,to increase predictability of legal environment, enhance rule of law and create job opportunities.

The pressure from illegal migration to Europe and solution of caused of huge migratory flows from the Middle East and Africa brought new tools of engagement with third countries. For example, we - the European Union – launched so called Compactswith six countries of origin and transit of migrants.

These Compacts are designed to individually assist relevant countries in dealing with specific problems they encounter.

In case of Nigeria, the EU is very much interested in concluding a readmission Agreement that will ensure orderly legal procedures regarding asylum-seekers or displaced persons. I shall also discuss this matter in Abuja with Federal authorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have come here in order to vitalize and strengthen the economic partnership between the EU and Nigeria. It is crucial for us to see economically strong Nigeria and prosperity between our business partners.

Not only does Nigeria represent a key partner for the EU, it is also a hub for the whole region and Africa. Although bilateral relations between EU and Nigeria have always been strong; trade and investment links can still be improved. We have a clear interest in enhanced commercial relations between our regions.

I would like to express my personal gratitude to the current administration of President Buhari. They have made a great job, and without them, it would be hard to imagine putting the Economic Partnership Agreement on the table.

In terms of the Economic Partnership Agreement, I am sure that it will contribute to mutual trade and investment. Duty-free and quota-free access in the EU market will definitely confirm enormous potential of our relationship.

We are here to help diversifying the Nigerian economy and this Agreement is supportive for it. Moreover it will be helpful in the current context of persisting low-oil prices that Nigeria has to face.

Therefore I would like to encourage our Nigerian partners to join our, let me use the expression, the “Economic Partnership Agreement club”.

Doing business with the EU, Nigeria can tackle a number of its own challenges.

I am convinced that our deeper ties will lead towards further economic stability, prosperity and win-win results.

The EU financial support for projects in Africa, I hope, will bring benefit to those who need it. Cooperation and common support is something that we need in these unstable times to boost our economies.

In the modern globalized world, negotiations about further development between economies is a grateful way in building, improving and promoting new partnerships.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe that our fifth meeting will deepen our economic cooperation and I strongly convinced all of us will take advantage of this Forum to establish and strengthen business relationships, share valuable experience and collaborate for mutual benefits.

Thank you all for inviting me here and I wish you all a successful Business Forum!