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THE PRESIDENT**



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**Press statement by the President Herman Van Rompuy,
following his meeting with Thongsing Thammavong,
Prime Minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic**

It is with great pleasure that I met today Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong ahead of the Asia-Europe Meeting - ASEM. In the name of the European Union, I thanked him for organising the ninth ASEM in Vientiane. I indicated that the high level of attendance demonstrates the commitment of ASEM leaders to further strengthen relations between the European Union and Asia.

The Prime Minister and I exchanged views on the relations between the European Union and Laos and the cooperation between Europe and Asia.

On the first, I commended the Prime Minister for the extraordinary progress Laos have achieved in the recent past. Laos left a tragic history behind it and is focused on the future with all its energy and youth. We agreed that our relations are now more mature and comprehensive, going well beyond development cooperation, and are based on peaceful cooperation and stability.

On trade, I congratulated the Prime Minister on Laos' accession to the WTO. This is good news for Laos, but also for the multilateral trading system as a whole. I stressed that the creation of a safe and attractive environment is important to encourage further investments in Laos from European companies. The EU is ready to work together with Laos to implement the terms of its WTO accession.

P R E S S

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On development, I commended the Lao chairmanship of the UN land-locked Developing Countries' group this year, which reflects its high level of ambition. The EU is fully committed to support Laos to become a land-linked country in an inclusive and sustainable manner. The EU and its Member States are already cooperating intensively with ongoing activities worth around 80 million Euros per year to support the Government reform agenda. As one of Lao largest donors, the EU will continue to support Laos actively in its efforts to achieve the MDGs by 2015 and for tackling the problem of the Unexploded Ordnance. I indicated to the Prime Minister that from 2014 onwards, the EU intends to increase its support for Laos through the joint programming of EU's and its Member States' cooperation programmes, coupled with a substantial financial increase. We will also intensify our cooperation in the field of climate change and environment protection.

On the political side, I reiterated the importance the European Union attaches to the EU-Laos Human Rights Dialogue, as well as EU's readiness to co-operate on the implementation of the recommendations identified in the context of the UN Universal Periodic Review. The recent ratification of the Convention against Torture is a welcome step and demonstrates Lao willingness to reinforce its role in the multilateral system.

On the regional side, we highlighted the many commonalities and interest Europe and Asia share in striving for security, political stability and economic prosperity. The EU seeks to promote peaceful and cooperation solutions to regional challenges. As an active member of the ASEAN Regional Forum since its creation in 1994, we wish to increase our engagement in the East Asia Regional Architecture, including through the participation to the East Asia Summit process.

The hosting of the ASEM Summit underlines that Laos is increasingly active on the international scene. As Chair of ASEM 8 in 2010 and EU coordinator - I discussed with the Prime Minister the agenda and the expected outcome of the incoming ASEM 9. With the Prime Minister we agreed on the need to make this Summit a success to strengthen further the cooperation between the EU and Asia.

I thanked again Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong for his hospitality, and I wished him a successful ASEM 9. At the same time, I indicated the great potential for sustained and fruitful EU-Laos relations.