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The President

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**Press statement by the President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy
following his meeting with the President of the Philippines,
Benigno Aquino III**

I am glad to welcome President Aquino on his first visit to Brussels and to the European Union. I had the pleasure of meeting the President two years ago on the occasion of the ASEM Summit in Vientiane.

The Philippines' relations with Europe are historically deep and long. Today, the Philippines can boast the fastest growing economy in Asia. It is an engine of growth in its region and will progressively raise millions of people from poverty. It was also a forerunner in democratic transition in South East Asia, and in this context, I pay tribute to President Aquino's good governance agenda. The fight against corruption remains a key issue. Democracy, indeed, goes well beyond elections, and the rule of law and respect for human rights are at the heart of it.

In our discussions, we have underlined the importance of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement for our future relations. This agreement, once implemented, will increase our engagement politically and economically and enhance practical cooperation in many areas, such as migration or disaster risk management.

Let me highlight other areas which I discussed with President Aquino:

Firstly, the European Union supports the peace process in Mindanao and I would like to take this opportunity to commend President Aquino for his pivotal role. Just a week ago, a draft law was submitted to the Philippines' Congress paving the way for greater autonomy in Mindanao. The EU has been invited to monitor the plebiscite in Bangsamoro in 2015 and we are currently looking into that possibility.

Secondly, I look forward to strengthening our trade and investment relations. The European Union is negotiating Free Trade Agreements in the region and remains open to start further negotiations.

Thirdly, the European Union's development cooperation with the Philippines will more than double in the next six years: it is increasing from 130 million EUR to 325 million EUR with the focus on judicial and legal reform, sustainable energy and job creation.

Fourthly, we have agreed on the importance of enhancing EU– ASEAN relations and on the strategic importance of ASEM in view of the upcoming Summit in Milan.

Finally, we exchanged views on the regional situation. It is essential that all parties seek peaceful and cooperative solutions to maritime issues, in accordance with international law, in particular with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. The European Union is party to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South East Asia. This Treaty calls on all parties to settle differences by peaceful means, to renounce the threat or use of force, and to effectively cooperate among partners.

To conclude, I would like to highlight the valuable contribution which Filipino migrants living and working in Europe are making to our societies and to their country of origin. Filipino migrants sent 2.3 billion EUR back to the Philippines in 2013. The European Union is the second largest source of remittances to the Philippines and the largest employer of Filipino seafarers.

I thank you for your attention and should like to thank again President Aquino for his visit to Brussels and to the institutions of the European Union.
