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Economic growth and a boost to the job market will have a direct impact on the lives of the people and consequently boost the public's confidence in the new Myanmar, thereby having a multiplying effect on the support for that route.

Myanmar's transition is highly complex and has to be taken one step at a time. To lead transitions you need three things: political will, leadership and strong support among your country's "agents for change" and civil society. As opinion leaders, they are the ones to help political leaders overcome the immense challenges of this transition.

The international community can equally assist and bring positive change, not only in the development sector but especially when it comes to boosting the economy and help creating new jobs. If Myanmar succeeds in creating a business-friendly environment, the country will greatly benefit from foreign direct investment that comes hand in hand with know-how, technical expertise and skills – all ingredients to sustainable economic development. However, foreign investment in Myanmar has slowed down. I see a number of reasons for this, starting first and foremost with the ongoing conflicts in the country. Instability is deterring investments. Second, the need investors have for clarity about the policy and the overall direction of the economy. Third, the overall conduciveness of the economic environment.

European investors are looking for sustainable, long-term investment opportunities, but this requires an environment that provides for the necessary security, both from an overall political stability point of view and regarding legal security of a predictable business environment. Myanmar needs to keep up the pace of reform to become an attractive place for high quality foreign investments that are made to last. The quick wins are not always lasting wins. Investors want predictability, legal certainty, transparency and a reasonable capacity to forecast. Myanmar also needs to show companies that they will be treated fairly, equally and won't be discriminated against local businesses or businesses that use different commercial behaviours. Investors want a level playing field with fair competition to be able to work in a fair environment and ensure sustainable investments.

Q: Can you tell your opinions on the ongoing Rakhine issues?

A: The situation in Rakhine is a difficult, emotional and deep-rooted issue that is going back a long way in history. It is a complex problem of a state at the periphery that struggles with inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions, underdevelopment, fear and poverty. Members of all communities in Rakhine are poor and struggle to survive; they should all be supported if one is serious about a lasting solution. There is no time to lose in addressing the issues in Rakhine, as these difficult living conditions do not only cause suffering for the people, but are also a fertile breeding ground for extremism. What I think is needed is a joint effort of the government, local political and religious leaders as well as civil society to bring about an end to violence and long-overdue improvements to the difficult living conditions of so many families in Rakhine.

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We have to bear in mind that the security situation in Rakhine State affects security and stability not only in Rakhine, but in the whole of Myanmar and in the wider region. The recent violence has resulted in dozens of thousands of people fleeing their homes, adding further to the already significant number of people displaced in Rakhine. Violence, conflict and segregation have resulted in great human suffering: there are families without a roof over their heads while the monsoon season is in full swing; generations of children with no education and no hope for a better future; thousands of sick people with no access to health care and many deaths that could well be prevented. People in Northern Rakhine from all communities are desperate. And as we could observe in many other areas



State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi shakes hands with European Council President Donald Tusk, at the European Council headquarters in Brussels, Belgium on 2 May 2017. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

of the world, this desperation and lack of perspectives is a very fertile breeding ground for extremism and ultimately further violence. Indeed, we have already seen some reports about possible links to foreign terrorist organisations growing in the area. If people are not offered a perspective for a peaceful existence in dignity, it is only a matter of time until they will turn to radical groups who offer them "a way out". It is up to national and local leaders to stop and reverse this trend of growing radicalisation in Rakhine before it gets even more complicated and spills over.

The EU is offering its full support to the Myanmar government and we stand ready to facilitate dialogue and extend our peace building support to the area. A number of grass-root level initiatives are already under way. EU support promotes inter-communal understanding and reconciliation and offers aid to improve access to education, healthcare, livelihoods, as well as sanitation, water and food. Humanitarian and development access should continue to be opened as much as possible, and target all.

I will leave this country being sad to see that the situation in Rakhine is not a positive curve. This applies also to Shan and Kachin States. Each of these conflicts has its own roots but they all have the same effect: people who are suffering from tensions and conflicts. Reconciliation is both a political concept but also a human concept. You need reconciliation between the people in all the ethnic states to rebuild trust. You need to rebuild trust and a sense of living together - this is what will make the Golden Land shine.

At a certain stage this overall political transition will need to look at ways to deal with the

past, to possibly have transitional and restorative justice, heal peoples' wounds, otherwise peace will not last and the transition will remain incomplete. If people do not feel that their grievances have been addressed, old wounds shall open up again one day. This is a very difficult process in all transitions, but a necessary one. I hope that the people of Myanmar will value and embrace the country's diversity as a treasure, not a curse. For me as a European, this seems the only way for a brighter future, more socio-economic development and full democracy.

Q: What is your impression for the "Golden Friendship" with EU and Myanmar and your thoughts on terrorism?

A: I hope that the relationship between Myanmar and the EU will continue to be a golden relationship and I think we have started well. The basis of our relationship is the EU's respect for Myanmar's sovereignty and independence, while honestly expressing opinions. This mutual respect allows us to have open and frank discussions where we share ideas; sometimes we agree and sometimes we disagree. As Europeans we tend to be outspoken, we say things clearly because we believe this is the best way to move forward. If you just keep silent and say 'yes' to everything, I'm not sure you can move forward. Being able to freely exchange ideas and opinions reflects the beauty of a true friendship and I think this is what Myanmar and the Europeans share.

You mentioned a difficult issue, terrorism. This is not only a Myanmar issue; this is a regional and an international issue where Myanmar, Europe and the whole world share challenges

in common. How to fight this rather new and emerging threat that is international terrorism? Through cooperation. No one will be able to tackle terrorism alone. Global threats require coordination and a global response. This is why it is in the interest of Myanmar to have the strongest possible cooperation with its neighbors and the wider international community.

What happened in October last year when the border post guards were attacked is very worrying, and the EU has immediately condemned this attack against the Myanmar authorities. It is very worrying because it shows that there is a new trend building up there. If Rakhine, as claimed by a number of constituencies, is increasingly hosting terrorist activities it only shows my previous point; we need more cooperation.

When people in any region start to become desperate and lose hope then this is the best breeding ground for terrorism. (MRTV: They are vulnerable, they have no choice?). Exactly. If they are poor and segregated and if they have no hope for their children then they will do things that are dangerous. So the best way to address terrorism is not only international cooperation but it's to try to work on the ground to give a sense of future to all the people.

Q: My last question is about EU and Brexit. How will it affect small countries like Myanmar?

A: Brexit has been a shockwave and a great surprise for everybody including half of the British who did not want to leave the European Union. But it is a democratic choice we have to respect it. The European Union is a free union and you can get in freely and you can get out freely.

I do not think Brexit will have a big impact on Myanmar because the EU will continue to be here with 27 European States continuing their strong support to Myanmar. The UK will work bilaterally. And we should not forget that while everyone is talking about one country leaving the EU, there are currently six countries that want to join the EU as soon as they can, and are negotiating their accession. This shows that the European project is still very attractive and in a state of expansion. And in today's unstable and unpredictable world, Europe is definitely a pole of stability, politically and economically. ■