



**THE EMBASSY OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA  
TO BELGIUM, LUXEMBOURG AND THE EUROPEAN UNION  
27, RUE JULES LEJEUNE, 1050 BRUSSELS, BELGIUM**

TEL: (00322)3445394 (00322)3445585 FAX: (00322)3446737 EMAIL: [secretariat@sri.lankaembassy.be](mailto:secretariat@sri.lankaembassy.be)

**INTERVENTION BY H. E. RAVINATHA ARYASINHA, SRI LANKA AMBASSADOR TO  
BELGIUM, LUXEMBOURG AND THE EU AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S DELEGATION  
FOR RELATIONS WITH THE COUNTRIES OF SOUTH ASIA - 27 JANUARY 2010**

I am happy to be addressing you today, on a day on which the people of Sri Lanka have reaffirmed their faith in President Mahinda Rajapaksa, in what even his critics believe to have been "a relatively incident free" election.

In a poll where the turnout was 74%, President Rajapaksa has secured 57.88% of the votes (6 million) against his main opponent former Army Chief General Sarath Fonseka, who polled 40.15% votes (4.1 million). The 'Economist' has called it "a thumping majority".

I know that even today there were a lot of rumors, on which concern was raised in comments here. But I believe that when an election is held and one loses by 1.9 million votes, in an electorate of 14 million, it must be conceded that an election has been clearly won. There is one authority in Sri Lanka that can at this stage question whether the election is fair, and that authority is the Election Commissioner, who has confirmed this outcome. I think that many of the concerns for this Committee, the European Commission and Council as to whether a proper election can be held in Sri Lanka without the implementation of the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the various structures it mandated, have also been proved wrong, with the conduct of this election by the Election Commissioner, whom all agree has done a wonderful job.

Sri Lankans are known to exercising their votes judiciously and when they do so, whether or not the result is to your liking, you must accept it. For as you know Madam Chairperson, Sri Lanka is one of the few countries where women in Sri Lanka enjoyed voting rights in 1931, only 4 years after the women of the UK were afforded that opportunity. Any attempt to question this vote would therefore be tantamount to insulting the Sri Lankan voter.

At the same time, it is also important that members of this Parliament, who after all represent the democratic will of the people of Europe, and the 27 member Governments and other institutions of the EU, also respect the message contained in the vote for President Rajapaksa.

In that context, I find unfortunate, that even as the people of Sri Lanka have so overwhelmingly reposed their faith in the policies of the present government, the EU appears intent on seeking to punish Sri Lanka. I refer specifically to the GSP+, where the threat to terminate these trade concessions continues to be held against Sri Lanka and is presently before the European Council. I must take this opportunity to salute the Spokespersons of the EPP, ALDE and the ECR (parties which represent the clear majority in the International Trade Committee, as it does in this committee and the European Parliament as a whole), who

at an 'exchange of views' on this issue in the International Trade Committee held on 14 January 2010, pointed to the unfair manner in which Sri Lanka has been singled out from among GSP+ recipients for unfair treatment and unambiguously urged that the Council refrain from acting hastily on this matter. It was noted that having overcome a ruthless terrorist organization, Sri Lanka had kept its pledges in re-settling more than 75% of those displaced due to the conflict, was addressing concerns relating to human rights and media freedom, was on the road to recovery and needed all support it could get from its friends. I was happy to note that in this debate, the Socialist Group and the Greens, while being critical on certain aspects about Sri Lanka, nevertheless assured that they would support a reversal of the temporary suspension, if enforced by the Council, if Sri Lanka showed sufficient change. Madam Chair, I believe that what you are seeing today in Sri Lanka is a further step in that direction, the possibility to tick off yet another box of the "concerns" previously expressed by the EU when it made issue concerning Sri Lanka's GSP+ concessions. I hope that this is taken serious note of.

If it is the intention of this Parliament, as well as that of the European Union, to engage Sri Lanka, then you must work with the person whom Sri Lankans elect. I urge, that now that Sri Lankans have made their choice, that the EU re-calibrate its strategy, and find the best way possible to get together and work with Sri Lanka over the coming years in making Sri Lanka - EU relations more stable. It has a real opportunity to do so, through the manner in which it chooses to handle the GSP+ issue.

As I stated at the International Trade Committee two weeks ago, "Sri Lanka values its longstanding relationship with the EU and is ready to continue with engagement with the European Institutions including this Parliament in order to help address issues of concern relating to the GSP+, in a manner that does not compromise Sri Lanka's national interest. However such engagement needs to be undertaken on terms respectful of one another, and with sincerity and purposefulness by both parties. There should be no setting of unattainable targets, no shifting of goal posts and no attempt to use Sri Lanka-EU relations to serve domestic political agendas".

"At a time when the EU has shown a considerable understanding and willingness to accommodate the practical difficulties faced by some current GSP+ recipient countries at variance from the norm with respect to the 27 UN conventions, and are willing to review the rules of the scheme to accommodate others, it is hard to understand why the same rubric is not being applied in the case of Sri Lanka".

"Sri Lanka remains hopeful that better sense will prevail upon member countries of the EU, who themselves have faced similar situations in their long history and are acutely conscious of the complexity of 'democracies fighting terrorism' – a phenomenon Sri Lanka, thankfully, has been able to overcome".

It is in the totality of the above circumstances, that I call upon this Parliament, who since the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty have greater responsibility for the conduct of the European Union's international trade policy, to encourage the European Commission as well as the Member States represented in the European Council, to review this matter with the seriousness that it deserves. (Ends)