

AIT – Graduation Ceremony speech

Greetings,

It's a pleasure and a great honour for me to be standing in front of you today, a day that is so special for you. First, I would like to address my sincere congratulations to all of you for your graduation; the starting point of your career that I wish will be full of success and achievements. I am particularly proud to be with you today as the Asian Institute of Technology has been an ambitious and pioneering institution, at the avant-garde of the scientific and technologic issues that, today more than ever, are in the middle of vibrant discussions at the international level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You are tomorrow's technicians and engineers of the world. We, the public servants, politicians and diplomats, need you by our side to address the issues that we are trying to counteract with our social, economic or environmental policies. Without you, all our actions would be null and void. We count on you to build our knowledgebase, to be the allies of progress and the partners of our societies towards a better and wealthier future.

Our future is threatened by unprecedented crisis: the planet is facing an environmental crisis that jeopardises our and not least our grandchildren's lives. We need you, the technicians to support solutions to these challenges that are innovative, non-disruptive (to the degree possible) and cheap – the challenges the coming decades are numerous for you and your field of expertise, as well as for us working primarily in the political field, where the main challenge – believe it or not- remains to convince stakeholders that climate change is real! The European Union is proud to be a leader in addressing climate change issues on the international arena, and is even more proud to have on its side the Kingdom of Thailand to resolve the multiple challenges that the global community is facing. Together, we need to intensify our efforts to avoid the catastrophic scenario towards which we are going if we lose the momentum created by the Paris

Agreement. That is why we need you, dear engineers, to help us finding more effective solutions and reaching more and more ambitious targets.

I had the honour to participate last year in the Regional Forum on Climate Change in Bangkok, hosted by the AIT, a forum that proved to us, that the South-East Asian countries are willing to take serious commitments to tackle global warming. 2015 has been a crucial year on that way.

After many years of negotiations, the Paris Agreement came into being in December 2015, endorsed of 195 nations plus the European Union. Since December, Governments, including the Royal Thai Government and the EU, have confirmed their commitment by signing the accord on the 22nd of April 2016 – on Earth Day!

Through the negotiations, the EU maintained a high level of political coherence, and managed to build a broad coalition with our partners, as part of our climate diplomacy's outreach, which also supported the Regional Forum on Climate Change here at the AIT. We, the European Union, hope that the positive dynamic created around the Paris agreement will get wider and deeper as countries adapt to the new reality. We hope that the Paris Agreement will steer the world towards a cleaner, more sustainable and healthier future, to succeed, we need our partners, including Thailand and its engineers, to help us! The transition will require a global change in our behaviour as consumer, in business, in policy-making and as investors, and we need empowering technologies to assist every stakeholder on that path.

Thailand's commitment in the Paris Agreement is clear; we do not have any doubt in Thailand's capacity to take on the challenges and not least the opportunities that the agreement will provide. Because adapting to climate change and agreeing on new targets brings new opportunities and forces new thinking. New jobs and new growth areas will become evident – I am sure that the percentage of you employed in so-called climate friendly sectors will grow almost on a continuous basis throughout your careers.

Climate Change is just one of many areas that the EU supports in Thailand and ASEAN, our financial commitment to ASEAN has tripled in the current

financial period amounting to 170 million EUR from 2014-2020 – providing support to all three pillars of the ASEAN community. We consider the EU and ASEAN natural partners, and I am - of course - as the EU Ambassador to Thailand a great believer in the benefits of regional integration, for many countries in Europe their membership of the European Union has made an enormous economic difference, and even if we have been hit hard by the economic crisis, this continued to be the case. Evidence tells the same story in ASEAN, where the focus of integration is on developing the so-called CLMV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam – the four poorest members of the community). We will stand by you in the process of building closer relations to your neighbours, and will continue to provide assistance in a variety of areas from customs cooperation to higher education – two of the large success stories of EU integration.

We need managers, technicians and engineers to help us address human poverty, food shortage, energy in-efficiency, lack of access to clean water, climate change and a number of other pressing challenges threatening our existence. And you, dear graduate students, should be at the front line of this battle along with your country and your region. As you move on into your future lives, be sure that the European Union will do its best to promote knowledge sharing and will continue to support and empower those who want to build a sustainable future.