



**Speech by Helen Saarniit, Press and Public Information Officer at EUAM Iraq  
EUAM Iraq Medal Parade on 17 November 2021, Baghdad**

*Head of Mission, Deputy Head of Mission,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests and dear colleagues,*

*It is an honour for me to stand in front of you here today and deliver a speech on behalf of my colleagues since I am, in fact, one of the newest mission members to have joined EUAM Iraq.*

*As a Press and Public Information Officer my job is to tell stories, to communicate what it is the Mission does and aims to achieve. One of my first tasks when joining EUAM Iraq three months ago as the first expert from Estonia, was to interview some of my colleagues in order to let their stories and voices be heard.*

*It was a task I enjoyed greatly. I was very much impressed and inspired by the wealth of experience, the different backgrounds and cultural references that experts bring to this mission. I was also reassured that this was where I wanted to be.*

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*The biggest asset of a mission, just as in any organisation, is its people.*

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*So why are we here doing what we do? As I was preparing this speech, I turned to my colleagues with two simple questions – what do you appreciate the most about working in this mission and what do you like the least. Firstly, these questions turned out to be not that simple after all. Secondly, it was very interesting to see how different the comments and viewpoints were, but some patterns also emerged. Let me share some of them with you.*

*Colleagues appreciate that EUAM Iraq is a mission with a serious mandate where every day is different. They enjoy the challenging work environment which also offers ample possibilities for professional growth. They also feel that it is an enormous privilege to be here – to be present in a country in post-conflict transition and contribute to this historic process.*

*In addition, mission members cherish their colleagues and the multicultural environment we are working in. It is enriching to be surrounded by so many different approaches and work cultures, both amongst our international and national colleagues as well as in the interaction with Iraqi counterparts. This, of course, offers both benefits and challenges.*

*Let me now move on to what colleagues liked the least.*

*EUAM Iraq is a hardship mission. We operate in an environment of high risk which presents us with certain constraints. The lack of freedom of movement is a challenge. The restricted access to the world outside our compound limits our possibilities for getting a better sense of this fascinating country and its people. Yet, it is something our experts yearn for and feel could help them achieve even more.*

*We also need to be patient in our work. Building consensus with counterparts or navigating complex situations takes time. The valuable connections and relationships we are building are at the core of the advisory process. Bringing about change can sometimes take generations.*

*Lastly, it is difficult to be far away from our homes, our families and friends, however interesting, fulfilling or positively challenging the work may be.*

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*All in all, working in a mission is not for everyone. This was something I thought about a lot, when I, a first-timer coming from a civilian background, felt somewhat shaken after hearing rockets being fired in Baghdad at night for the first time. It requires a certain character and for certain sacrifices to be made.*

*That may very well be one of the reasons why EUAM Iraq, but also the EU Common Security and Defence Policy missions in general, struggle to achieve gender balance. Gender mainstreaming and giving equal presence to men and women alike, is what the European Union and CSDP missions promote, yet it can be difficult for us to lead by example.*

*In order for this to change, I would like to use this opportunity to call upon the representatives of EU member states present in this ceremony, to actively offer seconded candidates – women, as well as men, to join missions such as EUAM Iraq. By promoting CSDP missions in your home countries, there can be a larger pool of candidates to fill our positions, which is also something this mission struggles with at times.*

*After all, as said before, it is the experts, the women and men who make the mission what it is.*

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*As we receive this medal today for our role in the context of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy, I believe it is a good opportunity for all of us to take a moment to reflect on our personal and inner motivations for being part of this complex yet very special mission.*

*To conclude, I am thankful for the opportunity to be part of this experience and for having the chance to learn from you all.*

*Thank you.*