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## **Speech on North Africa and the Arab world**

*Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

European Parliament

**Strasbourg, 6 July 2011**

Mr President, Honourable Members, the last time I spoke in this Parliament, in early May, I said that statements could and should be made – but that the priority is action.

You will remember that I announced my intention to establish an EU office in Benghazi.

The EU flag now flies above the courthouse in the newly-named Freedom Square – a symbol not just of our solidarity with its people, but of our practical commitment.

The office is now up and running, experts are arriving each week – working at how to support the security needs of the people, and help build the capacity of civil society.

And last week my team was in New York, coordinating our work on Libya with the UN.

Outside the courthouse in Freedom Square, I met some of the people who have been bringing democracy to life in Libya.

They thanked me; they thanked you; they thanked the European Union.

They know that we will stay with them over time, and today I am sure you join me in saluting again the enormous courage of the Libyan people – whether in Benghazi, Misrata, the Western Mountains, Tripoli or the South.

We have stepped up sanctions, to stop arms and money reaching the regime.

We have provided €140 million of humanitarian assistance to those most in need.

And we continue to work for a political resolution to the conflict, in the Contact Group (which will meet in Istanbul next week) and in the “Cairo Group”, where – at our instigation – we continue to work with the UN Secretary General and Special Envoy Mr Al Khatib, the Arab League, the African Union and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, where we prepare for the days, weeks and months after Gaddafi leaves.

Actions must be rooted in strategy.

The EU was the first to offer a serious response to the Arab Spring, with our 'Partnership' Communication of 8 March.

Two months later, we launched a new and ambitious European Neighbourhood Policy.

I am delighted to have Stefan Fule with me today – my close and trusted partner in conceiving the new ENP, and on ensuring delivery on our promises.

You know the core principles of the Policy: mutual accountability; individual approaches to individual countries depending on their circumstances and aspirations; offering more support, for more reform – in Stefan's words: 'more for more'.

It has financial backing to match, in the form of an extra €1.2 billion for the next two years, on top of the €5.7 billion already pledged – so, nearly €7 billion.

To this, we should add a sum in the region of €7-8 billion, the result of the concerted efforts I initiated to unlock new investment funds from the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

The goal is clear: the promotion of what I call 'deep' and sustainable democracy and – with it – economic prosperity.

We know full well that democracy is hollow without food, safety, and jobs.

So now is the time for all of us – EU institutions and Member States – to deliver on our shared objectives.

Beyond the new ENP, I have taken two further regional initiatives since we last met.

First, to enhance our political effectiveness, presence and visibility, I have appointed an EU Special Representative for the Southern Mediterranean – Bernardino Leon.

His task will be to assist us in strengthening the EU's political influence in the region, in dialogue with governments, and with civil society and international organizations.

And to cooperate closely with the European Parliament.

Second, I have established a Task Force to draw together our work and bring in the EIB, the EBRD, other International Financial Institutions and other international partners – to turn commitments into reality and to synchronise and work closely together.

And that reality is about democracy and it is about the economy we wish to see on the ground.

In Tunisia and Egypt, you see the evidence of the economic upheavals of the last months.

When I was in Egypt a few days ago, I talked to shopkeepers and hotel managers, and all tell me the same story.

Tourism revenues and foreign direct investment have fallen – they need support to revive the economy.

That is why, for instance, we are supporting a major Egyptian social housing initiative.

We are also launching a major programme to support the poorest areas in the greater Cairo region, as well as a €20 million programme to support Egyptian civil society.

We are ready to help Egypt reform its security sector; we have offered EU election observation and assistance and support for democracy.

Deputy Prime Minister El Gamal is leading the electoral process, the drafting of the constitution.

An eminent lawyer, it falls to him to sort out a constitution that will, in my words, be the guardian of the people.

Similarly, in Tunisia, I met with Foreign Minister Kefi on Friday.

Support for civil society and for the preparation of October's Constituent Assembly elections is well underway.

We have been asked to deploy an Election Observation Mission, and will do so.

EU security reform and regional development programmes are also in motion.

The Tunisian government, meanwhile, advances its own reform agenda.

We applaud the consensus that was reached on the date for the elections, and the fact that the principle of male-female parity for the lists of candidates has been retained.

I am concerned that the voice of women continues to be heard, and their engagement certain.

There is a fear, expressed to me, that - having taken part in their revolutions - their place in the future is not guaranteed.

We need to support them - practically by offering our resources to support them, and politically by making it clear that we expect their engagement.

We funded a conference with UN Women in Tunisia, so that women could come together from across the region to consult and gain strength from each other.

There is more to do - and incidentally this morning I have issued a statement of concern on the recent arrest of women journalists, artists and women's right defenders in Iran.

But perhaps our greatest concern today is for the people of Syria – who are denied the right to play their part in the charting their country's future.

What began as small local demonstrations, against corruption in local communities, has become a national outpouring – and been met with violence and repression.

Yesterday in Hama 11 people died, adding to a total of over 1500 civilians and 350 security personnel.

And 10,000 people have been detained.

We condemn without reservation these acts of violence and repression.

Since we last met, I have increased our sanctions twice, continued to make our voice heard, worked with our international partners, and sought action at the Security Council - all with the objective of sending a single message to stop the violence, create the dialogue, and prepare for change.

President Assad's promises of reform and dialogue remain weak - he has only recently announced that a committee will meet to prepare the framework for a dialogue.

Let us be clear any dialogue must be inclusive – the opposition must take part, and all who participate must do so without fear.

Our EU Delegation remains on the ground in Damascus – meeting every day with individuals and groups, working with other representatives, sending out our messages.

Our Delegation in Ankara has been visiting the refugees who have arrived over the border in Turkey in their thousands, and I have been in close touch with Foreign Minister Davutoglu - offering support for the future should they need it, and discussing the political situation on their borders.

And the instability in Syria has echoes in Lebanon, where, following the indictments, the Special Tribunal must now carry forward its work.

And this brings us to the search for peace in the Middle East, between Israel and Palestine.

The changes in the surrounding neighbourhood, the speech of President Obama in May, the moves towards Palestinian reconciliation, the approaching UN General Assembly: all these bring a renewed focus on the possibility of talks and a solution.

I have worked tirelessly for this possibility – working closely with President Abbas, Prime Minister Fayyad and Prime Minister Netanyahu and with many others in the region; and with our Quartet partners and with the Arab States to look for a strong and ambitious way forward, in which the EU plays the leading role this Parliament wishes us to.

The UN, the US and Russia responded to my letter requesting a Quartet meeting in Washington next Monday.

This will build on the Quartet meeting I chaired in Munich earlier this year.

Since then, the envoys have met intensively - and also, for the first time, with negotiators from both sides.

I do not underestimate the challenge, but my objective is clear - to try and adopt a statement next week that will help the Israelis and Palestinians to bridge the gap, and allow for a return to the negotiating table.

Many are looking to September - and the prospect of a resolution.

We don't yet know what that might say, and what reaction it might bring.

But I am clear that my energies should focus on trying to use this time to get the talks moving – and, on that, the EU is united.

And we have a strong position from the Council Conclusions – a united position.

I understand very well the concerns for the people of Gaza, having visited twice and seen for myself the situation.

I stress the need to get the crossings open, to provide what people need, and to ensure the security that Israel needs.

It is there that our energy should lie - and I am encouraged by meetings this week on the ground - but there is much more to do.

I thank Greece for its offer to route humanitarian aid to Gaza, in coordination with the UN.

I want to turn to two kingdoms – those of Morocco and Jordan – where the EU supports and encourages the strong commitment to reform.

On 12 June, King Abdullah of Jordan outlined ambitious reform proposals concerning political parties and the electoral process.

I have been in regular contact on this reform agenda with Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh – most recently on my last visit, two weeks ago.

And finally, this last weekend, there was good news from Morocco, with a referendum endorsing the new Constitution on Saturday.

The reforms proposed are a significant response to the legitimate aspirations of the Moroccan people.

I now hope that Moroccan citizens will remain at the centre of the implementation process, and that the dialogue will now widen and strengthen.

We are ready to give Morocco full support in this endeavour.

In Algeria, the state of emergency has been lifted, and the President's promises of reform now need to become action – something I raised with Foreign Minister Medelci recently at the EU-Algeria Association Council.

In Bahrain, I have continued to express my concern at the persistence of human rights violations, from trials lacking in due process, to the handing down of death sentences, and the disgraceful treatment of doctors who have tried to help those in need.

There may be some steps in the right direction: last week I was pleased to see that an independent international commission of inquiry into the events of the past few months has been established: so my and others' calls had been heard.

But we will remain as vocal as we need to be, as the national dialogue finally gets under way.

And finally, turning to Yemen, crippled by political stalemate and worsening humanitarian and economic conditions - as I discussed with the President before he was injured - the only way forward is a truly inclusive political transition, in line with the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative.

I have continued to work closely with our international partners, with the US and with the Council, in trying to unblock the situation and find a solution.

As President Saleh begins to recover, he must transfer power and follow through on his commitment to the transition.

We have made it clear that we are ready, alongside our international partners, to provide further humanitarian, political and practical support. I don't need to tell Honourable Members how serious the situation is in Yemen.

We are also ready to help prepare elections, and to re-establish a working Parliament – but the transition must begin now.

I close by thanking this Parliament for its steadfast support for our efforts to safeguard and promote these fundamental democratic values, rights and freedoms.

Honourable Members, this Parliament is unique in what it can offer to those in search of democracy.

You are the representatives of democracy: you demonstrate the power of the citizen, and the qualities of open debate and freedom of expression.

Many of you know only too well the challenges of building democracies, fighting for causes, and working for people.

You have much to offer, and I know you will be generous in your support for those trying to find their own path to democracy.

In Benhgazi, a young man, imprisoned by Gaddafi for 8 years, said to me: "We want what you have: democracy as everyday life..."