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O P E N I N G R E M A R K S

by HRVP at the 3rd European Union-League of Arab States

Ministerial meeting

"Dear Ministers, dear Secretary General, dear Ambassadors,

First, I would like to warmly thank Evangelos Venizelos, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, for having again provided a wonderful venue and hospitality for this meeting.

Can I on behalf of everyone thank you and your team so much for working so hard to ensure that we were all able to be here today.

It is a great honour for me to open this 3rd European Union-League of Arab States Ministerial Meeting. We come together not only to affirm our capacity to cooperate as international actors, but also to reinforce the strong commitment we have to our relationship as neighbours.

The relationship between us is growing into a truly strategic one, but also a matter of shared history and geography. Therefore we reaffirm our commitment to strengthen the dialogue that we have, to coordinate our respective resources so that we can work together and provide a joint response to some of the real challenges of economic growth and of course democratic progress in the region.

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The first meeting that was called in Malta in 2008 before I was in office responded to the need to forge a structured relationship between the European Union and the League of Arab States. I think that has been strengthened considerably, especially when we have seen some of the great changes that have taken place in the region. And at the meeting that I was privileged to be at in Cairo in 2012, we worked to further reinforce our links.

So I believe that this is an opportunity to strengthen and deepen the relationship after two more years and to lay the ground for greater cooperation in the future.

So for the purposes of this morning, in consultation with my co-chairs, colleagues, we propose that we cover two broad areas of discussion. The first is the bilateral relations and co-operation that we have together, so that we can look for ways that we can deepen and strengthen our bilateral cooperation.

And secondly, geopolitical issues that we are most concerned about.

We are considering the call of our colleagues from Libya, the situation in Iraq, and of course Syria which is not too far from our thoughts, along with other issues that I know colleagues wish to raise.

So again in welcoming you here, can I thank all of you and all the staff who worked so hard, especially to get to the point where we are in our declaration together, but to express again the strong commitment to deal with the challenges we face.

I want now to hand the floor to my colleague and dear friend Nabil Elaraby to thank him for his incredible work on behalf of the League of Arab States."
