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THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Foreign Affairs**

Brussels, 21 February 2011

President

**Catherine ASHTON**

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and  
Security Policy

# **P R E S S**

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## **Main results of the Council**

### **Main results**

*The Council had an in-depth discussion on the unfolding situation in the **EU's Southern neighbourhood**. It expressed its support for the peoples of the South Mediterranean and their legitimate hopes and aspirations for democratic change, social justice and economic development. It expressed the EU's readiness for a new partnership with the countries of the region to support the process towards democracy, rule of law, socio-economic development and strengthened regional stability, on the basis of shared principles, cooperation and local ownership. The Council condemned all acts of violence against peaceful demonstrators. The voices calling for the full respect of political, social and economic rights should be listened to carefully.*

*In particular, the Council condemned the ongoing repression against demonstrators in **Libya** and deplored the violence and the death of civilians. It called for an immediate end to the use of force against protesters, and for all parties to show restraint. It also called for freedom of expression and the right to assemble peacefully to be respected and protected and for the legitimate aspirations and demands of people for reform to be addressed through an open, inclusive, meaningful and national Libyan-led dialogue, that would bring a constructive future for the country and for the people.*

*The Council welcomed the decision of **Bahrain's** authorities to open a national dialogue. It urged the **Yemeni** authorities to reach out to the people through a comprehensive national dialogue.*

*The Council confirmed its solidarity with the people of **Tunisia** and the EU's engagement in support of their efforts to establish a stable democracy, based on the rule of law and pluralism, with full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to contribute to socio-economic development and institution-building. It reiterated its commitment to mobilising appropriate means and instruments in this regard.*

*The Council saluted the courage of the people of **Egypt** in their peaceful and dignified mobilisation for democratic change. The EU stands ready to support the peaceful and orderly transition to a civilian and democratic government based on the rule of law, with full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms and to substantively support efforts to create an economy which enhances social cohesion and promotes growth. The Council encouraged the transitional leadership in Egypt to set a clear timetable and take steps for constitutional reform, which will pave the way for free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections.*

*The Council also:*

- *expressed its commitment to a new partnership involving more effective support to those countries in the Southern Neighbourhood which are pursuing political and economic reforms;*
- *stressed the importance of strengthened cooperation with Mediterranean countries to address illegal immigration, in accordance with the principles of international law;*
- *welcomed the work already undertaken to follow-up the European Council of 4 February 2011 to prepare a package of measures and adapt the EU instruments in support of the region.*

***The Council also adopted conclusions on intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion and belief.***

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<sup>1</sup> Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks. Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>). Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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Mr William HAGUE

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**Commission:**

Mr Štefan FÜLE

Member

**ITEMS DEBATED**

**EU STRATEGIES / AFRICA**

**Sahel region**

The High Representative briefed the Council on ongoing work regarding an EU strategy for the Sahel region.

The strategy will start from the analysis that development and security are interlinked in a particularly intimate way in the Sahel. The approach will include several components such as the promotion of development, good governance and internal conflict resolution; political efforts to promote closer regional cooperation and a common strategy; capacity building in the field of security and the rule of law; the improvement of economic prospects and the prevention of radicalisation.

The strategy is due to be presented to the Foreign Affairs Council in March.

**Horn of Africa**

The High Representative briefed the Council on ongoing work regarding an EU strategy for the Horn of Africa.

The strategy will aim to establish a comprehensive political framework for a range of policy proposals to address widespread insecurity in the region. It is expected to focus on: tackling piracy; supporting stabilisation in Somalia; supporting peaceful transition in Sudan; and strengthening regional integration.

The strategy is due to be presented to the Foreign Affairs Council in March.

**MIDDLE EAST**

Ministers discussed the Middle East Peace Process during their working lunch, following a briefing by the High Representative on the Quartet meeting on 5 February and on the follow-up to the proposals for a package of measures to support Gaza. The High Representative also reported on her recent visit to the region, which included, Lebanon, Israel, the Palestinian Territories and Jordan. Ministers reaffirmed the need for urgent progress in the peace process.

**BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

Ministers discussed the next steps with regard to Bosnia and Herzegovina and how the EU could further reinforce its assistance and support to the country's integration perspective. They discussed the talks on government formation, the urgency for BiH to tackle the outstanding reform agenda, BiH's implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, a reinforced presence of the EU on the ground and the EU's toolbox for BiH.

**DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD**

Following its political discussion over dinner on Sunday, and ahead of the High Representative visit to Egypt, the Council discussed the unfolding situation in the region, notably the most recent events in Libya and Bahrain, as well as the EU's support for the countries of the region, notably Egypt and Tunisia, as tasked by the European Council on 4 February. The Council had an exchange of views with the President of the EIB (European Investment Bank), Philippe Maystadt.

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. Europe and the Mediterranean region share a common history and cultural heritage. The Council expresses its support to the peoples of the South Mediterranean and their legitimate hopes and aspirations for democratic change, social justice and economic development. The EU stands ready for a new partnership in its relations with the countries of the region to support the process towards democracy, rule of law, socio-economic development and strengthened regional stability, on the basis of shared principles, cooperation and local ownership. It is for the people of these countries to choose their future.
2. The Council continues to follow closely the very important developments in the region. Events differ in each country but it condemns all acts of violence against peaceful demonstrators. The voices calling for the full respect of political, social and economic rights should be listened to carefully.
3. In particular, the Council condemns the ongoing repression against demonstrators in Libya and deplors the violence and the death of civilians. The Council calls for an immediate end to the use of force against protesters, and for all parties to show restraint. Freedom of expression and the right to assemble peacefully are human rights and fundamental freedoms of every human being which must be respected and protected. The legitimate aspirations and demands of people for reform must be addressed through open, inclusive, meaningful and national Libyan-led dialogue, that would bring a constructive future for the country and for the people. We strongly encourage all sides in this respect.
4. The Council welcomes the decision of Bahrain's authorities to open a national dialogue.
5. The Council urges the Yemeni authorities to reach out to the people through a comprehensive national dialogue.

6. The Council confirms its solidarity with the Tunisian people and the EU's engagement in support of their efforts to establish a stable democracy, based on the rule of law and pluralism, with full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to contribute to socio-economic development and institution-building. Therefore, it remains committed to mobilising appropriate means and instruments in this regard. The EU welcomes the decision by Tunisia to hold an international conference on support to political and economic reforms. The Council reiterates its readiness to resume talks on the advanced status that shall be concluded with the government that will emerge from democratic elections. The Council calls on the Tunisian authorities to protect all people living in their jurisdiction without discrimination.
7. The Council salutes the courage of the Egyptian people in their peaceful and dignified mobilisation for democratic change. The EU stands ready to support the peaceful and orderly transition to a civilian and democratic government based on the rule of law, with full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms and to substantively support efforts to create an economy which enhances social cohesion and promotes growth. The rule of law should be respected and applied to all, including EU citizens.
8. The Council encourages the transitional leadership in Egypt to set a clear timetable and steps for constitutional reform, which will pave the way for free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections. The Council welcomes the intention of the transitional authorities to lift the state of emergency and encourages them to continue taking further steps towards a broad-based and genuinely inclusive dialogue while calling for a constructive approach of all parties. It expects the immediate release of all political prisoners.
9. The Council is committed to a new partnership involving more effective support to those countries in the Southern Neighbourhood which are pursuing political and economic reforms while drawing, where appropriate, on European experience of transition, including support to civil society, youth and enhanced economic cooperation. In this context, it is committed to respond to democratic transformation processes with specific political initiatives and support packages, building on existing and relevant programmes. It will review, adapt and mobilise appropriate support. As these countries strive towards democratic transition, full local ownership needs to be ensured.
10. The Council stresses the importance of strengthened cooperation with Mediterranean countries to address illegal immigration, in accordance with the principles of international law. JHA Ministers meeting later this week in the Council will pursue detailed work on this issue.

11. The Council welcomes the work already undertaken by the High Representative and the European Commission to follow-up the European Council of 4 February 2011 to prepare a package of measures and adapt the EU instruments in support of the region. The Council welcomes the recent visit to the region by the High Representative, her intention to visit Egypt and the dialogue with the authorities and other relevant interlocutors in these countries. It highlights the importance of the forthcoming high-level meeting on Egypt and Tunisia. It reiterates the need for a comprehensive approach across all fields of EU engagement building upon the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Union for the Mediterranean with a view to lending more effective support reflecting partners' commitment for reform."

**IRAN**

The Council discussed the human right situation in Iran, which remains a serious concern for the EU, notably the increase in executions this year. On 31 January the High Representative in particular condemned the execution of Dutch-Iranian national Zahra Bahrami in Tehran.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

A number of other topics were discussed, notably:

- information from the High Representative on current work regarding EU participation in the UN General Assembly;
- Belarus and the outcome of the recent donors conference;
- Pakistan and the follow-up to decisions on trade concessions;
- EU Special Representatives, notably the EUSR in South Caucasus.

**OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

A number of other items were adopted without discussion:

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion and belief**

Following its discussion at its January meeting, the Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council reaffirms the strong commitment of the European Union to the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief without any discrimination, and recalls the comprehensive conclusions it adopted in this respect on 16 November 2009.

The Council expresses its profound concern about the increasing number of acts of religious intolerance and discrimination, as epitomised by recent violence and acts of terrorism, in various countries, against Christians and their places of worship, Muslim pilgrims and other religious communities, which it firmly condemns. Regrettably, no part of the world is exempt from the scourge of religious intolerance.

The Council expresses its condolences and solidarity to the countries and individual victims of such acts and pays tribute to the commitment of countries to prevent them.

Freedom of religion or belief is a universal human right which needs to be protected everywhere and for everyone. It is the primary duty of States to protect their citizens, including persons belonging to religious minorities, as well as all people living in their jurisdiction, and safeguard their rights. All persons belonging to religious communities and minorities should be able to practice their religion and worship freely, individually or in community with others, without fear of intolerance and attacks.

Freedom of religion or belief is intrinsically linked to freedom of opinion and expression as well as to other human rights and fundamental freedoms, which all contribute to the building of pluralist and democratic societies. The international community needs to consolidate its collective response to those who want to use religion as an instrument of division, fuelling extremism and violence.

As part of the enhanced EU efforts in its bilateral and multilateral action on freedom of religion or belief, the EU and its Member States remain committed to the realisation of the freedom of religion or belief in all parts of the world, which will be addressed in the annual EU human rights reports. The EU will continue to engage with partner countries and offer its cooperation to promote religious tolerance and to protect human rights. The EU will engage further in multilateral fora, in particular the UN, to rally strong cross-regional support in the fight against religious intolerance.

The EU and its Member States will continue to support initiatives in the field of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in the spirit of openness, engagement and mutual understanding, including by the UN Alliance of Civilisations, UNESCO and the Anna Lindh Foundation.

The Council welcomes the ongoing efforts to enhance EU action to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief following the 2009 Council Conclusions. The Council invites the High Representative to report on the measures taken and on concrete proposals to further strengthen the EU action in this regard."

**EU Special Representative - Kosovo**

The Council adopted a Decision extending the mandate of the European Union Special Representative in Kosovo, Pieter Feith, until 30 April 2011.

**EU Common Military List**

The Council adopted an updated version of the EU Common Military List. This list defines equipment covered by Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP defining common rules governing the control of military technology and equipment.

**Association Council with Israel**

The Council adopted the European Union's position for the 10th meeting of the EU-Israel Association Council (22 February 2011).

**COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY**

**Montenegro - EU crisis management operations**

The Council adopted a Decision on the signing and conclusion of an agreement between the European Union and Montenegro establishing a framework for the participation of Montenegro in EU crisis management operations.

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