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PES Presidency Meeting - Paris, 19 May 2005

Statement on the Middle East

The PES Presidency gathered in Paris on 19 May 2005 issued a statement regarding the new state of play in the Middle East.

1. After years of paralysis, tensions and economic and social difficulties a period of new hope has started creating optimism. The political momentum has to be built upon in order to give a clear perspective for peace and democracy in the whole region; including in Israel and Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. People are suffering from poverty, oppression and the absence of freedom; it is high time to deliver a project offering a vision which integrates people's aspirations for a better future.

This project should integrate human rights values and principles; promote democracy and a multiparty system; establish secular regimes respecting the religious, cultural and ethnic minorities' rights; put men and women on the same footing at the centre of society and lead to a longstanding peace based on International law.

Europe should play a greater role in the Middle East. The EU should develop close bilateral political, economic and cultural relations with the countries of the region through the Association Agreements and a revitalisation of the Barcelona process. Following the 2nd PES Conference "The Euromed relations and the Barcelona process +10", in Toulouse, France, on 15-16 April 2005, we demand that a new impetus be given to the Barcelona process for political dialogue and regional integration, leading to the democratisation of the region and a better social cohesion. The EU should play a more active role to promote real democracy, reinforce the inter-cultural dialogue between our peoples, peace in the region and balanced and fair socio-economic relations.

The EU should also encourage regional integration among the countries of the region allowing them to have closer ties and creating the seeds for peace and prosperity.

The EU also has to play a more pro-active political role in the Quartet, including a stronger cooperation with the USA.

2. The PES reaffirms its conviction that the conflict between Palestine and Israel must be the top priority of the international community and that the end of the occupation, is the best way to open up a new era of stability and prosperity in a democratised region.

The PES underlines the successful commitments of the Palestinian people for democracy and their capacity to organise presidential, local and upcoming legislative elections in extremely difficult conditions. They have given proof of their will to build a real multi-party democracy.

We encourage the Palestinian Authority to go on the reform process and to stop all forms of violence. The EU must continue to give financial support to the Palestinian Authority. The PES welcomes the decision of the Israeli government to withdraw from the Gaza strip and some settlements in the West Bank. In any case this should not be accompanied by the development of new settlements in the West Bank, as all settlements have been already declared illegal by international law. Further withdrawal from the West Bank must be accomplished.

The PES Presidency expresses its opposition to the principle of walls separating people. In this particular case, it has to be underlined that the walls have dramatic influence on the daily lives of the thousand of Palestinians. The Wall should be stopped.

It is urgent to give a follow up to the Gaza disengagement plan by opening final status negotiations, including a move to the Road map implementation which had announced a viable and sovereign Palestinian state in 2005 must be put back on track immediately, in accordance to UN resolutions.

3. The “Cedars revolution” during the Lebanese spring has opened up a new era in the country. The pacific popular demonstrations and the strong cooperation between the opposition consecutive to the death of the late former prime minister Rafic Hariri have been a great success for the country’s sovereignty and independence.

Lebanon made great progress to overcome a period of dangerous turbulences and has now a new government. The PES welcomes these great changes that were unexpected only a few months ago. The PES calls all sides to respect fair political practices and democratic expression and not to use violence.

The PES now calls for free and fair elections in Lebanon. We express our support to Walid Jumblatt, leader of the PSP, and we urge the EU to commit to sending international observers during the electoral campaign.

4. The Middle East has undergone terrible conflicts for years, feeding all kinds of extremism, hatred, and terrorism. To combat these terrible phenomena, the PES expresses its commitment to struggle against their root causes: poverty, intolerance, oppression and frustration. We will always promote dialogue among civilisations and oppose the concept of a clash of civilisations.

5. The PES expresses its support to all democratic forces in the region which promote justice, human rights, open societies and progressive values.