

Arab Spring Conference
“A Progressive Agenda for a new Arab World:”
Tunis, 30 March 2012

“The Declaration of Tunis”

1. Introduction

In one year, the Arab world has lived historical events which have profoundly changed the region and the world. The process is still ongoing and no one can predict how it will end but it began with young women and men taking to the streets to express their anger and disappointment with the status quo. They wanted jobs, democracy, freedom and to live with dignity and human rights in their own countries and that is what they are still striving for.

The repressive situation had been present for decades and change finally happened when the people rose up and succeeded in ousting dictators in four countries: **Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen**. Some other countries have also engaged in reforms as in **Morocco and Jordan** under popular pressure. In other countries, people are struggling to claim their rights as currently in **Syria** and in the **Gulf countries**, especially in **Bahrain**. The **Palestinian people** are still facing a repressive occupation in their continued struggle for self-determination and justice. Progressives support the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to obtain an internationally recognised Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the two-state solution and emphasise therefore the urgent need for an immediate and comprehensive end of all occupation policies, including in East Jerusalem.

The spontaneous movement of the Arab Spring took political forces and civil society by surprise throughout the world. The mobilisation of young people and women should be congratulated for the courage that was shown; this momentous shift cannot be undone. Each country has faced and will continue to face its own challenges in achieving change. The challenges they face include: ensuring the democratic transition, establishing rule of law, fostering social development, modernising the economy and constitutional reform to name but a few.

Today, progressive forces from the region and from Europe must work on a common strategy to reach our goals of democratic development and social justice. The path in front of us will be a long and difficult one with many obstacles. This is why there **needs to be a strategic vision to ensure that the progressive forces will shape the future of these countries** and ensure the success of these revolutions.

2. Organisation of free and fair elections and ensuring real democratic transition

There is always a risk that as things calm down after revolutionary times there could be a return to autocratic rule as before. However, we believe that the populations will not accept this after so much sacrifice and so many years of suffering, as we witnessed with women's visible participation in the run up to the election and return to being almost invisible after the elections. **Our aim is to have democratic societies which implement and fully respect the rule of law and the will of the people to determine their own future**, where democratic institutions are a means to this end. These objectives may take time to meet but we must all persevere in order to achieve them. In the countries that have succeeded in ousting their former dictatorships the priorities must be to have free and fair elections and to build up stable

democratic countries and institutions, to create a guarantee for alternate governments. Socialists and social democrats in the region must offer political leadership, viable political programmes and alternatives that will lead the countries concerned towards democracy, social equality and a better and fairer distribution of wealth and how to develop it. **We are calling for clear separation of powers and proper democratic conditions in all countries across the region taking into account the specificity of each country.**

Following the revolutions socialist and social democratic parties of the region have a unique opportunity to garner support and enthusiasm from the thousands of women and men who took to the streets. Their demands must be met and they should be included in our parties. **Progressives must always be united, to ensure the creation of strong and viable political parties.** Our strength can be found in the participation of diverse groups of people including women, young people and all sections of society, which is essential in any modern political party. **Elections are the cornerstone of democracy and results of free and fair elections should be respected as they show the will of the people. However elections are not the only test of democracy, they are merely a starting point. True and long lasting democracy requires real reforms and changes in society.**

These emerging democracies must become pluralistic societies in order to be truly democratic. Inclusivity at all levels of society and government of women, young people and minorities, will only be achieved if there is a strong commitment to it, both socially and enshrined in the rule of law. **Ensuring fundamental rights and gender equality are respected must be a major concern of any progressive party and society.** Specific legislation on women's representation and participation and equal rights and opportunities for women is fundamental in these emerging democracies. The family code that exists in many Arab countries needs to be revised in order to ensure women equal access to and opportunities in politics, education, economic sphere, healthcare, employment, and decision-making at all levels and sectors in order for women to achieve economic independence and decide on their own future. Moreover, combating gender-based violence, including domestic violence, should be a priority.

Persecution of persons based on their faith can never be accepted in an inclusive society. Rights to worship and religious freedom should exist across all countries in the region.

Equal rights for all citizens are an essential part of any pluralistic and democratic society. The rights of women, young people, and religious minorities must be protected. In many countries across the world the everyday lives of minorities were improved by enacting Equality Laws. **We believe that all upcoming legal reforms should place an emphasis on having equality legislation enacted.** Furthermore we believe that the death penalty and all corporal punishment should be abolished for all crimes.

The ability of civil society to organise itself is a pillar of democratic society. This organisation can be either formal in the form of NGOs, or informal in the form of protests on the street. Repression against any kind of civil society mobilisation cannot be accepted. NGOs and foreign foundations should be given the freedom to work and accurately report what is happening without fear of pressure from authorities.

Recent elections have shown the competition between social-democrats, liberals, conservatives and religious parties throughout the region. Socialist and social democratic parties are united and preparing to compete against other political families. We believe that our policies are better for our societies to lead the region to true and lasting democracy and social progress. Competition means victories and defeats; we will accept free and fair democratic results. **We will work to change our society and are ready to coalesce with partners who respect democratic principles.** These must be our guidelines, as well as those of the International community.

Pressure should be put on the EU to provide assistance, including observer missions, to these processes where called upon.

An inclusive economic and social development

At the beginning of the revolutions, people who took to the streets were calling for freedom but also for dignity and jobs. At this juncture the countries of the Arab Spring are facing important economic and social issues. Both young people and women are suffering from a lack of participation and perspectives, which impedes their economic empowerment and independence.

As in Europe, there is a lack of jobs for young people; therefore **job creation must be a priority**. These issues should be of major concern for the newly installed governments in the countries concerned and the European Union must do all that it can to ensure development in social and economic terms.

Healthcare and education are pillars in society which need to be developed and protected by the State. Access to these essential services is a fundamental right of citizens regardless of socio-economic status. **The welfare state is a concept based on the principles of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility** for those unable to avail of the minimum provisions for a decent life. We believe that this is the model upon which our countries should be built.

The participants of this conference will follow closely the ongoing negotiations for trade agreements with Southern Mediterranean Arab countries. Trade agreements with the EU should be fair and balanced and should promote measures to stimulate the economies of our partners in a sustainable way. Open and frank negotiations need to take place on issues such as agriculture and trade.

3. Regional integration and south-south cooperation

Regional cooperation is an important aspect in tackling issues at an economic and social level. We believe that this kind of **south-south cooperation could be developed through the Arab League** and through the relaunching of the l'Union de Maghreb Arabe (UMA). Many benefits could come from this type of renewed relations, for example new talks between Morocco and Algeria could bring new political perspectives and economic opportunities.

4. Euro-Arab relations and the Barcelona process

There must be **a new type of relationship between the European Union and the MENA region**; one that is based on mutual understanding and respect, one that should not have dictatorships prevailing over democratic principles, one with social progress for all. After the mistakes of the past, Europe as a close neighbour, must take its responsibility in offering the support necessary.

A new political forum needs to be put in place in order to allow for engagement between Europe and the Arab World. This new forum should define the framework for a balanced partnership based on the respect of the universal values of freedom, democracy, human rights and equality between women and men. It should define a strategy of co-development and will have to deal with issues including trade, economic matters, energy, peace and security, migration and visa liberalisation. Furthermore progressives should continue their close connections through forums such as the Global Progressive Forum.

The proposals put forward by the European Commission for a "More for more" relationship needs to be executed. The European Union should recognise advancements made by the countries concerned on institutional and democratic reform and this should result in changes in European relations with those countries. A new vision for the Euro-Arab partnership and the Euro-Mediterranean partnership is needed, one that puts political cooperation and people first.

The socialist and social democratic family advocates a common approach for migration flows, in a spirit of solidarity, preserving human dignity, ensuring a humanitarian approach against the insufficient one imposed by the conservatives, respecting fundamental rights and international agreements, and which makes full use of all existing instruments at the European Union's disposal. Specific visa regimes and free mobility, conditional on progress in key areas of democratic consolidation, have always constituted an

essential pillar of the Union's policies. These policies should be promoted and promises fulfilled in the context of a new Euro-Mediterranean partnership. Particular efforts should be devoted to visa regimes for students and scholarships. The EU shall link development of bilateral relations with its partner countries to respect of human rights

5. With the Declaration of Tunis, the conference's participants are committed to a new Action Plan

- 1) Continue the **work of the PES Task Force** which is a platform for partners to exchange views, ideas, strategies, experiences and best practices. It is for a defined period of five years and is composed of Parties and Foundations bringing together relevant actors from both sides of the Mediterranean. It must coordinate the joint work of the PES, the S&D Group in the European Parliament, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies, the Global Progressive Forum, the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity and national progressive foundations. Regular meetings should be organised on different issues of relevance for the region's partners ;
- 2) Develop the initiative of the **GPF "Listening to the progressive Mediterranean"** to involve Trade Union, NGO's, bloggers and activists. In order to strengthen contacts between progressives;
- 3) **Promote socialist and social democratic policies for the region** through the European Union institutions, and in bilateral relations, by coordinating actions and initiatives;
- 4) Create a framework of exchange and cooperation with the participation of representatives of the region as well as their European counterparts including the PES, the S&D Group in the European Parliament, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies and the Global Progressive Forum **for the development of an Arab Social and Economic Development Plan;**
- 5) Support parties in the region by means of **seminars on constitutional reform** with experts and representatives from other transition countries;
- 6) Support the establishment of a **Euro-Arab Forum** supporting democracy and development;
- 7) **Continue to support party-building and political capacity for women and men** by means of training and recruitment in close cooperation with the region's socialist and social democratic parties;
- 8) Assist, where requested, in facilitating the **upcoming elections** with input on campaign programmes and political strategies.