



PES Statement Democratic transition: Tunisia, Egypt and beyond

Adopted by the PES Presidency, 24 February 2011

The protest movements in the streets of Tunis and Cairo have spread to a number of countries in the region with thousands of people demanding profound political and social reforms. Many instances of civil unrest caused by wide societal malaise have emerged in the Maghreb and Mashreq area. The outright oppression regimes imposed on society, often using the pretext of protection against Islamic radicalism reached an unacceptable climax: citizens could no longer tolerate increasingly deficient living conditions in a context of power and wealth monopoly by the few. The impact of the crisis, combined with neo-liberal policies, has weakened large segments of the population. This ongoing wave of protests has led to historical political changes with the overthrowing of the regime in place in Tunisia and Egypt. The wall of fear has fallen. These events, which have emerged within the countries' borders and without any external interference, represent a moment of great hope for the people of the southern shore of the Mediterranean and for democracy in the Arab world. They also demonstrate the need to reject those stereotypes according to which political movements in the Arab world contain dangerous Islamist sentiments.

The position upheld thus far by the PES is profoundly strengthened by the current events: the accumulation of social hardship and the lack of political freedom that authoritarian, autocratic and unscrupulously business-oriented regimes failed to address could only lead to the events the region witnessed in recent weeks.

The PES Presidency expresses its support to the Tunisian and Egyptian people that have united peacefully for freedom and a more just society. Rallies driven by legitimate demands and democratic aspirations have in many cases received violent responses from the authorities, claiming an important number of victims. Yet, the people of Tunisia and Egypt have continued to demonstrate peacefully and united.

The PES supports the democratic transition in Tunisia and Egypt and emphasises the role of opposition political forces, trade unions and civil society as well as the need to ensure a participatory and inclusive approach in the decision-making with national dialogue and reforms at such a crucial moment to guarantee freedom and pluralism.

The PES reiterates the crucial role to be played by political pluralism while rejecting any manipulation or a priori exclusion. It is important to engage in political dialogue with the wider political spectrum and groups of different beliefs. International observers must be present in numbers during the upcoming elections to further accompany the process, ensuring transparency and credibility.

The PES supports peaceful demonstrations taking place in other countries of the region, including Libya, Bahrain, Morocco, Jordan, Yemen and Iran, and stresses its solidarity with the people demanding a shift to democracy. The PES calls on the authorities to stop violence against protesters



and to respect the freedom of expression and assembly. The use of force by police and security forces against demonstrators, particularly brutal in Libya, Bahrain and Yemen, is unacceptable and must be condemned. The PES also demands the immediate release of political representatives, activists and journalists currently under detention on illegitimate grounds.

The PES is particularly concerned about the deliberate and relentless atrocities committed by the Libyan authorities and deplores the high number of innocent victims. The PES urges an immediate end to violence and the targeted killing of civilians and calls for the initiation of a meaningful dialogue through peaceful means. To this end, the PES calls for the end of the current dictatorship and the stepping down of its leader, Muammar Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi, in order to ensure a swift transition to democracy.

Europe should play a vital role by in the transition process. The EU must seize this historical opportunity and offer assistance in different forms to all emerging democratic movements. The PES calls on the EU to make adequate proposals on a number of areas including regional development, investment plans in the poorest regions, civil society promotion, media expansion and support to the justice system and the rule of law. The EU must support young people and a pluralistic civil society as they will increasingly shape the future of the region.

The EU must take all necessary steps to implement an Emergency Programme to support, when necessary, the countries' economies as financial need may endanger the democratic process altogether while also promoting a favorable environment for economic development by fostering, inter alia, private investments.

The PES calls on the EU to assist Egypt's top prosecutor request to freeze the foreign assets of ousted President Hosni Mubarak and his family. The EU should apply the same measures as those of former President Ben Ali and his collaborators. The EU should make sure that these assets are delivered to appropriate and trustful recipients in order to really benefit Egyptian and Tunisian people.

The EU should assume a key role in managing the migration and refugees flows caused by the exceptional situation in most of the countries of the south bank of the Mediterranean sea with a common approach and a spirit of solidarity.

The PES calls on the EU to be vigilant and relentless against all attempts to destabilize the new equilibrium, particularly in relation to the interferences which may derive from neighbours in the case of Tunisia, eager to put an end to such struggles in favour of democracy.

Confronted with the failures of previous policies (the Barcelona Process and the Union for the Mediterranean), the EU must open an in-depth discussion to review its strategy towards Mediterranean countries encompassing all relevant areas including a successful democratic transition and political pluralism, social fairness and progress, economic development and an adequate environment for investments. The EU must reiterate its full and unconditional commitment to the respect of human rights and democratic progress, present in the Barcelona process but omitted in the UMed. The EU must end a passive interpretation of Article 2 of the Association Agreements and assess the effectiveness of current Human Rights Dialogues the EU holds with a number of third countries.

The PES demands the respect of the new EU institutional framework and of the role of the High Representative, avoiding distortion of the EU position by contradictory statements stemming from EU Member States and their relevant Ministers.



The PES has a fundamental part to play vis-à-vis the EU's action in the region and therefore adopts the following Action Plan:

- 1) Developing with its partners a new strategy for the EU-Mediterranean partnership;
- 2) Stepping up contacts in the region by means of strong presence and initiatives including missions, seminars, delegations and experts exchanges;
- 3) Identifying and providing support to new partners;
- 4) Organising its next PES Euromed Conference on 28-29 April 2011 in Tunis, Tunisia, together with representatives of the opposition and political parties of the region. Since 2005, the PES decided to develop relations with opposition movements in the run up to the PES Euromed Conference in Toulouse. At that time, relations with Tunisia's RCD and Egypt's NDP were stopped and FDTL was chosen as main partner in Tunisia. On the contrary, the EPP Group in the European Parliament signed a cooperation agreement with the RCD in July 2010.

The FEPS, Foundation for European Progressive Studies, should play a role in the transition process to provide assistance and training for political parties and Think Tanks. In this context, the EU should make extra funding available to European political foundations by means of a specific budget line to support political capacity and training in this region.

What these countries are witnessing today is people's legitimate aspirations for a democratic transition. Under no circumstances should such aspirations be deceived or betrayed. European social democrats will continue to support democracy and the development of a plural political party system, freedom, the rule of law, the respect for human rights and solidarity in order to make sure that these legitimate aspirations are not let down.

