

3 February 2011

Catherine Ashton
High Representative of the European Union
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Bxl 12/202
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels

Dear Mrs Ashton,

The European Union must support the popular revolutions in Egypt and in other dictatorial regimes in the Arab Region

The eruption of the people's revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and other countries in the region is a response to years of political oppression, and the implementation of economic and social policies that have impoverished increasing number of citizens. While economies in the region have been growing, benefiting a privileged minority, large sections of the population have been denied access to affordable social services and the basic necessities of life for themselves and their families. Their rights have been eroded. For too long significant numbers of citizens living in the Arab region have been facing social, economic and political marginalization.

The spontaneous demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt were initially responding to social and economic hardship. They have been rapidly transformed into political expressions of mass mobilization, reflecting the basic links between political and socio-economic rights.

The determination of the people to bring democracy to their countries is both courageous and inspiring. In Egypt the Mubarak regime will not go easily, as the increasing violent response to pro democracy supporters demonstrates. It is likely that the outcome will be determined in the next few hours.

As you are acutely aware, the EU's response to the popular demands for change, and the actions by autocratic regimes towards these popular manifestations, will be a significant determinant for future relations with the Arab states and their peoples. The current framework for the Union's partnership with the region has formerly been based on respect for human rights, equality, democracy and

Eurostep A.I.S.B.L.

115 Rue Stévin, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel. +32 2 231 16 59 ☎ Fax. +32 2 230 37 80

E-mail: admin@eurostep.org ☎ Web: <http://www.eurostep.org>

adherence to the rule of law. The Euro-Mediterranean partnership seeks to promote solidarity and mutual respect between peoples, and the eradication of poverty.

The reality has been somewhat different. The EU has been building close partnerships with the oppressive regimes controlling their countries, including the ousted regime in Tunisia and the disclaimed regime in Egypt. EU policies have helped to maintain the regimes in office at the expense of the rights and livelihoods of the majority of their citizens. The economic and social policies that have been pursued in the name of this partnership may have helped achieve economic growth; but they have clearly contributed to increased poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

If supporting dictatorial regimes has been seen as the way to maintain Europe's security, current events demonstrate the fragility of such strategies. In neglecting the interests of ordinary citizens, this strategy was never sustainable. This can only be assured by genuine democratic processes. In the current turbulent situation there is clearly a need to secure a viable transition. However, asking autocratic governments to reform themselves and implement such changes is unlikely to result in genuine democracy. The current regimes will not enable the space required, but seek to continue exerting control. This will only lead to further frustration and alienation in which "extremism" is more likely to flourish.

There is a need to empower democratic alternatives whether from civil society or political movements. For this to be possible the dictatorial regimes must go. Only then can there be more space for such alternatives to be empowered.

The current events in the region offer an opportunity similar to the popular demonstrations that resulted in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the cold war. The opportunity must be grasped. The EU can, and must act with responses that support and help in this process. This must include encouraging the rapid departure of discredited leaders and their allies; encouraging the creation and maintenance of the space in which democratic alternatives can be built; and working to prevent external interventions that seek to subvert the outcome, not least from Israel. The dictatorial regimes in the region, and the Mubarak regime in particular, must be left in no doubt that their actions will not be tolerated, and the EU's aid should be stopped if they continue.

It is inevitable that the institutions and apparatus of the current regimes will not change overnight. Indeed there is clear evidence of their attempts to turn back the tide of reform. In Egypt the orchestrated and violent confrontations instigated by 'pro-Mubarak supporters' and reports we have received today of military police raids on the offices of respected civil society organisations affiliated to ANND, and the arrests of their clearly aim to undermine the capacity of the current protests to continue.

The ongoing response from these institutions will continue to be driven by past policy and practice defined by decades of dictatorship and oppression. The concept of state security, which has been synonymous with the security of the regime, must be transformed to a comprehensive human security approach in which adherence to human rights, social justice and sustainable development are at the core.

This not only requires the fostering of the demands for genuine democratic processes, but also an urgent and rapid assessment of the current economic policies and social models so as to ensure that they can actually deliver this broader approach to human security and according to the principles of the partnership. This includes reviewing elements of those policies such as trade liberalisation and deregulation that have undeniably contributed to increased social and economic exclusion for large number of people.

While the main responsibility for this lies within the countries of the region themselves, it is also crucial that future EU policies and their implementation are revised to ensure that they support these processes and address the real needs and aspirations of people in the region. Civil society organisations will have a crucial role to play in the process of transition, but their ability to engage effectively will be constrained without access to adequate resources. The EU, its member states and other donors could provide vital support in this regard.

Future EU policies must truly reflect the values and objectives of the Barcelona process, be rooted in a comprehensive partnership that seeks peace and stability, shared prosperity, and social cultural and human partnerships. The EU should also play an active role within the international community to foster support for this approach. The EU's future relationship with the region must be based on a partnership that benefits all. It is only when this is achieved that peace and stability within the region will be possible.

The Mubarak regime has not yet accepted defeat and will continue to seek the destruction of the people's revolution. Should they succeed the opportunities to achieve far reaching reform – not just in Egypt but also in the region as a whole – will be lost. We sincerely hope that this will not be the outcome, and that we are indeed at the beginning of a new era.

Sincerely,



Ziad Abdul Samad
Director
ANND



Simon Stocker
Director
Eurostep



Roberto Bissio
Coordinator
Social Watch