

Statement from the Delegation of Civil Society Groups from 7 Arab countries visiting the European Institutions

TOWARDS POLICIES THAT SERVE PEACE, DEMOCRACY, AND ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE BETWEEN THE EU AND ARAB COUNTRIES

Demand for an immediate change in the social and economic priorities between Europe and Arab Countries

(Brussels, 27th – 30th June 2011)

The Arab region witnesses a period of change and quest for new social contract between the citizen and the state, based on respect of fundamental freedoms, rights, dignity, and rule of law. Along the multiplicity of factors including political repressions, corruption, and lack of accountability and legitimacy of Arab regimes, the peoples' uprisings and revolutions reflect a climax of failure of social and economic development paradigms. Indeed, citizens are calling for a new development paradigm, which re-enforces the right to development and economic and social justice. Accordingly, the democratic transition in the region necessitates revising the approach to the economic and social partnership, aligned with reforms of political systems and enhancing the role of civil society. Moreover, achieving sustained democratic policies processes and economic and developmental progress necessitate achieving stability of the region through establishing peace and a just and sustainable solution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in respect to the relevant UN Resolutions and the people's right to self determination and right of return. Space, time, and resources to nurture a national dialogue that identifies political, economic, and social reforms are core to this challenge.

These changes in the Arab countries necessitate a re-thinking of priorities and policy approaches in the cooperation and partnerships with the European Union, on various fronts whether political, economic, social, and cultural. These changes have swept across the whole Arab region, including the Maghreb, Mashreq, and Gulf countries, thus requiring a holistic approach in the revision of the relation between the EU and the various Arab countries. Indeed, such steps are essential for establishing the common future of prosperity and stability that the EU and the Arab countries can share.

Within the context of their visit, the delegation welcomes the engagement presented by the Commissioner Stefan Fule and the other officials from the EU institutions. The delegation will actively participate in the discussions of the redesign and the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Action Plans.

Economic and Social Reforms at the Heart of People's Revolutions in the Arab Region

Given the indivisibility of human rights and the centrality of the right to development to justice and equality, the demands of the Arab peoples' revolutions combined the need for regime change at the political level as well as paradigm change at the development levels. Accordingly, there is a need to re-think productive sectors' policies in the Arab countries, to address development challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequalities. This necessitates re-establishing trade and investment policies that are adequate to the development levels achieved by the Arab countries and that is tailored and managed to serve the revised development paradigm.

Within this context, the European Neighborhood policy is expected to include recognition for the need to assess the human rights and development outcomes of trade and investment relations between Europe and the Arab countries before proceeding towards more of the same. Trade policies and their implementation must contribute constructively to the strategic objectives established by the EU's partner countries for their own national development. This indeed would reflect the EU declarations on policy coherence for development. Furthermore, achieving coherence of trade policy with that of a country's development goals necessitates establishing cross-sectoral dialogue at the policy making level, and within institutionalized forums and mechanisms that monitor the developmental outcomes of trade policies.

Moreover, policy making tackling mobility and movement of persons ought to expand from focusing on security and border management to a genuine cross-sectoral dialogue that brings together the EU with its partner countries and integrate the rights-based approach to thinking about mobility, peoples' right to movement, labor markets, workers' rights, and trade relations. This should expand covering as well the minorities and refugees, taking into consideration the recent humanitarian crisis they faced. Thus, it is necessary to develop and implement an effective and efficient international emergency response mechanism.

Reaction to the Revised European Neighborhood Policy and EU's Response

While the genuine efforts of the EU in revising and adapting the ENP are welcome, it is important to consider within the approach to differentiation (more for more, less for less) the following points: (1) there is a need to revise the Action Plans in order to achieve plans that reflect national ownership and visions, which is not the current case (2) there is a need to stay cautious on application of the proposed conditionality, avoiding policy conditionalities, and clarifying ways in which conditions based on the respect of human rights, democratic progress, and rule of law can be applied, and (3) there is a need to revisit the role of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), from project-based approach to more linkage with broader inclusive and nationally owned policy priorities, while enhancing the role of civil society under this cooperation project, and not focusing the role of the UfM secretariat on catalyzing between states, EIB, international financial institutions and the private sector as stated in the communication "A new response to a changing Neighborhood".

New Approach to the Role of Civil Society

The revised approach towards stronger partnerships with the people and enhanced cooperation with civil society, in its various organizations forms is a welcome step by the EU. Such an approach would be well enhanced by establishing more structured and institutionalized dialogue with civil society groups, including engagement at all stages of policy design, project and program identification, implementation, and evaluation. Within this context, it is essential that civil society groups take part in the thinking around the mandate, design, mechanisms, and policy approaches of the Civil Society Facility and Democracy Endowment proposed within the revised ENP. Moreover, it is of added value to consider establishing an open and representative advisory group from civil society groups from Southern Partner countries to assist and take part in the processes to be established as part of the EU response towards changes in the region, including the expected Task Force on relations with Arab countries.

Financial Support from the EU and Development Concerns

While support to the peoples' revolutions and aspirations is welcome, there is a need to ensure that related aid and financial flows is directed to serve social and economic justice and the public good, based on the re-established economic and social visions in each of the recipient countries. For those purposes, the EU Commission for Development and Cooperation, the European Investment Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development have a responsibility of ensuring transparency regarding the amounts of the assigned aid and its nature (whether grants or loans), the related mechanisms of disbursement, the monitoring mechanisms and criteria (including clear measurement criteria of the interventions' added value in terms of poverty reduction, employment creation, and respect of democratic processes), and the beneficiaries in terms of sectors and entities.

The Role of the EU Member States, European Parliament, and European Civil Society

Civil society groups from the Arab region look towards wider engagement with EU Member States on interests and policy approach, more structured and institutionalized dialogue with the European Parliament and specialized committees, as well as broader, re-energized, and new alliances and solidarity and partnerships with European Civil Society groups.