



Štefan Füle European Commissioner For Enlargement And European Neighbourhood Policy Speaks On Arab Spring Conference

Date: 2012-02-06 08:07

Source: [European Commission](#)

Ladies and gentlemen,

The events of the Arab spring have been truly remarkable. They have brought about a dramatic shift in the region, and they have led us to rethink our approach to our Southern Neighbourhood.

Following revolutions last year, there has been genuine and impressive progress, most notably in Tunisia where the calls from the people for greater dignity and personal freedom have been heard, and have been acted on.

Elsewhere reforms have been initiated, but much remains to be done (Algeria). In other countries, change has not gone in the right direction so far (Syria).

The process of democratisation will be long with some setbacks and frustrations, but strong democratic forces have been unleashed.

Today, I want to set out briefly how we have adapted our approach to reflect these dramatic changes in the region:

- * The broad steps we have taken in rethinking our approach;
- * The nature of our assistance;
- * And then finally the prospects for the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There are two key steps that we have taken in renewing our approach.

The first has been to recognise the errors of the past. Our policy in the region has not always been right.

We have changed our approach and there is today much less tension between our interests and our values. However, we need a constant reality check as to whether our policies and instruments can respond to the historical challenges.

There can be no return to complacency towards authoritarian regimes. The European Union stands behind the forces of change and modernisation.

The second step has been to develop a methodology that supports change. Here we have developed two key principles: 'more for more', and mutual accountability.

While implementation of the 'More for more' principle will be challenging - because there will inevitably be differences in how we perceive each country's progress - the direction is clear: we will only provide those extra incentives - extra funding, visa facilitation and liberalisation, greater access to the EU market - to those countries engaged in genuine political reforms.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This extra support takes a number of different forms. But at its heart remain the 3"Ms": money, mobility and markets.

Money

First, we have refocused our entire assistance to match the new policy priorities. And then we have increased resources where needed. Between 2011 and 2013 €1 billion extra for the Neighbourhood as a whole on top of the €5.7 billion that are already programmed.

We have a new Spring programme which is an instrument to deliver on more for more for the Southern Neighbourhood with a budget of €350 million for 2011 and 2012.

In addition to our grant aid, EIB funding has been increased by €1 billion and the EBRD's mandate extended to give a possible €2.5 billion additional lending per year.

But public resources are limited. It is essential to mobilise private investments conducive to job creation and provide transparent framework for investments.

Mobility

Second, Mobility - this is crucial for a true partnership with our Mediterranean neighbours. "Mobility Partnerships" have been initiated with Tunisia and Morocco already in October 2011.

There are over 740 additional Erasmus Mundus mobility grants for academic exchange with Southern Mediterranean countries this academic year. And a further 80 million euros has been allocated for ENP countries in 2012 and 2013 for these scholarships.

Markets

Third, on markets, mandates for negotiating so-called "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements" with Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan were approved by the Council on 14 December. These will lead to progressive and deep economic integration with the EU internal market.

In the meantime, we are looking at trade measures that can be introduced rapidly and that can be beneficial for both sides: for example the agricultural liberalisation agreement with Morocco. We hope to conclude a similar agreement with Tunisia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These 3 "Ms" are the cornerstone of our assistance. But we are able to help in other areas as well.

We are intensifying cooperation with our Southern neighbours in important areas such as transport, energy and information technologies.

The European Union has been recognised as a key partner for the organisation and monitoring of elections. Our assistance and observation mission in Tunisia was very much appreciated. The Algerian authorities have invited us to observe upcoming elections. Expert advice was provided in Morocco and national observation was supported in Egypt.

And our assistance is supporting the fledging civil society organisations that are crucial to democratisation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me now look briefly to the future.

The political support of the European Union is a given. But we must all work together to ensure delivery on the ground.

Our strong engagement in the region will need to be sustained over many years. Successful transitions are not measured by the first rounds of democratic elections but by the second, third and fourth rounds.

We must engage with the new leaderships. We should not be afraid of the outcome of democratic elections. On the contrary, the successful electoral process in Tunisia and Morocco (leading to new governments) and Egypt (where full transition to civilian rule has yet to take place) gives hope for a transition to fully representative governments. We have to judge our partners on the basis of facts and the respect of their international commitments.

We will engage fully with the new leaders and provide increased support to those engaged in reform. This was the essence of my message to the new Moroccan government during my recent visit and also the collective message of President Barroso and the Commission to the Tunisian Prime Minister whom we met yesterday in Brussels.

Of course such fundamental change cannot be built simply by co-operating with governments. In particular, we need to continue to engage with parliaments, the business sector, the press and civil society.

Civil society in particular has played a vital role in the changes we have seen and will continue to play a vital role in the transition to come. We are actively supporting civil society

And will better associate civil society to our policy dialogue with the partner countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Through this approach, I believe that we can build on the momentum of these recent dramatic events, and help to support further positive change in the region.

Thank you.

Published on eGov monitor (<http://www.egovmonitor.com>)

Source URL: <http://www.egovmonitor.com/node/46278>