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Closing Remarks by Alar OLLJUM, EEAS

- I will speak about the changes in the Arab world, particularly following the Arab Spring, and EU's response.
- Major geopolitical changes in North Africa and the Middle East, and associated security challenges have been taking place long before, shaped by 9/11 and the war in Iraq. Changing power relations among major players, including the ascendance of Turkey as a major regional force, Iran's nuclear ambitions, the spread of terrorist groups in the region, but also the perennial Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been the main features.
- The uprising of people in the Arab world – the Arab Spring – and the important regime changes it has brought about in some countries have accelerated these shifts in the region. But also produced new challenges.
- Perhaps most important is the tragic conflict in Syria, which started with the violent reaction by the Assad-regime to peaceful demonstrations in the town of Deraa and which, as we know, has now lasted two years and turned ever more bloody with tens of thousands of people killed, and hundreds of thousands displaced. The potential of this conflict to spill-over into Syria's neighbouring countries and,

indeed, to destabilise the whole region are a major concern to the EU and the international community. Since the start of the conflict the EU has worked on several fronts in its efforts to bring it to an end. Efforts included political and diplomatic pressure on the Assad-regime, tough economic and political sanctions against the regime and its economic supporters, and diplomatic efforts aimed at persuading the various opposition groups to unite. In addition, the EU is providing a large amount of humanitarian assistance to the people of Syria and the neighbouring countries who host Syrian refugees.

- Moreover, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict still has the potential of spinning out of control. It is ever more necessary for the parties to reach a negotiated settlement and find a solution based on two states that live side by side in peace and security. The changes in the political landscape in the region make this even more important. The EU is fully behind such a two-state solution and has, not least through the relentless efforts of the High Representative, been working consistently and tirelessly towards this goal. We are engaged in dialogue with the two parties and other governments in the region. And we work in close coordination with the United States and other major players, that is Russia and the United Nations, through the Quartet.
- A third important challenge is the instability in the Sahel region, which in the aftermath of the conflict in Libya has led to increased spreading of weapons and armed groups. What is currently happening in Northern Mali is but one element in a complex situation where the EU is working with governments in the region to protect

their territorial integrity, to combat terrorism and to stem the illegal flow of arms, drugs and people.

- Amidst the security challenges in the region we should not forget that the Arab Spring also has presented opportunities to fundamentally change the way the states have been governed for decades and to bring freedom, dignity and prosperity for the people. This desire was at the heart of many of the upheavals in the Arab world.
- We have witnessed real democratic elections for the first time in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. These countries are currently in various stages of drawing up new constitutions. In Jordan and Morocco, significant reforms are underway under the leadership of their respective Monarchs. These are processes the EU has been supporting right from the beginning through technical and financial assistance.
- We also see upsurges in civil society activities, not least in Libya where no such activities were permitted under the Gaddafi-regime. Also in this field the EU has focused its support.
- The EU's response to the Arab Spring was shaped in various stages. First, in the immediate phase when uprisings began, the EU implemented sanctions against the dictators then still in power. Member states banned them and their entourage from entering any EU country and froze their assets in bank, real estate etc. In the following phase we redirected our technical and financial assistance towards the emerging new priorities of the transitional governments and the civil society organisations.

- Following those immediate reactions the EU revised its policy framework which guides the assistance and support to our Southern (and Eastern) neighbours. This work was reflected in two joint communications issued in March and May 2011 by the High Representative Cathrine Ashton and Commissioner Füle who is responsible for EU's neighbourhood (and enlargement). These communications reflected some of the lessons we had learned, that is: Stability to be sustainable requires democratic governments. Democracy is more than elections and must be based on the rule of law and include the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as checks and balances on policy formulation and implementation. Civil society organisations are indispensable actors in democracies and must play important roles as watch dogs, interest and advocacy groups, learning forums and service providers.
- The EU support to countries in transition has been increased in financial terms in spite of the economic crisis in Europe. Also, our support programmes are now based on a higher degree of differentiation, allowing us to better tailor the individual programmes to specificities of the country. EU support is also performance based. The more a partner country demonstrates its commitment to reform, the more the EU is willing to support it.
- Apart from higher grants and loans in support of political and economic reforms, capacity building, SMEs, rural development and infrastructure, the EU is also committed to further integration of our regional partners into the Single Market through Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements and to improve mobility

through Mobility Partnerships. While work on trade and mobility are in progress, it is no secret that these areas constitute significant challenges to the EU which, in part, are accentuated by the economic crisis.

- The EU has also strengthened, and continues to strengthen, its support to civil society. Support is not only granted through our existing instruments, such as the Instrument for Stability and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. The EU has also established a new instrument for the purpose, The Civil Society Facility, and is supporting the European Endowment for Democracy which is being established and should soon be operational.
- It is crucial that the support of the European Union is “walking on both legs” as it were. That is to say we will support political reform and deepen our political dialogue with partners. But we also help creating jobs and inclusive economic growth. These are both equally important dimensions of the transition processes and efforts to tackle the multiple challenges.
- Another important lesson we have drawn from the challenges in the region is this: Many challenges are regional in nature and require regional approaches and regional solutions. Our bilateral policy framework and instruments need to be complemented by cooperation with regional organisations.
- One such organisation is the League of Arab States. Our cooperation with the Arab League was expanded following the Libya crisis, where the League played a crucial role. The Arab League is also deeply

engaged in finding a solution to the Syria crisis. The EU has provided technical support to the Arab League, strengthening its capacity to handle crisis management, for example by establishing a Crisis Room at Arab League headquarters in Cairo.

- Last fall, the cooperation between the EU and LAS took a significant leap forward. The foreign ministers of the EU and LAS member States met in Cairo for an intense and productive political dialogue on issues like the Middle East and Syria and other important topics related to developments in the region. They agreed on a joint declaration with a number of important statements on these and other issues. Moreover, they endorsed a work programme for the next couple of years of concrete technical cooperation between the EU and the Arab League in the fields of energy, culture, empowerment of women, civil society, legal affairs, humanitarian assistance, crisis management and electoral processes.
- Not many believe that the transition to democracy, stability and prosperity will be an easy, straight-forward journey. We must be prepared for set-backs, some of which can be more serious than others. This is why the EU is committed to stay the course and be a partner of the Arab world in the longer term.
- While we certainly are not the only partner, the EU sees its added value in supporting the aspirations of the Arab people both for freedom and dignity, and for economic prosperity.