



EUROPEAN UNION

Cairo, 14 November 2012
A 511/12

Speech by High Representative Catherine Ashton at the opening session of the EU-Egypt Task Force

Prime minister and Minister Amr, Vice-President Tajani, Excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

I would say that this is the most important meeting that has ever been organized between Egypt and the European Union. And I say that because of the breadth of the presence here today and because of the work that has already taken place in the discussions yesterday and this morning. 20 months ago people in Egypt gathered in Tahrir Square to demand political and social and economic rights. Since that day this country has come a long way. But the people continue to drive the demand and it is they that inspire us all to gather here today. The holding of democratic presidential elections is a historic landmark for this country. President Morsi has impressed the European Union not just with what he says but with his commitment. And some of us had the privilege of meeting with him this morning. And it was in our meeting with the president two months ago in Brussels that the idea for today's Task Force was launched. I must congratulate all of the people who calculated exactly how many hours they had from that day to this to gather this impressive audience to work closely with our Egyptian colleagues and most importantly of all to pull together the commitments that we will be demonstrating today. I know that there is much more to do to embed what I call deep democracy. That is about not just the process of one election. It is about ensuring the future, the development of civil society, the role of an independent administration, the fight against corruption, and ensuring that the people will see democracy rolled out in their life time and for generations to come. I know therefore how important drafting a constitution that reflects the aspirations of all people is and the importance of parliamentary elections. But we know too in the European Union that we have responsibilities. A fresh start means making a break with what went before. We have acted fast in freezing the funds that have been misappropriated and now we are working on a coordinated European approach to ensure those funds are quickly made available to their rightful owners, the citizens of Egypt. We also know we have to help to get the economy back on track especially reviving tourism, creating jobs and encouraging investment. There are a large number of chief executives and senior officers from European companies here who have been meeting with Egyptian companies and government officials under the able leadership of Vice President Tajani to whom I pay credit for his tremendous work in these last weeks. Working together to show the

P R E S S

FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

Michael Mann +32 498 999 780 - +32 2 299 97 80 - Michael.Mann@eeas.europa.eu

Maja Kocijancic +32 498 984 425 - +32 2 298 65 70 - Maja.Kocijancic@ec.europa.eu

Nabila Massrali +32 229 69218 - Nabila.massrali@ec.europa.eu

COMM-SPP-HRVP-ASHTON@ec.europa.eu

www.eeas.europa.eu

EN

commitment towards this economy and recognising a good investment when you see one. We are as the European Union the main trading partner the biggest source of development cooperation and of direct investment, so we believe we have a role and a responsibility in this process.

And I've spent most of my life in working and bringing public and private sectors together. Another manifestation of that is by simply looking around this room.

I know the people of this country, just as those who are interested in investment, want to see stability, democracy, governed by the rule of law. It's absolutely crucial for the future of the people and to guarantee their human rights. It's also crucial to guarantee the kind of long-term stability and investment that is going to be so necessary. I'm especially pleased therefore to know that the meetings with civil society have been successful. I said to the President this morning that they're also demanding, because civil society is there to demand, they are there to make sure the country continues to move in the right direction and they're there to make sure that their voices are heard, and that's true in the European Union as well.

I've been very privileged in my many visits now to this country, since those events of 20 months ago, to meet with young people and with women, and you will not be surprised when I say how important it is, that they're fully involved in the present and of course the future of this country. They will bring much to it. I would argue that any society that does not engage with everyone will never be as successful as it could be. That's true in the European Union, it's true in Egypt, it's true everywhere. So what we're trying to do is bring together the different elements in this Task Force, to begin a process, not to end it. I said to the President, earlier on today, Mr Prime Minister, that we did not come with promises, we came with commitments but all that we've put before you is already guaranteed, it's been through the system, it's been through the European groupings, it's been through the boards of the financial institutions. It's real, it's not a promise, it's a commitment. And I hope that you will see that this is only the beginning, that it's not a one-way partnership. We gain a great deal from our relationship with Egypt, we have much to gain in the future. Somebody said this morning every child in the European Union learns about the history of this country, it's in the curricula of every school in every country in the European Union. And every child when they read about the history of this country dreams of visiting it, and dreams of seeing for themselves some of the great monuments. You will have noticed, I hope, in this hotel in the lobby we have a replica of the tomb of Tutankhamun and that is a great description of what this is all about. Because there before you is something that those who've seen the original will tell you is exactly the same when you look at it but it's created by the technological genius of a group of people. They're Europeans, who came here to ensure that it will happen. Most importantly of all, the technological genius will be transferred to provide skills in this country. It will become Egyptian technology and I think it's a good metaphor for the recognition that we can create the best in the world and that we can use it to celebrate the past, with all its splendour, but to look forward to the enormous potential of the future. European Union-Egypt, Egypt-European Union, partners in action. Thank you.
