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## **Speech of High Representative Catherine Ashton on main aspects and basic choices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence policy**

**European Parliament - Strasbourg**

Mr President, Honourable Members,

I will make three contributions to the Parliament today, but I want to start by giving you my vision of the issues that we face, and also to touch upon on some other important issues.

But let me begin: There are storms blowing across countries we call our neighbours: 'Arab spring', 'winds of change' - whatever imagery we use, none of us in this house know where this will end, and what the end will bring. Aspirations are high, and expectations too, that the revolutions will have been worth the blood that has been spilt, worth the turmoil and fear, worth the economic havoc in a world already grappling with the worst economic problems for decades.

The uprisings across North Africa and the Arab world pose great challenges for Europe, but also opportunities we cannot afford to miss. Two principles have to underpin what we do. The first is that we in Europe know how long and painful the journey towards liberty can be. Our own path to 20th century liberal democracy was a very slow one. The EU itself was born in the ashes of conflicts that remind us how terrible life can be when democracy breaks down. Add into that the mixed record of Europe's empires, and some humility is in order, even as we assert that democracy is the necessary foundation of human progress.

Second, democracy is of course about votes and elections – but it is also about far more than that. What we in Europe have learned the hard way is that we need “deep democracy”: respect for the rule of law, freedom of speech, respect for human rights, an independent judiciary and impartial administration. It requires enforceable property rights and free trade unions. It is not just about changing governments, but about building the right institutions and the right attitudes. In the long run, “surface democracy”, democracy that floats on the top – people casting their votes freely on election day and choosing their governments – will not survive if “deep democracy” fails to take root.

# **P R E S S**

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But there is no certainty in the outcome in any country, and no quick fix or short term solution that will create the world so many long to see. And meanwhile the spectre of religious intolerance casts its shadow - witness the recent events in Egypt - finding its excuse in uncertain times to play on fear and wreak destruction. Freedom of religion or belief is a universal human right that must be protected everywhere. We need to condemn all those who seek to use religious belief as a means of oppression - and support those who advocate tolerance, whether in Syria, Pakistan, Egypt or elsewhere.

Europe has choices to make, too. As we look at our neighbourhood, we have to be ready to rise to the challenges that are being asked of us. I can make hundreds of statements - and I do. I deplore, condemn, urge, demand - but we also need to act. And that action has to come in different forms.

Let me take sanctions. We impose sanctions against regimes which treat the lives of their citizens as worthless, with people killed at the hands of the police or security services that they command.

Sanctions on Syria were imposed yesterday – an embargo on arms, an asset freeze and travel ban on 13 key individuals in the regime, the freezing of our Association Agreement, and of our cooperation with Syria. Let's be blunt and clear, as I was with the Foreign Minister of Syria yesterday: what is happening in Syria is a popular aspiration for democracy and the rule of law – it's not some foreign plot. By failing to see what it is, the regime loses legitimacy and estranges itself from the people and from the international community. Violent oppression and threats inside and outside are tools of an era long gone. Our concern is with the people of Deraa where the UN has been refused access, in Baniyas where the crackdown continues, in Hama where tanks have moved in. The Syrian people will not bow to tanks. We say to the regime to change course and to change course now. As I said to Minister Moallem, the Foreign Minister of Syria, yesterday - you must allow immediate and unhindered access to humanitarian support and to the media and only then can your claims of support for peaceful protests be substantiated.

And in our Eastern neighbourhood - in Belarus, where President Lukashenko failed to use last December's Presidential elections to show his readiness for change and a more open and democratic, European society. Not only did he not take this chance, but in using violence against peaceful demonstrators and multiplying the number of political prisoners, he has shown contempt for democracy and the rule of law. I met with the families of those imprisoned. And I know he has left us with no other option than to adopt strong sanctions in response, targeting those in the regime responsible for the crack-down, including President Lukashenko himself. And also that we should step up our support for civil society and for people-to-people contact.

And then there is the action which is about our direct engagement.

In Camp Ashraf in Iraq: what happened on 8th April in Camp Ashraf is deplorable, and has my strongest condemnation. I have been adamant that we need a strong and united EU response. I wrote to the Foreign Minister of Iraq, and spoke to him again yesterday. While I do not question Iraq's sovereignty over all its territory, it has a duty to protect the human rights of Ashraf residents.

I have condemned the violence, and called for an inquiry - an inquiry that has to be as thorough as it is independent, and which should tell us exactly what happened. But, honourable members, there is no simple solution here - several options for a long term solution are being considered, with the UN in the lead. All present challenges. I am grateful for the European Parliament's contributions: and I will take this to the Foreign Affairs Council, and discuss it in detail with the UNHCR. Our Ambassador to Iraq arrives today, and she knows the importance I attach to this issue. We need to pursue and make sure that we find a correct course of action and inquiry, and our condemnation is absolute.

In Yemen too, where the Gulf Cooperation Council has put forward its proposals, and President Saleh has once again hesitated. I spoke to him not long ago - we talked about his discussions with the opposition, and the proposals on the table. I told him he knew what he had to do - in the interests of his country - and that he should do it. In my meetings in the Gulf, when I met with the King of Bahrain: we discussed the initiative for dialogue without preconditions that the Crown Prince has put forward, and I urged him to pursue that dialogue. The current course is not the answer - we need to see fair and civil trials, and that the death penalty is avoided in all circumstances.

In all of these cases it is about the direct engagement that we have, and the pressure we apply, and the directness of our approach. I am very clear with all the leaders I speak to about what needs to happen. I do this with the support of this house and 27 Member States.

Or take Libya. There are members of this house who wish that the EU had a stronger defence and security policy. I say to them this - in the last weeks and months we've seen how far we have come in some ways, but in this, how far we have to go. But we did engage together to plan the military support for humanitarian needs: ready, at the request of the UN, to support the people with resources from across Europe. Just as we did when the terrible earthquake in Haiti struck, and we provided the military hospital ships, the heavy lifting equipment, and the civilian and military support staff working side by side.

Don't misunderstand: I know that Humanitarian aid is apolitical, and that humanitarian workers must not be put at risk. But in the primary objective of saving lives, sometimes it is only the military which has the equipment or people who can achieve that - delivering aid at speed, putting in place the infrastructure. That is why, should a UN request arrive, we will be ready to help.

But we need to get faster and smarter in how we do this. And I am the first person to admit that there is much more we need to do.

That is why we are improving our collaboration with NATO, sharing details of our operations for the first time as part of continuing to develop our relations. Last Friday I co-chaired with Secretary General Rasmussen the meeting of the PSC Committee and the North Atlantic Council in our first ever discussion on Libya.

And our collaboration with the Africa Union and President Jean Ping, with the Arab League and Amr Moussa [and of course his successor], with the OIC and Professor Insanoglu, all under the leadership of UN special envoy Al Khatib. It was in my discussions with Ban Ki Moon that we agreed to bring together the Regional organisations for a meeting in Cairo, and to follow up after the Contact Group meeting in Rome. We are discussing together how to play our part in the future of Libya - to support the national dialogue, and help with the constitution and prepare for elections.

And the two missions I sent to Libya, working with young people and with women. As the leader of my team said to me: This is the first time that they have discussed a constitution, using words and arguments they never knew before. They told us how they longed for the end of the regime. Let us be clear, Gaddafi must go from power – he must end his regime. I intend to open an EU office in Benghazi, so we can move forward on the support we have discussed to the people, to support civil society, to support the interim transitional national council and Mr Jibril, to support security sector reform, to build on what the people asked us for – they want help in education, health care, security on the borders. That's the kind of support that we are able and want to give them.

And in all this, human rights are the silver thread that runs through our actions.

And there is the new neighbourhood policy – a different level of ambition and vision. Mutual accountability is at its core: the EU and the neighbourhood are responsible to each other for delivering on the commitments that we make - to the country, and to the people of our neighbourhood, and to the people of Europe.

We are building on what we have already talked about: Mobility, Market Access and Money. The £ Ms: a simple way to describe it, but very important ways to support these countries into the future.

**Mobility:** These are societies with many young people that long for greater opportunities. The European Parliament has a big role to play in supporting those opportunities for young people to gain the benefits from Europe's knowledge. And so too with member states – the opportunities for young people to travel and study. We do the same for business too – supporting the chance to travel, to explore new markets, to sell goods and services. These are important - and they are in the gift of member states, some of whom have long relationships with countries in our neighbourhood. They need to step up and provide these opportunities.

**Market Access:** We have a genuine contribution to make to stimulating economic growth and supporting economic recovery. You know the effect of the turmoil on the economies of the countries that we're describing. Some neighbourhood countries rely on us as their major export market and source of imports. Allowing those countries to develop their markets with us could make a real difference, supporting not just the opening of markets but access to them – and ensuring countries can reach our standards, ensuring that they have real opportunities. Nowhere is that more true than in small businesses. But we have to have the political will to do it. We have to have the political will to be committed to ensure that we make our markets available and that, Honourable Members, is a challenge, a challenge in any circumstances, a challenge in economic times. But, I would argue, a challenge we have to rise to. Because if we don't, then the failure of the economies in our neighbourhood will have a direct impact on all of us.

**And Money:** or rather resources. Not just what the EU can do in direct support - important though that is - but in what it can leverage. We have already hosted a meeting of senior officials from around the world and from the big financial institutions, to discuss what we all might be able to contribute if asked. And we will - in consultation with our neighbourhood – be prepared to do more to support resources coming together more effectively.

Nowhere will this policy matter more than in Tunisia. Prime Minister Essebsi's recent TV speech may help as the country moves towards elections on 24 July, but he acknowledges the problems of economic growth rates are down to between 0 and 1%. We need to ensure our support to Tunisia - to both its economy and its civil society. And that means not just the long-term, not just the importance of a new strategy but what we do now, and how we support countries – Egypt, Tunisia and others – right now with the budgetary problems that they have. And that's the reason we have started discussions with the financial institutions, with our member states, with those who are engaged in wanting to support these countries. In helping them dealing with the deficit when tourism has collapsed, when the economy is not working properly, it matters right now. So honourable members must understand, there is an immediate urgency and there is a long term strategy, and we need to have both in what we do.

We need to consider too how best to support Egypt. I have visited three times in recent weeks, meeting with some of the young leaders from Tahrir Square, women who have participated in the revolution and who now seek a stronger voice in the future of Egypt, including a presidential candidate. I have talked with many Government ministers - like the planning minister Fayza Aboulnaga who has a big vision: she wants to build houses for the people and integrate training, education and sustainable communities into her long-term vision, and support for small businesses, and working with UN Women on building safer communities. And I have also spoken with the foreign minister, Al Araby, who is committed to supporting a solution to the Middle East Peace Process and keen to develop a strong relationship with the EU.

There will be many challenges for Egypt in the coming months and years. We have to be there to support them through each of those challenges and be willing to put our resources, knowledge expertise and contacts in favour of supporting them.

But I have always said the External Action Service is a force to prevent and resolve conflict. Let me just mention two.

That is why our role in Serbia and Kosovo matters; and it is why the vote that we won at the UN, the voice that we now have can play its part. It is why we need to engage with the leaders in Bosnia to get them to get their eyes off the floor of thinking about only their own communities, to thinking about the needs of their country, to see their future and to see the European Union.

And it is why, too, we play the role we do in the Middle East Peace Process. Members know well that stability in the Middle East also requires peace. The quest for a negotiated agreement has dominated the region for decades. We have brought new vigour to the Quartet in recent months: I hosted a Quartet principals meeting in February, the follow up of the Quartet envoys has been working with the Israelis and the Palestinian negotiators for the first time since the Quartet was established.

I wanted another principals meeting in April, and we have prepared a substantial statement, based on the EU position. I continue to believe that a negotiated solution is the only way forward, and we will stay engaged and have another envoys meeting later this month.

We too have been a strong supporter of Palestinian state building. When the ad hoc liaison committee meeting was hosted by us on April 13 I listened to the praise for the work of Salam Fayyad for his remarkable achievements in governance, rule of law and human rights, education, health and social protection – these are sufficient for a functioning government, according to the World Bank.

And I have acknowledged the importance of Palestinian reconciliation behind President Abbas as an opportunity, as something that the EU has called for, for years. Honourable members, what is happening now is the most serious effort so far to establish unity - which is in itself key to achieving the two-state solution. I have been in close contact with President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad, as well as Egypt, the Arab League, the USA and Israel. Non violence, the continuation of state building and abiding by existing commitments will be crucial, and we must judge this effort by its results. I do believe that Israel should hand over the revenues owned to the Palestinians. Let me be clear, our position on Hamas has not changed, and Israel's security remains a key concern for all of us.

I also want to say that I do not consider a flotilla to be the right response to the humanitarian situation in Gaza. I have been there twice. I continue to highlight the plight of the people especially asking for more access to enable the economy to start to develop. The situation there, especially for the children, is awful. We have put forward proposals to Israel to support that greater access. I want to see the people of Gaza with a future, and I also want to see Gilad Shalit, captive for years in Gaza, given the chance to go home to his mother and father, whom I have already met.

Honourable members, Europe's experience tells us that true democracy is the necessary foundation of tolerance, peace and prosperity. In North Africa and the Arab world that destination will not be reached quickly or without setbacks. But building "deep democracy" is the only way that destination will be reached at all. We've got the experience to help every country that asks us now to help them make the journey to democracy.

That's why I am proposing to support the endowment for democracy which will enable us to use our resources to support opportunities particularly for young people to engage in political life, to support the development of political parties, to enable people to do what honourable members in so many countries represented here had to do themselves, which is to develop the political process by building those political parties, civil society, those deep roots that mean that democracy flourishes and grows.

I often say, when I visit these countries, that it is not about electing the government, so much as the right of being able to throw a government out. Democracy is about being able to say bye-bye, as well as hello. And that is important. Knowing that you have the right to use your ballot box to change your government or demand something of your government is critical, and you can only do that when democracy is deep and flourishing. It is why what we have seen happening in Cote d'Ivoire is so important, seeing President Ouatarra finally take his place. And the role that we have played, which has been significant in supporting that process. It is why it is good to see the Nigerian elections going well, and Goodluck Jonathan now being appointed.

Change does not necessarily assure progress, but progress absolutely requires change. And that means we have to be more determined to act. Some of the things I describe are down to member states, some to the Commission, and many need the support of the European Parliament - we have to decide that we will all play our part. But if we only do it when the media's attention is on those countries or on us, then we will fail. We have to be in this for the long haul and we have got to help our neighbours not just to start their journey toward democracy, but to complete it.

Honourable members, there have been three excellent reports that I shall speak to in my next intervention, but I do want to thank the rapporteurs. I am going to end with a very small quote from an anthropologist, a woman called Margaret Mead, whom I admire very much:

Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

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