



EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 7 June 2011
A 226/11

HR Catherine Ashton sets up Task Force for the Southern Mediterranean

Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Commission Vice President, today established a new Task Force for the Southern Mediterranean. The Task Force will bring together expertise from the European External Action Service, the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and other international financial institutions to act as a focal point for assistance to countries in North Africa which are going through political transformation.

'Europe will be judged by how it responds to the momentous events going on in our neighbourhood' Catherine Ashton said. *'I want the Task Force to ensure that we make good on the proposals we made in our recent review of the European Neighbourhood Policy and to keep a clear view of the strategy we have defined for the whole Southern Mediterranean region. It will improve the coherence of our assistance to civil society, to democracy-building and to economic reconstruction through funds from the EU, the EIB and the EBRD.'*

The European Union has responded quickly to the events of the Arab Spring, providing financial assistance and political support to countries like Tunisia and Egypt which are seeking to establish new deep democracies. The EU is also working with its international partners, including the United Nations, the Arab League, the African Union and the Gulf countries Council, to apply political and economic pressure to regimes, like those in Libya, Syria and Yemen, which are seeking to repress the democratic will of the people for change.

Background:

In response to the Arab Spring the EU adopted the communication 'Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity' on 8th March and then on 25th May complemented it with a new European Neighbourhood Policy. This proposal - "A new response to a changing Neighbourhood" - establishes a new relationship between the EU and its neighbours based on mutual accountability, and increases EU financial support by 1.24 billion euros between 2011 and 2013, in addition to increased funding from the EIB and EBRD.

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

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