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## **First meeting of EU/Tunisia Task Force to support transition to democracy and economic recovery**

Brussels, 27 September 2011 - The first meeting of the EU/Tunisia Task Force will take place in Tunis tomorrow. The Task Force will ensure better coordination of European and international support for Tunisia's transition. It will be co-chaired by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Catherine Ashton, and Tunisian Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi. Stefan Füle, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy, and Bernardino León, the EU Special Representative for the Southern Mediterranean Region, will also participate in the event.

The EU-Tunisia Task Force is the first task force in the Southern Mediterranean since the Arab Spring began. In Tunis, HR/VP Ashton and Commissioner Füle will reiterate the full support of both the European Union and the international Community to Tunisia's transition towards an open and democratic society, less than a month before the elections scheduled for 23 October. The Task Force will follow up the implementation of its decisions and will meet again in 2012 to continue work on medium and long term projects.

It will put a strong focus on support to the economic recovery in Tunisia. Concrete actions will aim in particular to assist the recovery of frozen assets, and to boost Foreign Direct Investment and job creation. A number of EU grants, which are part of a 1 billion € multi-donor programme, will be signed during or in the margins of the event.

Market access, mobility of persons, education and research and support to civil society will also be high on the agenda – including in a session with civil society representatives – and the EU will offer enhanced cooperation and new partnerships in these areas.

# **P R E S S**

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Ahead of the meeting, Catherine Ashton said: *"Tunisia is making history. In less than a month, the first fully democratic elections will be taking place since the Arab Spring began. A new Tunisia is emerging: open, dynamic, prosperous, and democratic. The EU is committed to doing all it can to help."*

*The Task Force has three key objectives: to listen to the needs of the Tunisian people; to improve the coordination of European and international support to deliver faster and more effective assistance; to provide a catalyst for concrete results."*

*"Tunisia is going through an impressive transition process and we hope that the upcoming elections will confirm all the progress made in such a short period. Tunisia is confronted with short term economic difficulties and this is why the European Commission has doubled its financial assistance this year. We are committed to continuing our multi-faceted support to underpin Tunisia's democratic transformation and economic renewal. We have proposed a new wave of mutually beneficial agreements that will allow Tunisia to gradually take advantage of the EU internal market. We are committed to establish a privileged partnership with Tunisia on the basis of offering more to those partners that are more committed to democratic reforms."* said Štefan Füle, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy.

## Background

The European Union acted swiftly to support Tunisia in the wake of the revolution. EU political solidarity to the Tunisian transition was demonstrated by a series of high-level visits, the first by High Representative Catherine Ashton on 14 February 2011.

Considerable humanitarian aid amounting to more than €150 million has also been made available, in particular to help Tunisia to cope with the influx of refugees fleeing war in Libya.

Following the request by the Tunisian authorities, the EU is also carrying out an election observation mission and assistance to civil society and to the three commissions looking into political reform, and corruption and abuses of power under the previous regime.

## [Eu-Tunisia relations state of play and next steps](#)

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