



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**

**Brussels, 11 March 2011
PCE 065/11**

**Remarks by
President Herman VAN ROMPUY
at the press conference following the extraordinary European Council
on EU Southern Neighbourhood and Libya**

European leaders are pleased about the democratic wave all over our Southern Neighbourhood and at the same time we are worried about the events in Libya. A leader shooting at his own people, a country close to civil war, a humanitarian crisis looming, right across the Mediterranean. That's why I have convened this extraordinary European Council, to give a decisive common response.

The fact that the 27 national leaders of the European Union are meeting in response to such an international crisis is in itself a strong signal. In ten years it has only happened three times: for the Georgian War, the Iraq War, and the 9/11 attacks. We are all convinced that the revolts on our Southern borders are just as momentous as those events.

We have focused on Libya today. We have made clear to the Libyan authorities that the use of force against citizens must stop. Those responsible will face grave consequences. The current leadership must give up power without delay; all 27 are saying it loud and clear. We have the situation under constant review and will keep up the pressure.

The European Council welcomes and encourages the interim transitional national Council based in Benghazi, which is considered as a political interlocutor.

We also spoke about the humanitarian crisis which is developing in Libya and at its borders. Almost a quarter of a million people have already left the country out of fear. The safety of the people must be ensured by all necessary means. The European Council expresses its deep concern about attacks against civilians, including from the air. In order to protect the civilian population, Member States will examine all necessary options, provided that there is a demonstrable need, a clear legal basis and support from the region. We will work with the United Nations, the Arab League, the African Union and our international partners to respond to the crisis. We call for the rapid holding of a summit between the Arab League, the African Union and the European Union.

P R E S S

FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

Dirk De Backer - Spokesperson of the President - ■ +32 (0)2 281 9768 - +32 (0)497 59 99 19
Jesús Carmona - Deputy Spokesperson of the President ■ +32 (0)2 281 9548 / 6319 - +32 (0)475 65 32 15
e-mail: press.president@consilium.europa.eu - internet: www.european-council.europa.eu/vanrompuy

EN

There is another side of the coin. The Member States confronted with these migration flows also require our concrete solidarity. We urge all Member States to provide further human and technical resources to our border agency, Frontex, which is already engaged in an operation. We have invited the Commission to make additional resources available.

What is happening on Europe's Southern borders is truly momentous. Many people have compared it to the events in Central and Eastern Europe two decades ago; and rightly so.

Irreversible change has already taken place in Tunisia and Egypt. To the Tunisian authorities, we are offering help in organising the elections on 24 July. We are encouraging the Egyptian authorities in the steps they are taking to secure a true democratic transition.

The European Council discussed how to offer the whole region a positive perspective; how to help to turn this Arab Spring into a truly new beginning. It is of strategic importance for Europe as well.

The European Union will therefore support all steps towards democratic transformation and to economic reforms which benefit the people. Those who do more in terms of reforms will get more support. It is a conditionality; a positive conditionality.

I should like to conclude with three more general points.

Firstly, the outcome is of course in the hands of the people in the countries concerned. It will not be decided in Brussels. We should not overestimate what we can do. However, we should not underestimate it either! The region may experience a tipping point, a moment when little things can make a big difference. So it is the duty of us Europeans to use whatever is within our means to secure a positive outcome of these dramatic changes.

Secondly, all this will take time. It is not by toppling a dictator that a democracy is born. Nor is it by organising free elections that unemployment will disappear. We are talking about transitions. Therefore it is crucial that things move in the right direction. Direction comes before speed.

Third remark. The uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have nothing to do with fundamentalism. No, the protesters' aspirations are familiar to young men and women all over the world: jobs and justice, a say in their country's politics, the right to speak. We are not witnessing extremism, or a clash of civilizations, but an episode in the fight for freedom and for justice.

We must not miss this golden opportunity for mankind and for our southern neighbours.
