



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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Remarks by President Van Rompuy following the final press conference of the European Council

This morning, after yesterday's economic discussion, we focussed our debate on three subjects: our response to the developments in the Arab world, migration and the free movement of persons and the accession of Croatia.

Firstly: the European Union intends to continue to play a key role in the historical developments which are taking place in Northern Africa and the Middle East. Without Europe, there would have been an Arab Spring, but without us there will be no Arab summer!

We witness positive and negative developments. On the positive side, in addition to the democratic transformation in Tunisia and Egypt this spring, we see constitutional reform in Morocco; renewed commitment for political reforms in Jordan; and a lifting of the state of emergency and planned constitutional reforms in Algeria.

The European Union wants to contribute to these changes. We offer a new Partnership to the countries in the region, promoting both democratic reforms and economic reforms to the benefit of the citizens. We will build on individual assessments of partners' performance and needs: "less for less", and "more for more".

We condemn in the strongest possible terms the ongoing violence and repression of the Syrian regime against its own citizens. With its actions the Syrian regime is calling its own legitimacy in question. Yesterday the EU adopted new sanctions against the regime of Assad.

P R E S S

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Regarding Libya, we will keep up the military pressure as long as Khadafi stays. We are also preparing with international partners the post-Khadafi democratic transition.

Regarding Yemen: we reiterate the urgency of an orderly and inclusive transition.

The Arab spring is also an invitation to redouble our efforts for progress on the Middle East Peace Process. Only the resumption of direct negotiations could provide a realistic chance of improving the situation on the ground, thus leading to a lasting and comprehensive solution. The European Council fully supports the High Representative's urgent call for the Quartet to create a credible perspective for the re-launching of the peace process. We also support the French initiative to call for a donor conference in Paris.

This morning's second issue of debate was migration. I chose this topic last summer, even before the events in the Arab world gave it a new urgency. Today we took decisions on 4 aspects.

Firstly, the best way to reduce migratory pressure on our southern borders, is by helping young people in Northern Africa and the Middle East to build a future in their own country. A successful migration policy starts outside our borders. Therefore the new partnerships with the countries of the Southern Neighbourhood include also migration, mobility and security aspects.

Secondly, regarding asylum, we set the traffic light in the negotiations in the Council to green. We consider the recent Commission proposals on procedures and reception conditions as a basis for those further negotiations. We confirmed the 2012 target date for the establishment of the Common European Asylum System.

Thirdly, regarding Schengen, all Heads of State and Government are deeply committed to free movement of persons: it is a cardinal achievement of the European integration and a fundamental right of citizens. Without undermining this basic principle, we felt the need to improve the Schengen rules. *"A safeguard mechanism should be introduced in order to respond to exceptional circumstances putting the overall functioning of Schengen cooperation at risk, without jeopardizing the principle of free movement of persons."*

As a very last resort, in the framework of this safeguard mechanism, a clause could be introduced to allow the exceptional reintroduction of internal border controls in a truly critical situation, when a member state is no longer able to comply with its obligation.

Such a measure would be taken on the basis of specified objective criteria, and on a common assessment for a strictly limited scope and period of time, taking into account the need to be able to react in urgent cases.

Fourthly and finally, I should like to congratulate Prime Minister Orban on the agreement reached earlier this week on strengthening Frontex, our agency for external borders. It allows Frontex for instance to deploy liaison officers in third countries -- in line with the new neighbourhood policy. From now on, its operations will be undertaken by the so-called "European Border Guard Teams".

On Croatia, today, the European Council paved the way for Croatia's accession to the EU as the 28th Member State. We expect the Council to conclude the accession negotiations very soon, before the end of June. We would then sign the Accession Treaty before the end of the year.

This future accession of Croatia brings new momentum to the European vocation of the countries in the Western Balkans.

We are happy to see you again later this afternoon, for a press event with the three of us and Prime Minister Kosor of Croatia.

Finally, the European Council appointed Mr. Mario Draghi President of the European Central Bank as of 1 November 2011. We are all confident that Mr. Draghi will exercise a strong and independent leadership of the ECB, continuing the tradition established by the Bank's first two Presidents. This is essential in normal times, and indispensable in difficult times.

Before giving the floor to President Barroso, please let me once again congratulate Prime Minister Orban for the excellent job he has done during the Hungarian Presidency of the Council. We have worked very closely together and I am glad to continue working with you within the European Council.