



HR/VP SPEECHES

Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the European Union -League of Arab States Summit

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Check against delivery!

It is a pleasure to be in Sharm El-Sheikh today, in what I truly consider an historic meeting. It is very hard to believe that this is the first joint summit of the European Union and the League of Arab States (LAS). We have Summits with the rest of the world but not the region closest to us. We've been working well together with our Foreign ministers, since years now. I'm personally glad it has led to this Summit today, thanks to the LAS Secretary General and the EU foreign ministers.

We share the same geography to a great extent. Events in the Arab world shape our reality in Europe, and events in Europe have an impact in the Arab world too. *Èhna fil hàwa sàwa*. We are in the same boat. Our common region has gone through difficult years. A decade that started with great hopes and expectations, especially for our younger generations. But also a decade of war and turmoil.

Today, we stand at a crossroads. On the one hand, we risk even greater tensions and suffering for our people. But we also see the possibility to end the many conflicts in our region, and finally take the path towards reconciliation – however difficult it is. We all have a responsibility in this; we can all contribute to the choice between one path and the other.

At global and regional level, we see a worrying tendency towards competition and confrontation. Yet we know where this would lead. Power struggles and proxy wars can only lead to more instability, more social strife and more conflict. The path towards peace, security and reconciliation requires first and foremost cooperation among us.

Europe and the Arab world share many of the same interests. We all want to see peace between Israel and Palestine – based on a two-state solution, and as a premise to build more positive relations all across our region. Last year, we both intervened to fill a severe funding gap in the budget of UNRWA. And this has allowed schools to remain open and humanitarian support to reach those in need. This shows what we can achieve when we work towards a common goal.

We have already worked together to address the crisis in Libya, through the Quartet that brings together the EU, League of Arab States the African Union and the UN, in support of the UN mediation. Together, we can help Libyan actors to truly move towards reconciliation, through a National Conference and elections when right the conditions in place. We can use our combined political leverage and our economic support to help Libya, together with IOM and UNHCR, close all detention camps and ensure a better protection of migrants.

And we have worked together on Yemen – once again, within the framework provided by the UN. The negotiations in Stockholm show that it is indeed possible to build win-win solutions and that the war could be over in a not-so-distant future. We can continue to work together for a full implementation of this agreement in due time.

In mid-March our countries will gather together once again for the third Brussels Conference on Syria. Together, we can work to end the war in Syria, and close one of the darkest chapters in the history of our region.

We all agree that, when a political transition will be under way, Syria will have to be rebuilt with our support. The people of Syria will need to find a new way to live together, as a reconciled and inclusive society. We all want the Syrians to be able to return to their land, knowing that they will be safe and they can build their future in their own country. And we know that we will be together in helping the Syrians “win the peace,” when the war is finally over. One thing is the absence of war, another is a stable peace.

But the war is not over yet. And there are no short-cuts towards a truly sustainable peace. We cannot simply “normalise” relations as if nothing happened in the last eight years. The Syrians need a negotiated political transition towards a democratic, inclusive, reconciled and united Syria. The only realistic path runs through the UN-led talks among Syrians in Geneva. Anything else would not lead to a stable, sustainable, secure, inclusive and prosperous Syria.

The third Brussels Conference will be an opportunity to discuss how all of us can contribute to support the UN led process, and also continue to mobilise resources in support of those countries in the region that are hosting millions of Syrians, including

some around this table.

Sharm El-Sheikh is also called 'the City of peace'. It is a good omen for our first summit, and it should remind us of why we are here. Peace and security in our times are strictly linked and can only be achieved when we invest in cooperation, rather than confrontation. There is no other way to advance our common interests, and I am convinced this is what brings us here today, for the first, I hope, of many successful and fruitful Summits.

Shukran.

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