



TALKING POINTS

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Panel: The Post-Arab Spring Leadership Deficit (Grand Ballroom III)

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Talking Points for: Christian Berger, European External Action Service

Even in the global context of an emerging multipolar order, the EU remains a major player in the Arab world. Especially with regards to the countries of the Southern Mediterranean, the EU has long been the main trading partner and the main source of investment and development aid and has, already since 1995 and the launching of the "Barcelona Process", increasingly promoted a reform agenda and political dialogue with the countries and societies of the region.

In the wake of the momentous changes unleashed by the "Arab Spring", the EU has significantly increased its political and economic engagement with the region, which is of central strategic importance to the EU as a part of its immediate neighbourhood. Because of its geographic proximity to our southern member-states, the long-term prosperity and stability of the region is essential to ensure our own security, not only in terms of ensuring continuous positive flows, i.a. of energy, (the region remains a major source for EU energy imports, presently of non-renewable - 20% of oil and 25% of EU gas imports - sources and potentially also of renewable - ie solar - energy sources), but also against negative flows, i.a. of illegal migrants, criminals and political extremism.

The EU's support for change and reform in the South Mediterranean continues to be a top political priority. The last European Council (meeting of heads of state and government of the 27 EU member states) in February clearly re-confirmed our continued and long-term commitment for a strong engagement with the region. The countries of the Arab Spring struggle with their internal uncertainties about the future concerning their political, social and economic development. This is more so an argument for our renewed political engagement. The deteriorating state of the security sector in some countries of the region remains an alarming issue. In this context, the continued civil war in Syria and the possible spill-over of the conflict to neighbouring countries is a major concern. The EU has always underlined that democracy and freedom are built from the inside, not imported from abroad.

The EU is helping countries from the region to build the kind of democracy that meets the aspirations of the women, men, young and old. This is what we call "deep democracy" – not just free and fair elections, but also engendering a pluralistic political culture and building the institutions that guarantee the rights and freedoms of everyone, men and women: i.a. rule of law, free press and a vibrant civil society. We know from our own experience in the democratic transitions that took place in our south and east that the transition from authoritarianism to democracy takes time, and the EU is determined to stay the course in its support for reform and democracy in the Arab world.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.