

Buzek's speech on the Extraordinary European Council on Libya and the situation in North Africa

Brussels - 11/03/2011

"Dear Presidents,
Dear Chancellors,
Dear Prime Ministers,

The situation in Libya is a human tragedy!

The European Parliament will be a constructive partner in the EU's response to the challenges of our Southern Neighbourhood. We have been using our Parliamentary delegations and parliamentary tools to support civil society. I will visit Tunisia and Egypt myself next weekend.

This issue has been of great concern. We have adopted clear and determined resolutions on Tunisia, Egypt, and yesterday on Libya. We will certainly contribute to the work of the Task Force set up by the European External Action Service. The Parliament believes that the situation in Libya - and in the entire region - requires short, medium and long term strategies.

I. SHORT TERM STRATEGY

Every hour brings us fresh information of a worsening situation. The Parliament believes that we must work with the wider international community, and especially with the Arab states, to use any means necessary to protect civilians. This is our first priority.

Legitimate action through the UN Security Council is the best way forward. If a no-fly zone is introduced on whatever basis, it should also be based on the active involvement of Arab states. All Libyan pilots who defect should be granted asylum.

Our second priority in the short-term strategy is that we have to help in a terrible humanitarian disaster. We welcome the efforts made by the Member States and the EEAS in extremely difficult conditions. Yet, we would like to see more action and better coordination.

We have the instruments available, through the European Commission's Humanitarian and Civil Protection, and the Civilian Crisis Management teams in Common Security and Defence Policy. We need a strong EU presence on the ground providing water, food, healthcare, sanitation, tents, and camp management. Let us build confidence and trust that we stand on the side of the people.

It is good that Lady Ashton, Commissioner Georgieva, and Minister Gyori were visible and that there was a rapid response in providing additional funds for relief. I strongly welcome President Barroso's proposed Pact for Democracy and Shared Prosperity.

We need to do more. We know, not only our citizens are in danger, but thousands of refugees are waiting for help.

Dear Friends,

Our third priority in our short term strategy is that we build the basis which ensures a proper transition to democracy.

Put simply, the Libyan dictator must go! We should take steps to issue international arrest warrant against the dictator and other leading members of his régime for crimes against humanity. We have to send a clear message that these people will be brought to justice.

We need to stop funding this régime. Our sanctions must be serious, even if we know that sanctions are not always easy. I believe that no European company should trade with Gaddafi and that CSDP assets should be used to enforce these sanctions.

Last but not least in the short-term, democracy can not be imposed from outside, this is an Arab struggle, and owned by the Arab people. We are here to help. Dialogue is necessary. We need to have proper information from inside the country and simple advice on how to help. The European Parliament believes we should establish relations with the Interim Transitional National Council whose representatives I met on Wednesday. We should consider making it a legitimate interlocutor which represents an important part of society.

Let me summarise: all the efforts in our short term strategy should be directed at rebuilding confidence in Europe, on the part of the people living in our Southern Neighbourhood.

II. MEDIUM TERM STRATEGY

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our Southern Neighbours have been badly managed. Often these countries are wealthy, but the benefits of that wealth are not enjoyed by the citizens.

We need to use the expertise in economic and political transformation which exists in Europe today, not least around this table. One can recall that political change and structural reform from dictatorship to democracy also happened in Europe. That experience can be useful to some of our Southern partners, even though the conditions may be different.

We also have a specific expertise in how to dismantle and reform a country's security services and military institutions, as well as how to reform a country's legal and judicial system. This has to be done quickly if we want democracy to flourish.

I also remember that, from the 1970s onwards, there were thousands of engineers, doctors, architects and other experts from today's EU Member States who worked in North Africa. We should invite some of these experts to return to help on contracts funded by the EU. What our friends in North Africa need is not just money, but technical assistance.

We also have the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. This instrument should be boosted and made more flexible. It should be funded by the EU, but operationally independent, so that we can help finance political parties and civil society.

We know that without strong civic institutions and procedures, democracy cannot flourish. It is always possible that in a few years time, people linked to the current dictatorship could come back to power through democratic means. We therefore need to make sure that institutions and procedures are strong enough to guarantee democracy. This is what our medium strategy should be for.

III. LONG TERM STRATEGY

Dear Presidents, Chancellors, Prime Ministers,

The situation has changed and will never be the same again. We must therefore think what we can offer our Southern Neighbours in the long term.

I remember very well after 1989, the European Union acted as a magnet for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This played a stabilising role. This helped with the hard decisions of crucial and deep structural reforms. The transition would not be possible without such reforms. We must be the same stabilising force today, although we cannot offer the prospect of membership.

We should build a new kind of partnership - one oriented more towards values and people. A greater emphasis should be laid on fast-track measures for market access for North African products. This will bring real social and economic benefits for the men and women in those countries. It can represent a visible "democratic dividend" that will help people make choices in favour of democracy.

Dear Colleagues,

We know that we are faced with financial constraints, so it will not be easy to find the money to help. The Parliament believes that we should not only freeze Gaddafi's assets, but we should give them back to the Libyan people through some kind of development aid. These assets represent a substantial amount of money - tens of billions of Euros!

This fund can be the initial basis for the reconstruction work. We could match it with additional aid, as well as loans and guarantees. The Parliament is in favour of freeing up additional resources from the European Investment Bank.

In the long run, these developments will have clear repercussions on our internal policies: agriculture, trade, migration and integration. The arrival of migrants to Europe's shores and the risk of larger flows of people call for a better coordination and for burden-sharing mechanisms. The principle of mutual solidarity is set down in the Treaty.

We believe that the money spent today can be an investment that will benefit the EU and our Southern Neighbours for the long term. The European Parliament will support efficient spending in the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Yes, stability is important, but we know the only true, long-term stability comes from democracy. This is the lesson that North Africa once again has taught us today, and this is the reason a long term strategy is needed. We need to make sure that we do everything for these countries to become stable democracies.

We have a rendez-vous with history, so let us not miss it this time!

Thank you."