

European Neighbourhood Watch

Issue 78 • January 2012



Thinking ahead for Europe

Putin's faltering return

In May 2011 we argued for a modest advance in Russian democracy, namely that both Medvedev and Putin should stand as candidates to offer a modicum of choice between, roughly speaking, modernisation versus continuity. For Putin alone to stand would be disrespectful towards the Russian people. And so it comes to pass for the 4th of March. The two leaders decided that just Putin should stand, and so many people are deeply offended, expressing this through very peaceful street demonstrations led by the new middle classes (for some a 'mink-coated revolution'), and above all through modern social network communications.

The de facto manifesto of the new opposition is being laid out in a series of interviews posted on the internet between Boris Akunin, a fiction writer and democratic activist, and Aleksey Navalny, a lawyer who made his name initially as an anti-corruption fighter. Navalny is the leader, a highly articulate and charismatic speaker. Here is the authentic language of the contest. Navalny argues (<http://www.opendemocracy.net/print/63649>): "The 'Let's Screw Putin' movement – that's our main task, all the rest is a waste of resources - needs to reduce his rating to 30% around the country and 15-25% in the larger cities and so destroy his real support base. It's a completely achievable aim, given even the official election results for United Russia in the big cities. We have the mechanisms to do this, and the activists as well – we have 100,000 out there, we just need to sort out our campaigning infrastructure and come up with creative and persuasive ways to get our message across.

"The main thing is that we don't have to lie to people. We can get through to them simply by telling them the plain facts about Putin, his billionaire friends, FSB generals whose children suddenly all turned up working for state banks. The slogan 'United Russia is the Party of Crooks and Thieves' has stuck not thanks to some kind of technology, but because it's the truth".

"Those 100,000 people are both a campaign headquarters, and a perfect propaganda machine, capable of spreading necessary information to scores of millions of their fellow-citizens in a very short time. Every member of this many-thousand Machine needs to talk to ten people they know, send emails, put information on social networks. That's all we need".

Putin for his part was evidently knocked off balance by this movement. He booted out of the Kremlin his main 'political technologist', Vladislav Surkov, while refusing an invitation to a TV debate with other candidates. His spokesman said he was too busy.

Then Putin countered with a lengthy article in *Izvestia* on 16 January, with arguments about the merits of political stability and his own achievements in rescuing Russia from the chaos of the Yeltsin period. "In today's world stability is an asset that can only be earned by hard work and with openness to change and readiness for imminent, deliberate and calculated reform. The recurring problem in Russia's history is the aspiration of the elites for a leap, a revolution instead of gradual developments. Russia's experience – as well as the experience of the entire world – shows the destructiveness of historical leaps, of overthrowing in haste without creating". About the hazards of revolution he has a point.

He concluded his article with: "And here I would like again to say why I have agreed to run for the post of President of Russia in 2012. I do not want, and will not, belittle anyone's achievements in establishing our new country. There were many. But the facts remain that in 1999, when I became prime minister and later President, our country was in a deep and systemic crisis. And it is a group of like-minded people – which the author of these lines was to form and lead, supported by an absolute majority of citizens and national unity around common goals – which led Russia out of the impasse of Civil War, which broke the back of terrorism, restored territorial integrity and constitutional order, which revived the economy, and ensured during ten years that Russia had one of the world's highest economic growth rates as well as rising incomes".

Navalny will not however be a candidate for the Presidency, since he has not had time to organise the 2 million signatures required. On the other hand Mikhail Prokhorov, Russia's richest oligarch, seems able to do so, with many hired hands collecting signatures in shopping districts and metro stations. At first sight the youthful and imposing (2 metres tall) figure of Prokhorov might be seen as standing for modernity and change. But in reality he is just a Kremlin stooge, supplying a front for those wishing to say there is political competition, whereas he has no chance of success. In mid-January he shared a TV duel with Gennady Zyuganov, the veteran leader of the Communist Party. Prokhorov's political debating skills were dismal, even compared to the worn out, long playing gramophone record of Zyuganov.

Putin's second major contribution to public debate came in a lengthy article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* on 23 January, entirely devoted to the issue of ethnicity and multiculturalism. Putin's argument is that while unnamed European politicians (obviously Merkel and Sarkozy amongst others) have been playing the ethnic card to stay in office with 'multiculturalism has failed', Russia will by

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contrast “strengthen the historical state that we inherited from our ancestors, the civilisation that is blessed with an inherent ability to integrate various ethnicities and faiths”. Leaving aside the dubious receptivity of this speech in today’s Northern Caucasus, its main target seems to be the extreme ‘Russia for Russians’ nationalist factions in the country’s heartland, noticing also the uneasy cohabitation between nationalist and liberal-democratic elements among Navalny’s demonstrators.

This is all about domestic politics. The main foreign policy proposition so far was presented by Putin in an article in *Izvestia* on 4 October 2011, where he launched the idea of a Eurasian Union. This would renew the integration of as many as possible states of the former USSR, but would not amount according to Putin to recreating the USSR, since the mechanisms of communist command and control have obviously gone for ever. Well yes, obviously. But still the meetings of heads of state of these former Soviet republics are not a happy sight. Lukashenko and Karimov are dictators of international pariah status, with Aliev catching up on them. Yanukovich reverts increasingly to Putin-style authoritarianism, and there are no recognisable democratic leaders among the rest. Putin resumes Russia’s geo-political pressurising of Ukraine through gas pipeline geo-politics, announcing agreement with Turkey to go ahead with a hugely expensive South Stream pipeline across the Black Sea, which only makes sense as a bluff to threaten Ukraine with loss of gas transit income. He pressurises Ukraine into joining the customs union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, which would mean dropping Ukraine’s free trade agreement with the EU that is awaiting signature.

A second manifestation of current Russian foreign policy is its stance over Syria. This has been symbolised by the recent visit to Russia’s Syrian naval base of its only aircraft carrier, Admiral Kuznetsov. Russian TV portrayed it as a demonstration of solidarity with the regime of Bashar al-Assad in the face of Western pressures. The Syrian defence minister visited the ship, appreciating the show of solidarity. This crude geo-political posturing may have been intended to help Putin’s re-election, but also portrays the most bizarre international image at a time when the Arab League wants to get rid of Assad. At the level of foreign policy norms, Russia is standing the UN doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) on its head, to protect not the people but repressive authoritarian regimes. As damaged limitation diplomacy, its latest move is to volunteer to between Syrian authorities and opposition, which the latter rejects.

What would Mr Navalny have to say on Russian foreign policy? Boris Akunin tackled him about this indirectly, “The main reason for [my] mistrust is your allegiance to Russian nationalism... Are you sorry that the USSR is no longer in existence?”

Navalny replies: “Everybody wants their country to be bigger, richer, stronger. That’s perfectly normal, and it’s what I want as well. ... The USSR was destroyed not by external forces, but by the Communist Party, the State Planning Committee and the Soviet political elite. ... That is historical fact. Another fact is that the core and foundation of the Russian empire and the USSR was our country – Russia.

And Russia remains, both economically and militarily, the dominant state of the region. Our task is to preserve and build on that. ... We should not deliberately be making plans for any expansion; our task is to become strong and rich ourselves, and then our neighbours will be part of our zone of influence; they won't have any option." But beyond this Navalny has shown no real interest in foreign affairs.

And what should the EU be saying about all this, bearing in mind its declared objective of democracy promotion in the world at large? EU policy towards Russia in this context is easy to define and execute perfectly. Do nothing. Just leave the Russians to make up their own minds. Putin is already trying to rally all loyal Russians to his support by decrying foreign plots. Michael McFaul, a respected democracy promotion academic before joining the Obama team in Washington, and now the new US ambassador in Moscow, already fits the plot perfectly. No need to add to it. The virus of demands for clean democracy seems to develop quite strongly all by itself, with the demonstration planned for 4 February aiming at getting 100,000 people together on the streets of Moscow. With this Putin cannot compete. His attempted counter-demonstration last week in Ekaterinburg flopped, even with busloads of people from nearby towns reportedly bribed with organised visits to IKEA and Metro shopping malls on the way back.

Still Putin's re-election seems a safe bet, given that the other candidates are either unable to stand (Yavlinsky and Navalny), or are just ageing court jesters (Zyuganov and Zhirinovskiy), or are Kremlin stooges (Prokhorov). However the credibility and legitimacy of Putin's leadership have been damaged for his return to power; how seriously remains to be seen. The idea of his return for two terms has been erased for sure. In the meantime the task is to ensure that the new momentum of ideas and people takes on a real political shape, which is not yet the case, but this will require years - not weeks or months.

Michael Emerson
CEPS Associate Senior Research Fellow

Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on Iran Brussels, 23 January 2012. [Link](#)

1. Recalling the European Council conclusions of 9 December 2011 and the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of 1 December, the Council reiterates its serious and deepening concerns over the Iranian nuclear programme and in particular over the findings on Iranian activities relating to the development of military nuclear technology, as reflected in the latest IAEA report. The recent start of operations of enrichment of uranium to a level of up to 20% in the deeply buried underground facility in Fordow near Qom further aggravates concerns about possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme. Iran's acceleration of enrichment activities is in flagrant violation of six UNSC Resolutions and eleven IAEA Board resolutions and contributes to increasing tensions in the region. The Council calls upon Iran to fully cooperate with the IAEA, including in the context of the planned visit by its Deputy Director General for Safeguards.
2. Iran continues to refuse to comply with its international obligations and to fully co-operate with the IAEA to address the concerns on its nuclear programme, and instead continues to violate those obligations. In this context and in accordance with the Council conclusions of 1 December 2011, the Council has agreed additional restrictive measures in the energy sector, including a phased embargo of Iranian crude oil imports to the EU, in the financial sector, including against the Central Bank of Iran, in the transport sector as well as further export restrictions, notably on gold and on sensitive dual-use goods and technology, as well as additional designations of persons and entities, including several controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).
3. The Council again reaffirms the longstanding commitment to work for a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear issue in accordance with the dual-track approach. The Council stresses that the restrictive measures agreed today are aimed at affecting the funding of Iran's nuclear programme by the Iranian regime and are not aimed at the Iranian people. The Iranian regime itself can act responsibly and bring all sanctions to an end.
4. The Council reaffirms that the objective of the EU remains to achieve a comprehensive and long-term settlement which would build international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme, while respecting Iran's legitimate rights to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in conformity with the NPT. Supporting the ongoing efforts by the EU High Representative and reaffirming the importance of close co-operation with the E3+3, the Council urges Iran to reply positively to the offer for substantial negotiations, as set out in the High Representative's letter of 21 October 2011, by clearly demonstrating its readiness to engage in confidence building measures and, without preconditions, in meaningful talks to seriously address existing concerns on the nuclear issue.

Related Document:
COUNCIL IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) No 54/2012 of 23 January 2012 implementing Regulation (EU) No 961/2010 on restrictive measures against Iran
[Download here.](#)

Ashton on the increasing use of the death penalty in Iran

Brussels, 5 January 2012. [Link](#)

I am deeply concerned at the number of executions in Iran in 2011. This goes against the worldwide trend towards the abolition of the death penalty. The number of executions in Iran last year is reportedly the highest in recent history, making Iran the world's leading user of the death penalty per inhabitant.

Thousands of individuals remain at risk of execution, including Ms Sakineh Mohammadi-Ashtiani and Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani. The EU reiterates its call on Iran not to execute them. Hundreds of individuals were executed in 2011 after grossly unfair trials, without the right of appeal and for offences which according to international standards should not result in capital punishment. The EU recalls that in countries still retaining the death penalty, this sentence may be used only for the most serious crimes.

The EU holds a strong and principled position against the death penalty. It therefore calls on Iran, as it does on all states which insist on maintaining the death penalty, to halt pending executions and to introduce a moratorium.

Secretary General Jagland and Commissioner Füle sign the Programme for strengthening democratic reform in the Southern Mediterranean

Strasbourg, 17 January 2012. [Link](#)

Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland and European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle today signed a € 4.8 million joint programme to strengthen democratic reform in the Southern Mediterranean countries.

The joint programme will support democratic reforms and, the independence and efficiency of the judiciary, whilst promoting good governance. It will also target corruption and human trafficking and aim to promote human rights and democratic values, working through government officials, future leaders, youth and civil society. It will be rolled out initially in Morocco and Tunisia, and some initiatives will be implemented over three years throughout the region.

The signature is part of the Council of Europe's efforts to consolidate democracy in the south Mediterranean region and marks a further step in the strategic partnership between the two organisations.

"The partnership with the European Union, enables us to combine our strengths in this important mission, and will benefit the neighbourhood countries with the expertise of the Council of Europe in supporting political and democratic transformation," said Secretary General Jagland.

Commissioner Füle declared: "With this programme the EU complements its global response to the Arab Spring in supporting the countries willing to transform and to reform in order to answer their citizens' call for democratic rights, dignity and prosperity. We want to build on long-standing expertise of the Council of Europe in providing guidance on sensitive political and governance issues to the fragile new democracies.

Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on Syria

Brussels, 23 January 2012. [Link](#)

1. The European Union remains deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in Syria and the widespread and systematic violations of human rights and calls again for an immediate end to the violence. The EU is particularly concerned by the recent escalation of violence and reiterates its condemnation in the strongest terms of the brutal crackdown by the Syrian government which risks exacerbating even further the spiral of violence, sectarian clashes and militarization. President Assad must step aside immediately to allow for a peaceful and democratic transition.

2. The EU strongly condemns the bombs attacks in Damascus on 23 December 2011 and on 6 January 2012 causing scores of deaths and injuries. Any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation and by whosoever committed. The EU also condemns the attack on 11 January that killed a French journalist and several Syrian civilians, injuring many more people, including a Dutch journalist. The EU calls for light to be shed on this attack. The Syrian authorities have a responsibility to guarantee the safety of journalists in their country. The press must be allowed to carry out its vital role of providing independent information on the events in Syria without fear of violence or repression.

3. The EU welcomes the League of Arab States' resolution of 22 January and its initiative to seek UNSC support for a political solution. The EU is deeply concerned by the Syrian authorities' lack of cooperation and urges them to fully comply with the League of Arab States' Action Plan and their commitments undertaken in that respect, to completely stop acts of violence against civilians, free political detainees, remove troops, tanks and weapons from cities, and allow independent observers and the media, to freely travel in and report on Syria.

4. The EU recalls its support to the League of Arab States' efforts to end the cycle of violence in Syria, and to the deployment of its monitoring mission, including through the setting up of the LAS situation room. The EU welcomes the UN readiness to provide training and assistance to the League's monitors and encourages the League to accept UN assistance to ensure technical support for the mission.

5. The EU welcomes the League of Arab States' decision to extend its observation mission and to reinforce its capacity to report independently on the situation in Syria. The EU takes note of the League of Arab States' decision to appoint a Special Envoy for Syria.

6. The EU condemns in the strongest terms the attacks on the League of Arab States' mission monitors and calls for an impartial and swift investigation into the events. The mission must be able to act safely and with independence and to access all detention facilities.

7. Given the Syrian regime's continued use of violence against civilians, the EU has today designated further 22 individuals and 8 entities to be subject to restrictive measures. The EU will continue its policy of imposing additional measures against the regime, not to the civilian population, as long as repression continues. Following the assessment of EU Member States, the listing of designated persons who have dissociated themselves from the repressive policy of the regime will be reconsidered. The EU calls on the international community to join its efforts to target those responsible for or associated with the violent repression and those who support or benefit from the regime

8. The EU reiterates its strong support to the Syrian people and encourages the Syrian opposition to make all efforts to strengthen coordination on the way forward in order to realise an orderly transition to a Syria that is democratic, stable, inclusive and that guarantees minority rights. It supports the efforts of the League of Arab States in this respect. The EU will continue to engage with representative members of the Syrian opposition, such as the SNC, which adhere to non violence, inclusiveness and democratic values.

9. The EU reiterates its strong concerns about the deteriorating living conditions of the Syrian people in a great number of localities affected by the unrest. The Syrian authorities must immediately alleviate the suffering of the population living in these areas, respect and protect the wounded and sick, guarantee unhindered access to medical care without any discrimination or reprisal and refrain from intimidation of those providing medical assistance. The Syrian authorities must allow full and unimpeded access of relief personnel from international humanitarian organisations for the timely delivery of humanitarian aid to persons in need of assistance.

10. The EU urges all members of the UN Security Council to uphold their responsibilities to end the violence against the Syrian population and support the Syrian people in their desire for freedom and political rights. The EU welcomes the establishment by the UN Human Rights Council of a Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Syria and urges the Syrian Government to fully cooperate with the

Rapporteur. The EU recalls the main findings of the report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry which stated that crimes against humanity may have been committed in the country. The EU looks forward to the next debate of the UN Human Rights Council on Syria on the 12 March 2012.

Related Document:

COUNCIL IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) No 55/2012 of 23 January 2012 implementing Article 33(1) of Regulation (EU) No 36/2012 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria
[Download here.](#)

Spokesperson of the HRVP on the French journalist killed in Homs (Syria)

Brussels, 11 January 2012. [Link](#)

High Representative Catherine Ashton strongly condemns the death of France 2 reporter Gilles Jacquier and of the other victims of the attack today in the Syrian city of Homs. She expresses her condolences to the family of Mr. Jacquier and the families of all the victims of this terrible attack.

The High Representatives reiterates her call for an immediate end to violence in Syria. She is concerned by the recent escalation of violence in the country. The High Representative calls for a rapid investigation to clarify the circumstances leading to this tragedy. The Syrian authorities have a responsibility to guarantee the safety of journalists in their country. The press must be allowed to carry out its vital role of providing independent information on events in Syria without fear of violence or repression.

Council appoints EU Special Representative to the Middle East Peace Process

Brussels, 23 January 2012. [Link](#)

The Council today appointed Mr Andreas Reinicke as EU Special Representative to the Middle East Peace Process.

The task of the Special Representative will be to contribute to achieving the EU's policy objectives in the region, including a comprehensive peace, a two-state solution and a settlement of the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese conflicts. He will act as the EU envoy to the Middle East Quartet.

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton commented: "I am delighted to have nominated Andreas Reinicke to this vital post, which underlines our reinforced commitment to the Middle East Peace Process. He is an experienced diplomat with huge knowledge of the Middle East. He will play a key role in our efforts to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. The EU's objective remains the creation of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian state, living

side by side with Israel in peace and security. The EU, along with its Quartet partners, has a key role to play in this process.”

Mr Andreas Reinicke, currently ambassador of Germany in Syria, is a diplomat of more than 25 years' experience and has devoted most of his career to the Middle East.

Mr Reinicke will take office on 1 February 2012, with his mandate running until 30 June 2013.

Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process

Brussels, 23 January 2012. [Link](#)

1 The EU welcomes the efforts by Jordan to facilitate direct talks between the Israelis and Palestinians as part of the Quartet process. The EU calls on both parties to come forward with comprehensive proposals on borders and security, as envisaged in the Quartet statement on 23 September. A bold and decisive demonstration of political leadership is needed from both sides to encourage the momentum and ensure real progress.

2. Against the backdrop of worrying developments on the ground in 2011, particularly with regard to settlements, the EU reaffirms its commitment to a two state solution: The legitimacy of the State of Israel and the right of Palestinians to achieve statehood must never be called into question. The viability of the two state solution must be preserved. The EU will continue to reinforce efforts towards resolving the conflict through its contribution to the Quartet, its continued partnership with Israel, and its support for the Palestinian Authority's state-building efforts. The EU reaffirms its clear positions on negotiations, with regard to parameters, principles and issues, including the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council in December 2009, December 2010, May, July and October 2011 as well as the statement delivered on behalf of the EU at the UN Security Council on 21 April 2011.

3. The EU stresses the central role of the Quartet and backs the Quartet process to reach an agreement between the parties not later than by the end of 2012. The EU fully supports the High Representative in her continued efforts to create a credible perspective for the relaunching of the peace process. The EU reiterates its support to the Arab Peace Initiative.

4. The EU calls on the parties to demonstrate their commitment to a peaceful solution and to the Quartet process by actions that can build confidence and create an environment of trust necessary to ensure meaningful negotiations, leading to a comprehensive and lasting peace.

5. The EU welcomes the appointment of the new EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process.

HRVP travels to Israel and occupied Palestinian territory

Brussels, 24 January 2012. [Link](#)

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission, travels to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory from Tuesday 24th to Thursday 26th January. The visit marks the latest stage in her ongoing efforts to encourage the two sides to return to the negotiating table, in line with the Quartet statement from September. It follows the recent start of face-to-face meetings between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in Amman.

“I look forward to talking to both Israeli and Palestinian leaders. I will continue to make every effort to push the peace talks and encourage the parties in the path towards a negotiated solution,” Catherine Ashton said. “The fact that negotiators are talking to each other face-to-face is encouraging, and I'd like to express my thanks to the King of Jordan for his initiative, closely linked to the efforts by the Quartet. I'll be looking for positive signs from both sides that they are prepared to turn this progress into real gestures and negotiations. Time is of the essence. Developments in the region make peace in the Middle East even more urgent and necessary.”

During the visit, the High Representative will meet Israeli President Shimon Peres, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and Defence Minister Ehud Barak, and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad.

She will also visit the Gaza Training Center, where she will sign the Financing Agreement with UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), and meet representatives of civil society.

The High Representative will give a press conference at the Gaza Training Center at ca. 11.15 on Wednesday.

Video and photographic images on the visit will be available on Europe by Satellite

HRVP and UNRWA's Commissioner General Filippo Grandi sign in Gaza € 55,4 million agreement

Brussels, 25 January 2012. [Link](#)

The European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice President Catherine Ashton, and the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Filippo Grandi, signed today at the Gaza Training

Centre in UNRWA's compound a € 55,4 million financing agreement towards UNRWA's General Fund.

The EU contribution is the largest single donation to UNRWA's core budget, which supports the Agency's regular activities in education, health, relief and social services and camp improvement. The grant will fund these essential services to Palestine refugees throughout Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Speaking at a signing ceremony at UNRWA's Vocational Training Centre in Gaza City, the EU High Representative/Vice President Catherine Ashton said during her visit that "the continued EU support to UNRWA is an essential element of the EU strategy to bring peace and stability to the region. The €55.4 million contribution we are signing today represents our ongoing commitment to Palestine refugees. It will support UNRWA's general fund, the main engine that keeps the organization going and provides all its essential services. I am very pleased we can announce this from Gaza today and would like to pay tribute to the important work UNRWA is doing for the population of Gaza".

Filippo Grandi expressed gratitude to the EU for its firm support of UNRWA: "I would like EU citizens to know that thanks to their generosity, refugee children will go to school; the health of families and communities will be improved; and many of the most vulnerable Palestinians will be less poor. The concrete, substantial impact of this contribution is even more significant as it happens at a time when millions, in the region, are calling for better lives and more opportunities."

High Representative/Vice President Ashton and Commissioner General Grandi also met with youth leaders at the Gaza training centre, a unique opportunity to exchange views and raise issues of mutual interest with the youth community, before moving on to speak with business and civil society leaders at Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children, a registered Palestinian NGO in Gaza City supported by the EU.

Background:

The European Union is the largest multilateral provider of international assistance to Palestine refugees. Over the period 2000 to 2011, the EU, excluding EU member states alone, has provided approximately €1.2 billion of support to the Agency. This funding has enabled human development for the most vulnerable Palestine refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

On the opening session of the Egyptian Parliament

Brussels, 23 January 2012. [Link](#)

Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-

President of the Commission, made the following statement today:

"Egypt's Parliamentary elections, which saw a good level of participation from voters, are an historic step towards the country's democratic transition. I congratulate the members of parliament and wish them every success in their work.

I hope that the Parliament will drive on the democratic reforms to meet the expectations of the Egyptian people for social rights, economic growth and fundamental freedoms.

I wish to congratulate Dr Saad Al-Katatny on his appointment as Speaker of the People's Assembly in Egypt following its first session today.

I am looking forward to the upcoming elections to the Shura Council due to start on the 29 January.

The EU places great importance on the transfer to civilian rule as early as possible. To meet the expectations of the Egyptian people, it is vital that the authorities stick to their commitment to hold Presidential elections by the end of June this year."

HRVP on raids by Egyptian judicial and police authorities on the offices of civil society organizations

Brussels, 30 December 2011. [Link](#)

The High Representative has taken note with great concern of the news that Egyptian judicial and police officials have raided the offices of several local and international civil society organisations, some which are working in the field of democracy and human rights.

This open demonstration of force against civil society organisations is particularly worrying as it comes in the midst of Egypt's transition towards democracy. The High Representative calls on the Egyptian authorities to resolve the current situation and to allow civil society organisations to continue their work in support of Egypt's transition.

Commissioner Füle in Morocco: We stand behind your reform efforts

Brussels, 20 January 2012. [Link](#)

Morocco is doing well in the reform process and the European Union appreciates this progress," Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle said during his visit to Rabat. „I came here with a clear message that the Commission stands firmly behind your reform efforts and expect these efforts to be continued," he stressed when meeting the Head of the Government

Abdelilah Benkirane and several members of the cabinet, as well as the leaders of both Chambers of the Parliament.

Commissioner Füle held talks with the Moroccan counterparts on the same day as the Government presented its program to the Parliament. Commissioner Füle was the first high-ranking EU official visiting the country after the November legislative elections and after the appointment of the new Government headed by Mr Benkirane.

“I can express my satisfaction, that barely one year after my last visit to Rabat, several important changes occurred: a new constitution was approved in the July referendum, free and fair elections took place and now the new government is taking the reform agenda forward,” Mr Füle said and added that the EU was keen to see this reform agenda to succeed, while continuing to provide its support based on the principles of new neighbourhood policy. „The extent of our support and increased cooperation should reflect the needs and ambitions of our partners. For more progress in democratic and economic reforms there will be more EU assistance,” the Commissioner said, acknowledging that much has been achieved in Morocco so far but that there are still important reforms to be implemented to ensure lasting stability and a stronger and more inclusive economic development so that the legitimate aspirations of the people could be met.

He was reassured by the determination of his interlocutors to continue and to strengthen the transformation of their country with a „new generation of reforms“. The partners on the Moroccan side expressed willingness to increase bilateral cooperation and dialogue on a wide range of issues, underlining that Morocco would be a strong and reliable partner for the EU.

In addition to the Head of Government Mr Füle held talks with the speaker of the Chamber of Representatives Karim Ghellab, speaker of the Chamber of Councillors Mohamed Cheikh Biadillah, Minister of Foreign Affairs Saâdeddine El Othmanim, Minister of Economy and Finance Nizar Baraka and Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Aziz Akhannouch.

Commissioner Füle and Minister Baraka launched two projects financed from the EU Neighbourhood Investment Facility to help Morocco to reduce its energy dependency and increase efficiency in water delivery : “Both projects amount to 37 millions € in EU grants but they have a much higher value as they are leveraging large loans from EU development banks, for a total amount of more than 600 million euros. These are just small examples of the advantages stemming from our support to the transformation of Morocco,” Mr Füle said. The first project is for the Ouarzazate Solar Power Plant (€ 30 mil) and the other one for Drinking Water Efficiency Programme (€7 mil).

During his visit to Rabat Commissioner Füle also met representatives of civil society and discussed with them the extent and the results of the reforms undertaken in Morocco so far, in order to gain a better understanding of citizens’ aspirations. The Commissioner explained that, under the new European Neighbourhood Policy, there is now much a

greater focus on the EU’s support for and partnership with civil society, which has a key role in the sustainability of the democratisation process.

Jordan and Tunisia become members of the EBRD

3 January 2012. [Link](#)

Jordan and Tunisia have become members of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) as part of the process of becoming recipients of EBRD investments.

Both countries sought membership of the EBRD in 2011, saying that they believed EBRD support would play an important role in helping to implement their programmes of economic and political reform.

Jordan and Tunisia now join Egypt and Morocco as EBRD shareholders in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region, with Egypt and Morocco being founder members when the Bank was established in 1991.

All four countries are the target of support under the Deauville Partnership that was launched under the French presidency of the G-8 in May 2011 in response to the historic changes under way in parts of the Middle East and North Africa.

Responding to a call by the international community, the EBRD is extending the remit of its activities to include the southern and eastern Mediterranean region in a three-stage process that has already seen the first flow of technical assistance funded by grants from donors.

Technical cooperation funds prepare the way for future EBRD funding, while the second stage in the process, expected in 2012, would be the creation of a special fund that would permit the start of EBRD investments in the four countries ahead of their becoming countries of operations.

The EBRD is aiming to apply the experience it has built up in supporting the transition process in central and eastern Europe and central Asia over the last two decades, bringing to bear its particular focus on promoting the development of the private sector.

The EBRD has the capacity to invest, in the medium term, up to €2.5 billion a year across the southern and eastern Mediterranean region. Any decision by shareholders to begin full-scale investments will take into account political and economic reforms undertaken in the relevant countries.

Ashton and Commissioner Füle on the new government in Tunisia

Brussels, 27 December 2011. [Link](#)

We welcome the appointment of the new Tunisian government headed by Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali and wish him and his team every success. This is a further important step in the transition of the country towards democracy. It is highly symbolic that a democratically elected government has now been installed one year after the start of the Tunisian revolution. While the Tunisian people will continue to face new challenges, in the space of just one year, they have shed an authoritarian regime, engaged in an electoral process to set up a Constituent Assembly and put in place a democratic system. We pay tribute to the Tunisian people for this remarkable achievement.

We also wish to commend former Prime Minister Essebsi and his government for the excellent work they undertook during their mandate.

We look forward to starting an intense dialogue with the new Tunisian government. The EU has already provided substantial support to Tunisia in the process of democratic transition. We are committed to continuing our assistance in response to requests from the Tunisian authorities and civil society. There is a broad agenda of common work ahead of us, from the negotiations of a mobility partnership to the possibility of establishing a deep and comprehensive free trade area. We are keen to establish with Tunisia a privileged partnership that will be beneficial to our peoples.

The EU attaches great importance to the consolidation of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law in Tunisia, as well as to progress towards sustainable and equitable economic and social development. The new Tunisian government can rely on the full support of the EU to achieve these objectives.

The Statement of the Foreign Minister of Armenia on adoption by the French National Assembly of a bill aimed at making it a crime to deny genocides recognized under French law

Yerevan, 24 January 2012. [Link](#)

Today's Senate decision is the logical continuation of the law recognizing the Armenian Genocide adopted by France in 2001.

This day will be written in gold not only in the history of friendship between the Armenian and French peoples, but also in the annals of the history of the protection of human rights worldwide, and will further consolidate the existing mechanisms of prevention of crimes against humanity. France re-affirmed its pivotal role as a genuine defender of universal human values.

I would like once again to express our gratitude to the President of the French Republic, the Senate, the National Assembly, the Government and the friendly people of France.

Press Release Regarding the Law Proposal Adopted by the French Senate, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs
24 January 2012. [Link](#)

The law proposal presented by deputies of the governing Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), aiming to penalize in France any challenge to genocide allegations regarding the events of 1915 was adopted by a vote in the General Assembly of the Senate today (23 January). We strongly condemn this decision, which is problematic in every aspect and constitutes an example of irresponsibility, and declare that we will express our reaction against it in every platform.

A similar law proposal was rejected earlier by the General Assembly of the Senate on 4 May 2011 by 196 votes against 74, in line with the opinion of the Commission of Laws of the Senate which had concluded that the proposed law was in breach of the Constitution. Although the Commission of Laws of the Senate once again concluded that the latest proposal was in breach of the Constitution, the Senate adopted it. Since there has not been a change in the substance of the matter in the meantime, this development is a blatant indication of how such a sensitive issue can be exploited for domestic political purposes in France. This has been an entirely unfortunate step for French politics. Politicization of the understanding of justice and history through other people's past and damaging freedom of expression in a tactless manner are first and foremost a loss for France.

It is obvious that the interpretation of historical events cannot be determined by the attitude of French politicians who see in themselves the right to judge other nations on the basis of one-sided views and declare a judgment on a serious allegation of crime such as genocide, thereby ignoring the principles of international law. In fact, no Parliament has such a right nor such a competence. The decision in question goes further and delivers a blow against the freedom of expression and scholarly research. At a period when we need positive examples for the dissemination of universal values throughout the world, it is disconcerting to see narrow political calculations producing such a result even in a country which plays a role in the advancement of such values and which takes pride in rule of law.

It is further unfortunate that the historical and multi-dimensional relations between the Republic of Turkey and France have been sacrificed to considerations of political agenda in spite of all our initiatives and warnings, as well as the opinions of prominent French institutions and jurists. It is quite clear where the responsibility for this lies.

The circles which consider that Turkey has overreacted on this matter or think that its reaction will only remain in words neither comprehend the essence of the matter, nor understand Turkey and the Turkish people. We find it useful to remind all parties that, in case of the completion of

the finalization process for the law, we will not hesitate to implement, as we deem appropriate, the measures that we have considered in advance.

Similarly, it must be also known that we will continue to strongly use our right to defend ourselves on a legitimate basis against unfair allegations. No one should doubt our Government's principled approach in this issue.

On the other hand, we share the calls for common sense of those who, during this process, have admitted the error being committed in French politics, appealed to return from this error and opposed to damaging relations with Turkey in such a tactless manner.

It is clear that all avenues need to be explored for the finalization of the present process in a way which will avoid this being recorded as part of France's political, legal and moral mistakes.

Turkey is determined to take every step required against this unjust action, which disregards basic human values and public conscience.

Commitment to the Energy Community Treaty is good for energy security and for Ukraine's independence

13 January 2012. [Link](#)

This morning Energy Commissioner Oettinger spoke to Ukrainian Energy Minister Boyko regarding the ongoing discussions between Ukraine and Russia on the question of gas pricing and transit. Minister Boko reassured Commissioner Oettinger that the outcome of these discussions would ensure uninterrupted supplies of Russian gas to the EU.

Energy Commissioner Oettinger stressed that any agreement with Russia must also guarantee the full respect by Ukraine of the legal commitments it took when joining the Energy Community Treaty earlier this year. This is essential both for the energy security and independence of Ukraine, and also since the energy chapters of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (including its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area component) are built around these engagements.

Energy Commissioner Oettinger said: "The EU is willing, if Ukraine and Russia so wish, to enter into tripartite consultations on gas transit at any time. The Commission stands ready to continue both its active support to the Ukrainian energy sector reforms and to the upgrading of the gas transit infrastructure in Ukraine to ensure that it remains a key part of the pan-European energy network. Minister Boyko and I have agreed to work on a common strategy to further energy market integration into the EU. This work will start immediately. I will keep in touch with Mr Boyko on the development of the negotiations with Russia."

Background information on Energy Community

The Energy Community Treaty was signed between the European Union and the following nine Contracting Parties: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro Serbia, Ukraine and Kosovo under UNSCR 1244. To date, Armenia, Georgia, Norway and Turkey have the status of observers. It entered into force in 2006.

The Energy Community was created for a period of 10 years, expiring in 2016 and it can be extended by a unanimous decision of its Ministerial Council. Its secretariat is in Vienna. It gives administrative support, provides legal and technical assistance to the parties. The budget of the Energy Community for 2011 is over €3 million and it is financed to a 98% by the EU.

The Energy Community has a regional market of 73 million citizens.

In the medium term, the Energy Community aims at creating an integrated energy market across the region which allows for cross-border trade, guarantees energy supply and takes into consideration climate and social aspects.

European Commission President Barroso and European Council President Van Rompuy on the outcome of the EU accession referendum in Croatia

Brussels, 22 January 2012. [Link](#)

We welcome the positive outcome of the referendum on Croatia's accession to the European Union. With this vote, Croatia's citizens have given their endorsement to European integration. We congratulate Croatia and its people on their choice: EU membership will open up new opportunities for them and help secure the stability and prosperity of their nation.

With this popular mandate, the Croatian government can now complete the remaining preparations for membership. We are looking forward to a smooth ratification process by the Croatian Parliament as well as by the Parliaments of all EU Member States, so that Croatia can become the Union's 28th member on 1 July 2013.

The upcoming accession of Croatia sends a clear signal to the whole region of South Eastern Europe. It shows that through political courage and determined reforms, EU membership is within reach. Today's positive vote is therefore good news for Croatia, good news for the region, and good news for Europe.

Launch of the arbitration process between Slovenia and Croatia

Brussels, 17 January 2012. [Link](#)

The European Commission welcomes the successful launch of the arbitration process between Slovenia and Croatia. We are delighted that the governments of both countries have agreed on the appointment of the President of the Arbitral Tribunal and two Members recognised for their competence in international law based on a list established by the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso and Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle.

“This common agreement is a very welcome signal for the positive development of the good neighbourly relations between the two countries as well as for the Western Balkans regions showing that even difficult issues can be best solved by means of dialogue and cooperation” congratulated Commissioner Füle the two Parties.

Under the terms of the Arbitration Agreement signed on 4 November 2009 in Stockholm, the Commission undertook to establish a list of candidates from which both Parties shall appoint by common agreement three members including the President of the Arbitral Tribunal. In addition, each Party shall appoint a further member of the Arbitral Tribunal, which will thus comprise of five members.

The Commission has accepted this role and has established the list in line with the provisions of the Agreement after the positive meeting of the Slovenian and Croatian Foreign Ministers with Commissioner Štefan Füle on 10 January 2012 which has facilitated the successful launch of the arbitration process. The Commission commends the two Parties for the very constructive approach in this process, which paved the way to this agreement.

Following this agreement, the President of the Arbitral Tribunal is Mr Gilbert Guillaume and the two Members appointed from the list established by the Commission are Mr Bruno Simma and Mr Vaughan Lowe. The European Commission commends them for their willingness to take up the task to settle this dispute between the two countries.

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