Syria: Terzi-Al Araby meeting – Credible political pathway needed, Russia has a vital role

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Syria is on the “precipice of a civil war” and so “a credible pathway to reach a political solution” must be implemented. These were Foreign Minister Giulio Terzi’s words at the end of a meeting at the Foreign Ministry in Rome with the Secretary General of the Arab League, Nabil El Araby.

No-one wants to see a military intervention

The crisis in Syria “risks overflowing to neighbouring countries, with very serious consequences”, explained Terzi. He underscored that “as things stand, no-one wants to see a military intervention”. At present, “we are considering the problem of how to strengthen the observers’ mission by increasing its operational scope, its size and its capacity to defend itself”. But this is “influenced by whether the regime in Damascus is willing to accept a true peace force”, he specified.

Terzi and El Araby discussed the follow-up to the “Friends of Syria” meeting in Istanbul on 6 June 2012. The goal, explained Minister Terzi, is to find a concrete mode of implementing the Annan Plan, which thus far has not produced results. Its application, however, is “urgent”, because the population is being subjected to “repeated massacres”. In this light, the international community needs to press with greater urgency for a cessation of the violence and the opening of a transition process.

Russian input is vital

The solution of the crisis should also entail the “constructive involvement of Russia, whose input is vital”, in view not just of its role on the United Nations Security Council but also of its policy of maintaining a “real relationship” with Damascus. Italy, explained Terzi, “continues to work on this and it seems that there is an agreed line of action with the other regional actors”. He underscored that encouraging signals have been emerging from Moscow in recent weeks.

Indeed, Russia is organising an international conference to resolve the crisis, with the participation of Iran. On this chapter the debate is still open, said Terzi. Teheran is “a major regional actor” whose “specific weight” would entitle it to be involved. At the same time, however, its unocmpromising positions on Israel and Lebanon, and the difficulties posed by

its nuclear dossier, are a source of “very strong reserves on the part of the various actors concerned”. The Arab League maintains an open position on Iran. As El Arabyexplained, “Personally, I believe that every country that plays a role must in some way be involved, not necessarily in official meetings”.

15 months of violence in Syria

The Arab League Secretary General warned that “the violence in Syria has been going on for 15 months and has become intolerable”. The League is seeking “the opening of a credible and significant reform process”, and reiterates its support for the Annan Plan. El Araby noted that the international community is working on the idea of a contact group on Syria, that would include Russia and China, and which could meet at the end of the month. The aim is to exert pressure on Damascus because “the regime’s continuing exercise of military options will lead to nowhere but new deaths, and nobody can tolerate that any longer”.

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