EURO-MEDITERRANEAN FORUM: A strong appeal from Rome: “Stop the violence in Syria and create the conditions for an inclusive process”

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The goal of our diplomatic activity is to “stop the violence, stop the massacres, find a new stability for Syria: a great country that must respect the rights of all”. Speaking was Minister Giulio Terzi, at the close of the 5+5 meeting at Villa Madama. “We support the Arab League project”, underscored Terzi, explaining that “we are acting in concert with our EU partners”.

Minister Terzi also referred to the “Friends of Syria” meeting taking place in Tunis on Friday 24 February: a diplomatic initiative of great relevance, not least in view of its inclusive nature. A point that was underscored by the Tunisian Foreign Minister, Rajik Abdessalem, who co-chaired the “5+5” meeting with Minister Terzi.

The Syrian National Council and the Syrian opposition have been invited to the Tunis meeting, said Abdessalem. He explained that “representatives of civil society will also be present, while the opposition will have its own status” at the event. The Minister underscored that no-one wants further “Iraqi scenarios” for Syria but that a “strong message” for Bashar Assad’s government must emerge from the Friends of Syria meeting.

“A radical reform of the political system is needed”, said Abdessalem. He pointed out that “the integrity of Syrian territory” must be protected to ensure that “Iraqi scenarios” are not created. The Tunis meeting will bring together representatives of all the countries concerned with bringing an end to the violence in Syria. It will reiterate the utter condemnation of civilian killings, added Abdessalem, who noted that “the Syrian National Council and other members of the opposition in Damascus have been invited to the summit, where they will have their own status”.

The French Foreign Minister, Alain Juppé, speaking in the margins of the Euro-Mediterranean Forum in Villa Madama, said that “we need to press the Syrian opposition to unite, to organise and to take into account all the sensitivities. The sensitivities of those who are ‘inside’ and those who are ‘out’, and of the various communities who must be represented if the opposition wants to become a partner in the political dialogue that will find a way out of the crisis”.

Much of the discussion at the Dialogue for the Mediterranean ministerial focused on the Syrian crisis, not least in light of the Friends of Syria meeting of 24 February 2012 in Tunis. Juppé commented that “we agree on the goal of supporting the Arab League plan and halting the violence and repression. And we also agree that the process to end the crisis must be a political process”. The head of French diplomacy added: “we hope that the Syrian opposition will be present at the Tunis meeting”.

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