Speech by Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle during the debate on the Federal Foreign Office budget in the German Bundestag

2012-09-12

Mr President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Members of the House,

We were shocked to learn of the despicable attack on the American Consulate-General in Benghazi and of the deaths of the American Ambassador in Libya, Christopher Stevens, and members of his staff. At this difficult time our thoughts are with our American friends. We mourn Ambassador Stevens and his colleagues. Our sympathy goes out to their friends and loved ones. We condemn the violent attacks on the United States' diplomatic missions in Benghazi and Cairo in the strongest possible terms. We call on the Libyan Government to ensure that these crimes are fully investigated. The perpetrators must receive their due punishment. I strongly urge the Libyan and Egyptian Governments to fully guarantee the security of embassies, consulates and their staff in their countries.

I want to state quite clearly that we will resolutely oppose any attempt to offend the sensibilities of others or to undermine peaceful interfaith relations. However, we are united in our view that the response to such provocations cannot be violence. There is absolutely no justification whatever for the murders of the American Ambassador and three members of his staff, which were confirmed just a few hours ago.

We sense when we talk about the Arab Spring that, in truth, we should be talking about Arab seasons. Just as the freedom movements on our continent were far from identical in every country – and we Germans are especially aware of that – the transition, the movement for change in the Arab world, has not had the same pattern or happened at the same speed or in the same way everywhere.

Some countries chose revolution. They include Tunisia, for example, which despite everything that has still not been put right, are becoming more and more of a model for many other countries and their freedom movements. There are countries such as Egypt which have struck out in a new direction. Despite all the great difficulties it faces, I would like to point out

that Egypt has a democratically elected President for the first time in its history. That deserves our respect and recognition despite all the weaknesses and, indeed, things worthy of criticism – I'm thinking here of the role of the German political foundations in Egypt – which we don't like and feel the need to comment on.

In Libya, we see that freedom has not yet taken root, as was made clear by these terrible attacks. We see evolutionary developments in the Arab world; I'm thinking here, for example, of the Moroccans, as well as of the Gulf region. We see that these countries have embarked upon different paths. However, these developments all have one thing in common: they show that people are clamouring for freedom and new life chances. A state which denies its citizens freedom can ignore many things but not demographic developments. These countries have a growing number of young people and they're looking for ways to get on in life. They're not only asking for political and democratic participation but, in truth, also better economic and social opportunities for themselves and their families. We shouldn't forget that the demonstrations in Tunisia were a protest against poverty and repression.

That's why it's important to me – even if we're understandably very much occupied with our own European problems at present – that we don't forget the historic changes currently taking place in our backyard. As we ourselves struggled for democracy in 1989/1990, we have an obligation to stand by nations which are striving for democracy, the rule of law, plurality, and expressly also religious plurality, which are daring to embrace sweeping change. We stand shoulder to shoulder with these transition countries. Even if we ourselves have problems, we haven't forgotten the freedom movements in our neighbourhood.

The situation in Syria is still appalling. We all agree that not only the violence in Syria but also the international community's lack of effectiveness have thrown up many questions.

There's no doubt that Assad's time is up. We'll have to wait and see when exactly he is forced to abandon power. Hopefully, it will be soon. Hopefully, it will be quick. The sooner Russia and China stop supporting the Assad regime, the quicker the violence will come to an end.

We have a strategic partnership with Moscow and Beijing. However, that won't stop us criticizing the obstructive stance adopted by Russia and China in the

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Security Council loudly and clearly.

It's important that we work to bring together and unite the opposition forces in Syria and help them to agree on a platform. It's not enough to simply be the opposition to something, in this case Assad's brutal regime. It's equally important to stand up for something, to point to alternatives and help foster the process of erosion in the regime's inner circle. We're promoting democracy, the rule of law, plurality and, not least, religious tolerance. We want a

new Syria, we want a free Syria and we want to help bring it about. However, it must be a Syria in which all religions and all ethnic groups have a place, in which they can practise their faith and live their lives freely and without hindrance. We're therefore also entering into partnerships of values.

We all sense that the Middle East has an extremely testing time ahead. The situation in our immediate neighbourhood is dangerous. Although most members of this House are rejoicing at today's ruling in favour of Europe, it's crucial that we don't underestimate the risks in neighbouring countries. We have to take a closer look and be clear that peace is hanging in the balance. It's not certain that developments in many of these countries will be peaceful. That applies not only to Syria and the ongoing violence there but also to Iran.

Having repeatedly advocated on the international stage during the last few years that we reach out to Iran and state our readiness to enter into negotiations, I say: negotiations are not an end in themselves. We won't accept negotiations which are merely a means of playing for time. A nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable to us, not only because we have a special responsibility for Israel's freedom but also because we cannot allow a nuclear arms race to start in the region which will lead one country after another to arm itself with nuclear weapons, with all the risks that involves.

We call upon Iran to comply with international law. Otherwise we'll have to impose tougher sanctions; no other course of action is possible. I want to emphasize and say in all earnest that we want a political and diplomatic solution; it's not too late for that. However, everyone has to be aware that a nuclear-armed Iran is not acceptable. It's not acceptable to Israel, not acceptable to the region and not acceptable if we are to maintain a stable global security architecture.

Finally, I'd like to thank everyone who's worked together with us in the Budget Committee, in the Committee on Foreign Affairs, in the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union and in the Subcommittee on Cultural and Education Policy Abroad.

I want to conclude with a comment which goes far beyond the technical aspects of what was said during this morning's debate on the crucial and fortunate ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court: I believe we have to work out together how we're going to rewrite Europe's history, also in the eyes of ordinary citizens. It's not enough to say to young people: Europe is the peaceful answer to centuries of war and confrontation. It's important that we recognize that Europe is not only the response to history, not only the response to the darkest chapter in Germany's history but, in truth, Europe is a community linked by a common destiny, a community with a shared culture.

I've been Foreign Minister for three years now. The increased authority which economic success has brought the new global players, and which I've witnessed during the last three

years, has also given them more political clout. No country in Europe can master the challenges of globalization on its own. We can only master them together by pooling our resources. And we can only defend our European model in the face of competition if we enter into partnership with the new global players. We have to put into practice Europe’s determination to make it as a European community bound together by a common culture. This is about more than the single market and monetary union.

Thank you for your attention.

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