Speech by Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle to the 2011 CFSP Review Conference: “Democratic and Economic Transformation in North Africa and the Middle East”

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-- translation of advance text --

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Internally, the European Union has to deal with one of its worst crises.

Externally, the Arab Spring offers an historic opportunity.

The European Union is the partner of choice for the transition countries in

North Africa

.

The Union provides a good example of how close cooperation can work without diminishing cultural identity. It shows how democratic, economic and social development can be successfully combined.

Europe

understood very quickly the historic opportunity arising from reforms in the Arab world.

Not that we are ignorant of the risks. There is still a lot that could go wrong. But we must not let our awareness of the risks blind us to the positive prospects. The Mediterranean could finally become a common space of peace, freedom and prosperity.

The potential benefits are numerous.

Successful transformation processes will make Arab societies far less vulnerable to radical ideologies. German and European business might get easier access to a market of more than 150 million people.

Producer and consumer countries stand to benefit from the huge solar energy potential in the southern Mediterranean. There is potential for minimizing illegal migration and expanding cooperation in this field.

The

EU

has offered the transition countries a Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity.

It is also going to improve its European Neighbourhood Policy in order to better support processes of democratic transition. Greater reform will be met by greater support. More for more.

Germany

is providing its own assistance to complement the

EU’s

support.

We have offered Tunisia and Egypt comprehensive bilateral transformation partnerships.

We recently agreed with the Tunisian government to focus our cooperative efforts on democratization, the economy and education.

The jointly agreed Berlin Declaration will be the basis for comprehensive collaboration with Egypt.

These transformation partnerships can become beacons of democratic and social development in the region.

Their aim is not simply to overcome the old autocratic regime and their replacement by no matter what. Transformation Partnerships follow a clear direction: towards democracy, the rule of law, human rights, peace at home and with its neighbours as well as religious diversity.

German involvement in the Arab reform process is based on two underlying principles.

First, the path the process of transition takes has to be determined by the countries themselves.

We should be careful in our judgments.

The criteria for assessing the political parties in

Tunisia

and

Egypt

needs to be whether they are playing by the rules of democracy or not.

Conservative social structures are a basis for the success of Islamic political parties. They will only be changed by long-term economic and social developments – not by voices from outside.

We have no reason to fear or marginalize moderate Islamic parties.

But we must keep an eye on whether democratic principles and human rights are being respected. This includes the rights of religious minorities. We were appalled by the recent violence against Christians in Egypt.

Second, longterm political stability can only be based on freedom.

We have seen how quickly autocratic regimes can collapse in today's globalized world. North Africa should encourage us to have confidence in the long-term workings of freedom. Those who miss their time to go, will be made to go.

Where governments actively initiate change, such as in

Morocco

or

Jordan

, we will support their efforts.

We will have to make sure that the changes made are lasting and that the societies really have a stake in them. The young, energetic populations of these countries expect freedom and true democratization.

In

Libya

, things are still in the initial stages.

Now that Gaddafi's 40 year regime is over, the country needs to find a new way of being a state. We are already doing a lot to help, for example treating injured persons in German

hospitals. We will strongly support Libya on its way to become a true democracy and to unfold its economic potential.

In countries where the internal conditions for change are simply not in place, we cannot initiate developments from the outside.

But we seek to encourage change and reform in our contacts with such countries. This includes the human rights situation. At the same time, responsible foreign policy needs to take account of all Germany's, the

EU's

and our allies' interests and have the capacity to carefully weigh decisions.

The Syrian regime is relying on repression.

While friendly protesters are continued to be killed, we cannont allow President Assad to play on time. That is why we are working to increase the international pressure and preparing further sanctions.

We welcome the Arab League's more robust approach and we are urging the

UN

Security Council to send a strong message.

The international community has to stand firm in the face of the Syrian regime's criminal treatment of its own people.

The internet is playing a central role for civil society in countries like

Syria

.

As in Tunisia and Egypt the role of bloggers and social media can hardly be overestimated. We should therefore ensure that the internet can continue to be used by democratic movements in these countries.

At the

EU

level, countries like Germany and Finland – with our strong telecommunications industries – should push for technology for controlling the internet to be included in sanctions regimes.

If technological development changes the form of repression, sanctions cannot stop at small arms and water cannons.

Iran

has to cooperate with the international community on its nuclear programme.

If the report of International Atomic Engery Agency comes to the conclusion that Iran is continuing to violate its obligations, we are determined to further increase the international pressure, including through further sanctions. However, I am not convinced a discussion about a military option is helpful.

A military option would destabilize the entire region and at the same time stabilize the repressive regime in Iran.

The people in

North Africa

and the

Middle East

are looking to

Europe

with great expectations.

Many of them will be beyond our power to meet. There is no doubt that this is a historic development – but 2011 is not the same as 1989.

The

EU

will not be able to provide the same sort of financial support, nor to offer the new transition states a perspective of joining the

Union

.

However, the

EU

needs to develop a vision for these countries and what specific prospects it can offer.

First, we need to rapidly translate our words into action to help develop civil society, the economy and infrastructure in our partner countries. Without democratic development, there can be no lasting economic success.

And without economic success, democratic developments cannot be stabilized.

Second, we must offer a realistic perspective.

I believe that states willing to reform should have the option to develop very close ties with the

EU

, short of the perspective of membership.

This option should be about real partnership, not just creating new structures and bureaucracy.

Third, the

EU

should offer the transition countries an ambitious mobility partnership.

This might involve, for instance, professionals receiving training in Germany. We cannot neglect security concerns, but I think we must be prepared to review our visa policy. Values are best passed on through direct contact.

Fourth, we should be making efforts to facilitate more trade.

Germany has been lobbying in Brussels for the North African countries to be quickly granted greater access to the

EU

market. To realize all the benefits the transition countries also need to become more competitive. The

EU

should concentrate on opening up viable market opportunities for these countries.

Elaborating a concrete offer for the countries of

North Africa

and the

Middle East

will mean a lot of work within the

EU

.

We will need to convince partners.

At the same time, we need to engage in intensive political dialogue with the transition countries to work out together how we can best move forward.

As we know from our experience in Central and Eastern Europe, developing closer ties can be a long and laboursome process.

I am certain that

Europe

will retain its great appeal for people in

North Africa

and other parts of the world.

I am also sure that Europe can only benefit from intensive cooperation with our neighbours. Whether we can fully grasp the opportunities of these historical changes in the region will be a defining issue for Europe's common foreign and security policy.

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