

Opening speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the 5th EU-League of Arab States (LAS) ministerial meeting

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Good morning.

I wish to warmly welcome you to Brussels for this first ever ministerial meeting between the League of Arab States (LAS) and the European Union that we have in Brussels. I remember very well the last time we met in Cairo for a very productive meeting and it is really my pleasure, together with all my colleagues and friends from the European Union Member States, to welcome all our friends from the Arab League Member States and from the Arab League itself to this important ministerial meeting.

It is an intense moment in our cooperation, with the first ever Summit between the European Union and the League of Arab States at the end of this month in Egypt.

And let me say that cooperation between Europe and the Arab world was never so important and, I believe, has never been so necessary. And if I can say it also from a personal point of view: I have always found it strange that the European Union has summits with Asia, with Latin America and with Africa, but so far we never had a summit with the League of Arab States. So I think we will do a very important step and this ministerial will be an important step to prepare the Summit later this month.

In our common region we have gone through almost a decade now of wars and turmoils. We now stand possibly at the crossroads between more instability and suffering, on one side, and the difficult path towards peace and reconciliation on the other. Answering the call for peace that comes from our people is in our collective interest, we believe, towards not only peace, but also towards sustainable security and towards economic growth in our region. And we know very well that peace, security and economic growth in our region is interconnected, because we share the same geography and the same history. And this is incompatible with a logic based on confrontation among regional powers. Confrontation can only lead to greater polarisation, greater instability, and new escalations of violence. We believe cooperation is the basis for a brighter future.

And this is where our partnership, our friendship can make a real difference - first and foremost, on practical things where it is self-evident that we share the same interests, because we see that together we can create more and better jobs for our young people, open up new opportunities for education, manage migration flows more safely and humanely, adapt to climate change and invest in our common environment, contrast

radicalisation and cooperate in the fight against terrorism. In all these fields we need one another. Europe needs cooperation with the Arab world and the Arab world needs cooperation with Europe.

This is also true in addressing the conflicts in our common region. Look at Israel and Palestine: today there is a risk of further escalation that will bring the Israelis and the Palestinians further away from ending the conflict.

We Europeans have demonstrated our commitment to peace in the Holy Places, for instance through stepping up consistently our contributions to maintain the operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees [UNRWA]. And we know that we need cooperation between Europeans and Arabs to accompany the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships on the path towards peace. And most all, I believe, we around this table share the urgent objective to prevent the definitive collapse of the two-state solution and find ways to revive it.

The same is true for Syria. I believe we share the view that only a negotiated political solution – under the UN auspices – can bring peace to Syria. This is for us the obvious precondition for reconstruction and for a normalisation of relations with Damascus. I believe we all want to see Syria in peace again. And for this reason I hope we will all join forces during the Third Brussels Conference on Syria that we will host in this very same room from 12 to 14 March, where we will work in support of the United Nations' mediation for a reconciliation inside Syria. But also, we will work to support the countries in the region that are hosting so many refugees from Syria.

After almost a decade of war, it is hard to believe that peace and reconciliation are even possible. Yet all conflicts – even the most ancient and violent ones – can come to an end. And the people of our region have not lost hope in the possibility of a more peaceful and freer future for all of them.

In Libya, people all across the country are supporting the electoral process, to finally bring an end to the transition. I am proud that through the Libya Quartet both our organisations have worked in these years to support the UN mediation in the country, and I am confident we will continue to do so together.

There is hope for Yemen, after the Stockholm agreement showed that it is indeed possible to build win-win solutions – where everybody has something to gain, and we hope to see a full implementation of this agreement.

This is the right path. I believe we have a collective duty and responsibility – as individual countries and as regional organisations – to support any step in the direction of peace and reconciliation in our regions. The choice is ours. A future of power struggles and even greater conflict is not inevitable if we work together for reconciliation in Syria, in Libya, in Yemen and across our region. Let us work together to save the two-state solution - and you know that when we say it we really mean it; let us work to lower tensions across our region; and address together everyone's legitimate security concerns.

We may disagree among our organisations and sometimes within our organisations on a few specific issues, but we do share the interest to prevent another decade of conflict in our common region. This is the hope, I believe, of all Europeans and all Arabs alike, and this unites us in a way that is stronger to any disagreement we could face.

I thank you very much for your attention and it is now my pleasure to leave the floor to the Chair of the League of Arab States Ministerial Council, and my co-Chair, His Excellence Mohamed Ahmed Al Dirdeiry, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sudan, and then I will give the floor to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States [Ahmed Aboul Gheit].

Link to the video: <https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I167262>

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