Egypt: Press remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell after meeting with Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Ahmed Aboul Gheit

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Good morning and thank you to the Secretary General of the League of Arab States, my dear friend [Ahmed] Aboul Gheit. I am very glad to have this opportunity to meet with you today, Mr Secretary General, to discuss the latest regional developments and the ongoing cooperation between the European Union and the League of Arab States.

First, I used this opportunity to reiterate that the League of Arab States is a very important partner for the European Union. Over years, we have been cooperating closely on important issues for both of us, [such] as counterterrorism, non-proliferation, human rights or the Middle East Peace Process.

For doing that, we have been having contacts - regular contacts at different levels - including ministerial meetings. The last one [5th EU-LAS Ministerial meeting] took place in February 2019, in Brussels, at that time, I was still minister for foreign affairs of Spain. Since then, unfortunately, the [6th EU-LAS Ministerial] meeting had to be postponed. It was scheduled for this week, and it had to be postponed due to the readmission of Syria to the League of Arab States.

The re-admission of Syria in the League of Arab States is a sovereign decision, and we respect it fully. But we also see that this was done in a situation when Syrian regime did not make any meaningful efforts towards solving the conflict. Our position with respect to the Syrian regime has not changed and will not change until they make progress in line with United Nations Security Council resolution 2254.

At this moment there is no serious accountability of the regime. This is not perceived lightly by us. That is why the European Union, and the League of Arab States postponed our Ministerial meeting at the request of the European Union.

At the same time, I came here to underline that the European Union wants to deepen its engagement and dialogue with the Arab League, that is why I am here. And I want to thank you for your warm welcome; this is my third visit to you, and it has always been a pleasure, a pleasure to meet with you dear Ahmed [Aboul Gheit]. Believe me, the European Union is

keenly interested to keep contact with the League of Arab States and in particular, with the League's Committee on Syria.

We have also exchanged our views on the next steps of the comprehensive regional peace approach for the Middle East Peace Process. We are cooperating to create a new momentum; we are working with the League of Arab States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and are planning to pursue this further, taking concrete steps in the coming months. It is very important for us to be successful in this endeavor.

Moreover, we reviewed the current situation in Sudan, we welcome the resumption of talks in Jeddah and the renewed 72-hour ceasefire being effective [as of] today.

Certainly, and unavoidably, we discussed about Russia's aggression against Ukraine. This war has great consequences, as you said, it is very sad. First and foremost, for the Ukrainian people. We see every day how Russia is bombing civilian targets; over 5 million people are internally displaced in Ukraine, and 4 million people have escaped from the war and are hosted in the European Union.

But this war has dire consequences for the rest of the world in terms of energy and food security. And this one, the latter, is affecting considerably the Arab countries.

We - the European Union - have been at the forefront of the global effort to address food insecurity, both financially as well as through solidarity, trying to make possible the exports of over 30 million tons of Ukrainian grain and other food stuff. This is the consequences of Russia violating the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations by launching an illegal and unjustified war against their neighbour.

When it comes to the path toward peace, it needs to be clear that we have an aggressor and a victim of the aggression, Ukraine. We stand behind President [of Ukraine, Volodymyr] Zelenskyy ten-point peace [plan], which is based on base principles of the United Nations Charter, and based on the United Nations General Assembly resolutions, which has been supported by an overwhelming majority of states.

Dear Secretary General, on that [and] other issues of mutual concern we will continue developing our cooperation. I want to raise the level of cooperation between the European Union and the League of Arab States further, and this is why I am here to enjoy your friendship and your welcome, trying to overcome any difficulty that could prevent us from cooperating more and better for the mutual benefit of our people.

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