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A Marshall Plan for the Mediterranean region

The Arab world is in ferment. In many countries of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, people are standing up, raising their voices against poverty and oppression and calling for greater prosperity, a greater say in decision-making and more democracy. This epochal transformation merits Europe's unstinting support.

We are witnessing a fundamental and perhaps even seismic change that is taking place in the immediate vicinity of Europe. It is not yet clear how far the upheaval will go, but one thing is certain: a new course is being set in the Arab world. This will have a profound impact not only on people in the region itself but on us in Europe too.

At the present time, Europe has an acute crisis of its own to deal with. That is precisely why we urge the EU and governments in Europe not to make the mistake of concerning themselves exclusively with their own problems. Engrossment in our own affairs would be a mistake of historic dimensions. The developments in the Arab world offer great opportunities for Europe as well as posing great risks. It is in the very best interests of the EU to offer its hand to the people of the Mediterranean region. The resolve of the EU will help to determine whether the opportunities offered by these upheavals can be grasped or whether the frustrated hopes of millions of young people will lead to extremism, instability and mass flight.

We note with concern that the EU is failing to display the necessary resolve at this crucial time. It is acting hesitantly, indecisively and disjointedly. The long-established Euro-Mediterranean cooperation structures have grown rigid, and there is no sign of political leadership. Uncoordinated *ad hoc* offers of cooperation that entail long-drawn-out bureaucratic processes are mere figleaves and are not the way forward.

It is time for a change of thinking on the part of the European Union and the Federal Government. We need a strategic approach that is designed to support the democratisation and reconstruction of Arab states and societies vigorously, quickly and over a lengthy period, in short a Marshall Plan for democratisation and modernisation in the Mediterranean region.

To this end, we call for the following measures:

- An extraordinary summit of the Heads of State or Government of the EU Member States should issue a clear signal that Europe recognises the import of the developments in the Arab world and has drawn the political conclusion that there is a need for comprehensive, pan-European support for democratisation and modernisation in the Mediterranean region.
- Promotion of the reform of state structures must be considerably intensified. This relates to revisions of national constitutions, to reform of electoral laws and of the police and judiciary and to the conduct of elections. Experts from all sections of society, intermediary organisations and political foundations must play a leading role and be provided with the financial resources to do so. It is not sufficient to 'scape together' a few million from the current federal budget for this purpose.
- The young generation in the Arab world want to have good prospects for the future. We must help them by engaging in much closer cooperation in education and research, beginning with specific opportunities for academic exchanges. These efforts should include the relaxation of visa regulations for young academics.
- Building up the economy must be at the core of all our efforts. To this end, it is imperative that there should be a regional development fund which is sufficiently well resourced to perform its function. The resources that have hitherto been allocated to the European neighbourhood policy would be inadequate for this purpose.

Funds must be awarded on the basis of strategic priorities. In future, more money will be assigned to the areas where most is being done to democratise states and societies. In this way, good governance will be rewarded, while interference and moralising will be avoided.

- The weakened economies of the countries bordering the southern Mediterranean now need rapid assistance, unhampered by red tape. For this reason, investment aid must be made available to German and European businesses wishing to operate in the region as well as to small and medium-sized businesses in the relevant countries themselves.
- The removal of barriers to trade and the project for the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean free-trade area must be forcefully expedited.
- Cooperation in key areas of the economy must be developed in the medium term. A flagship project such as the Desertec solar-energy initiative must be followed by similarly ambitious projects in other fields.

The EU and governments in Europe have a joint responsibility. Now is the time to act. We Europeans are called upon to make good use of the experience we gathered in supporting transformation processes in Central and Eastern Europe for the benefit of the Arab world. We need a relaunch of the Mediterranean Union.

The Federal Government must use its good relations with the Israeli Government to work bilaterally and through the Middle East Quartet for the resumption of direct talks between Israel and Palestine. Together with other European countries and with the EU, Germany must act now to ensure that the democratisation of the Arab world also unlocks the door to the resolution of the Middle East conflict. In order to clear the way for such a breakthrough, the Israeli Government must put an end to its settlements policy. A Middle East peace formula is in the fundamental and long-term interests of Israel, the entire neighbouring region and Europe.