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(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RESOLUTIONS

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

470TH PLENARY SESSION HELD ON 15 AND 16 MARCH 2011

Resolution of the European Economic and Social Committee on ‘The situation in the southern Mediterranean countries’

(2011/C 132/01)

At its plenary session on 15 and 16 March 2011 (meeting of 15 March 2011), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted this resolution by 149 votes to 11 with 10 abstentions.

1. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) expresses its solidarity with the people of the southern Mediterranean countries who are peacefully struggling for their fundamental rights and freedoms, and supports their legitimate aim of establishing stable democracies in their countries.

2. The EESC demands an end to all violence against civilians and respect fully the people's desire for democratic transition and their right to freedom of speech and peaceful demonstration.

3. The EESC calls for a peaceful and democratic transition, with no delays, that leads to the rule of law, a stable democracy based on free and fair elections, full rights of association and the respect of human rights.

4. At this important juncture in history, both long-standing and recently established organisations of employers, workers, and other parties representative of civil society, notably in socio-economic, civic, professional and cultural areas in the Mediterranean countries with clear democratic aspirations are playing a fundamental role in the change of political regimes and are destined to play a crucial role in the future of their countries. In order to lead to fully democratic systems, it will be essential to establish constructive and fruitful dialogue between

these organisations and the political authorities guiding the transition processes. Civil society's contribution to strengthening neighbourhood relations, including direct contacts between populations, will be of equal importance.

5. The EESC welcomes the High Representative for Foreign Policy's recent statements in favour of these democratic processes and the announcement of a humanitarian aid plan for the region. The EESC demands Europe's unequivocal commitment, as expressed in those statements, to civil society in the southern Mediterranean region. The EU's external service has stated that it is already taking steps to turn this political commitment into reality. For its part, the EESC stands ready to support this political effort through capacity building, support for consensus building and the establishment by the civil society of the different countries of the southern Mediterranean of a structured and representative dialogue. The EESC welcomes the decision to develop this new approach: the civil uprisings in the southern Mediterranean countries clearly point to the weaknesses of the EU external relations policy conducted so far towards these countries.

6. To this end the EESC is anxious to assist its existing and new contacts, including the organisations of employers, workers, and the other civil society organisations having links with European civil society counterparts, and the Euromed Non-Governmental Platform. The EESC proposes joint actions in the region in support of a peaceful transition towards democracy.

7. The EESC calls for the involvement of all democratic forces in the transition process. The involvement of democratic and independent organisations of employers, workers, and the other civil society organisations will be essential during the transition phase.

8. The EESC calls on the EU to take ambitious measures, revising the mission of the Union for the Mediterranean, to provide political and institutional, economic, social, technical and humanitarian assistance to the Mediterranean countries that are already on the path towards democratic transition. The EESC regrets the lack of coordination between the EU institutions and the Member States in addressing these issues. It therefore urges the EU institutions and the Member States to coordinate their actions in the region and to thoroughly overhaul their Mediterranean strategy. Support for civil society should be a strategic component of this new approach in order to ensure that EU support to the countries of the region leads to maximum benefits. The European Economic and Social

Committee, as well as the Committee of the Regions (CoR), are ready to be involved in such actions.

9. The EESC and the CoR have agreed to dovetail their future action in relation to the democratic transition processes in the countries of the southern Mediterranean. The EESC and CoR call for a joint action plan by the EU institutions and bodies, which sets out how each of them should contribute to an overall EU policy in the region.

10. The EESC welcomes the conclusions of the Extraordinary European Council of 11 March supporting the democratic, economic and social development of the Mediterranean countries.

11. The EESC calls on the European Union and its Member States to work quickly and effectively towards a coordinated intervention of the international community in Libya in order to provide safety for the population, humanitarian aid, and all the measures needed to support the transition to democracy.

Brussels, 15 March 2011.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Staffan NILSSON
