

Plenary speech

**Friends of Yemen Meeting
Riyadh, 23 May 2012**

**Address by Kristalina Georgieva,
European Union – European Commissioner for international
cooperation, humanitarian aid and crisis response**

Royal Highnesses, Excellencies,

I am greatly honored to represent the European Union today and I would like to thank the custodian of the two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah, His Royal Highness Prince Saud and the Saudi government for hosting so ably this important event, as well as the United Kingdom and Yemen for all their hard work in bringing us together today.

We are here to demonstrate our full and unwavering solidarity with Yemen: with its people and its Government. We do this with even more determination following the deplorable and cowardly attack in Sana'a on Monday. The best way to express our support for the families of the fallen, for the injured, for the people of Yemen is to stand by Yemen every step on 'the way' in its vital journey towards a better future.

In January last year I was in Sana'a, Aden and Saada as the first winds of what became known as the Arab Spring began to blow through the region. A year on there are many signs of hope: on 21st February Yemen voted for change and already today, just three months later, President Hadi and the transitional government of Prime Minister Basindwah present us with a set of documents marking a clear pathway to meet the aspirations of the Yemeni people for a society of tolerance and justice.

I am pleased that we all speak with one voice on the importance of the GCC initiative, and we all recognize that for the transition to keep its momentum we need to make simultaneous progress on many fronts - political reform, improvements in the humanitarian conditions, economic development and security.

To succeed, we must follow the discussion we hold today with action. Our Yemeni friends are expecting no less. So here are the actions we in the EU are committed to take:

- First, together with our Russian partners we will coordinate international engagement for the national dialogue process and we will provide technical and financial support. We have

to make sure that this process is finalised by early next year in order for elections to take place in February 2014.

- Second, in the security sector, we will support by the Government to make the necessary reforms in the Ministries of Interior and Justice in order to provide responsive law and order to the people and we will fund training and deployment of police force.
- Third, we need to show the people that the transition is paying dividends – for their basic rights and needs. I am pleased that several members of the Gulf Cooperation Council have announced funding for Yemen. We in the EU will also increase our support during this Transitional period. Together with the World Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and UN we will finalise a comprehensive Social and Economic Needs Assessment which could serve as a basis for the Government's Transitional Plan to be presented at the forthcoming Donor conference and as a guide to our own contribution.
- Last, but not least: we must address the deep humanitarian crisis in Yemen, that has gone from bad to desperate. The

Prime Minister asked me today to make sure we focus on the severity of the situation - 44% of the population facing food shortage, 8 million people in need of humanitarian aid, more than 800,000 displaced population, and, worse of all, 1 million children suffering from malnutrition – threatening their lives and future. These are shocking figures and have all worsened in the past year. And despite its own hardship Yemen hosts hundreds of thousands of refugees from Somalia and other Horn of Africa countries. We need a surge in assistance now – in the EU we have already scaled up our humanitarian aid and I pledge today that we will do more.

I sincerely hope that next time this group gathers, there will be many reasons to celebrate and that, step by step, the foundations of a new Yemen will be put in place, offering the Yemeni people the future they so desperately deserve. We cannot fail them. We know all too well that ignoring this would bear tremendous risks for the region and world. So let us join forces and help Yemenis to stand on their own feet and live the lives that they all deserve.