

Statement by

H.E. Ambassador Nehad Abdel Latif

Head of delegation of
The Arab Republic of Egypt

to the

International Conference

"Working together – Strengthening the European
Neighbourhood Policy"

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Your Excellency Mme Chair,

It is my pleasure to participate in this important Conference, which the European Commission has invited us to, in order to discuss and exchange views on a policy formulated by the EU reflecting its vision on interacting with its neighbors. Egypt, as a close partner to the EU and its member states, is most interested in listening to its partners in order to better understand the new elements of this policy and its effects on the future relations between us; and in the same time this Conference gives the opportunity for our partners to listen to our views. In this regard, I would like to share with you some of our thoughts on this important issue.

First : Egypt attaches a great importance to its relations with the EU and its Member States, our neighbours to the North and our main partner in political, trade, and investment issues, as well as in development cooperation, in addition to the cultural and human flows and exchanges. This relationship culminated in the last decade in a comprehensive partnership addressing all aspects of our relations, based on the principles of mutual respect, equality, shared interests and mutual benefits.

Second : Egypt is implementing a comprehensive and ambitious programme of political, economic, and social reform, in accordance with its vision and priorities, and at a pace that takes into consideration its cultural specificities in a regional environment characterized by instability and the absence of peace. Egypt is convinced that a successful and sustainable reform process should stem from the inside, and will pursue this reform process believing that it is in our interest of development. We do not expect rewards, but expect from our partners to continue their constructive support to our reform programme.

Third : Co-ownership is an essential principle for the establishment of a fruitful and sustainable dialogue, understanding and interaction between parties willing to establish an effective relationship of partnership. This principle was clearly embodied in the Barcelona Process when it was launched in 1995. The Parties of this process jointly, and by consensus, formulated a common vision for a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership centered around the Mediterranean as the cornerstone for their future relations, and a unique regional framework enabling all parties to express their views on equal footing on all issues of mutual interest, including policies adopted by the European Union with relation to its southern partners, such as the European Neighbourhood Policy and ways to strengthen it.

Fourth : Egypt expressed its interest in the European Neighbourhood Policy, which focused on the bilateral dimension of the European Union's relations with its Southern Partners, not because Egypt was a new neighbour to the European Union, but because we were convinced of the importance of strengthening and deepening our Partnership with the Union. This is particularly so, since the mechanism of this Policy, the Action Plan, is based on the principle of co-ownership and on Egypt's reform priorities, and is, therefore, a tool with a value added in supporting Egypt's efforts to achieve the comprehensive development it aims at, and enhancing the European

Union's role and Egypt-EU cooperation in dealing with the regional and international issues of common interest. We have started with our European partners to implement this Plan, and it is worth mentioning that measures going beyond the Action Plan have already been taken, reaching for a higher level of cooperation in areas such as energy, higher education and scientific research.

Fifth : I would like to raise a number of elements about "Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy", as it was announced by the European Commission :

- a - It is crucial to ensure the principle of co-ownership of any European Union policies that affect its Partners in the preparatory phase, through listening and consulting with them.
- b - The bilateral dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy is clear and understood, as it complements the Association Agreements. On the other hand, while the Barcelona Process covers all aspects of cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean context and constitutes a unique regional framework, as already mentioned, the European Neighbourhood Policy introduces a new multi-regional component that brings together in one framework regions and countries with different political, economic, and social circumstances, let alone aspirations, priorities, concerns, cultural heritage and international interests. A question is raised whether this new component will gradually replace the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, or transform it at a certain stage into a sub-region in a framework in which the Mediterranean is not the center of gravity?
- c - The criteria for measuring a third country's level of ambition for its relations with the European Union are based on the pre-accession model, despite the huge difference in the end goal of the two cases.
- d - Are the "incentives" referred to clear enough? This applies in the economic integration component to the concept of "better access to the internal market". Will limiting this concept to three freedoms (movement of goods, services and capital) with the exclusion of the fourth freedom (movement of natural persons) represent a value added to what is already taking place in the context of Barcelona? The same applies to the issue of visa facilitation which depends on voluntary measures by the Member States. It also applies to the possibility of participating in European agencies and programmes, which is linked to a number of requirements. Wasn't it possible to provide a more flexible formula to the participation of partners in some of these agencies and programmes, in the first phase, as observers for example, to benefit from European experiences and best practices?
- e - Egypt would also like to stress a number of priority areas which have previously been suggested in the various meetings with the European Union in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, as well as in the context of implementing the Action Plan. These issues include the transfer of technology,

technical education and vocational training, facilitating the access to the European Union's financial mechanisms, particularly for small and medium size enterprises, the field of Research and Development, as well as the free movement of persons, and particularly officials, business people...

- f - Is it possible to achieve stability, security, and prosperity in the absence of peace? The region surrounding Egypt suffers daily from the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict and the unresolved Palestinian Problem, as well as instability in the region as a whole. Isn't it necessary to further foster dialogue and efforts on these issues between partners, notwithstanding the difficulties faced by such dialogue and efforts?
- g - Is enhancing relations within the context of the strengthened Neighbourhood Policy limited to economic and trade-related issues, environment and migration? Or is it also important to give due attention to cultural dialogue, which is already an on-going process within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and should be enhanced, particularly in light of the increasing manifestations of discrimination, intolerance and defamation of religions?

I would like to stress that these questions are raised out of our keenness to enhance and deepen our Partnership with the European Union, Egypt's important partner, at the time we are implementing the Association Agreement, the legal framework for our relations, the Action Plan in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy, as well as the 2005 Work Programme within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

Finally, I hope that our debate and dialogue today contributes to strengthening understanding and constructive interaction among us, thus upgrading our Partnership and our cooperation in support of the comprehensive development of Egypt, and achieving peace, stability and prosperity in our region.
