



EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

EU response to the Arab Spring: new package of support for North Africa and Middle East

Brussels, 27 September 2011 - The European Commission has adopted four new decisions for its Neighbourhood. The programmes will include support for areas like democracy, growth, job creation, microfinance and higher education.

"The European Union was the first to offer a serious response to the Arab Spring. This new set of decisions is the result of the new and ambitious European Neighbourhood Policy launched in May and it confirms that the EU has made it one of its main priorities to support 'deep' and sustainable democracy, but also economic recovery, in North Africa and the Middle East," said Catherine Ashton, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission.

Štefan Füle Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy added: *"These decisions prove our strong commitment to our neighbouring partners. Through job creation, improved living conditions, university partnerships and promoting a stronger voice for civil society, this support demonstrates Europe's full engagement in ensuring the desired transition to democracy in the region."*

Today, the **SPRING programme** (Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth) was adopted. Under this flagship initiative, the Commission will provide support for the Southern Neighbourhood countries for democratic transformation, institution building and economic growth in the wake of the Arab Spring. Support provided through SPRING will be tailored to the needs of each country. The total value of this initiative is €350 million to cover the years 2011 and 2012.

The second decision concerns a Special Measure designed to support poorer areas in Tunisia in the aftermath of the events of the Arab Spring. €20 million has also been allocated in order to foster employment and job creation in the country and to improve living conditions for inhabitants of urban areas in the most impoverished regions, as well as to improve access to microfinance.

The third of these decisions, adopted on 23 September 2011, is the **Erasmus Mundus** programme. This will go towards achieving better understanding and mutual enrichment between the EU and neighbouring countries by creating possibilities for student and academic staff mobility (for example, the opportunity to study in universities in EU Member States) and exchange of knowledge and skills. The overall budget for this programme is €66 million.

The fourth decision, adopted on 20 September 2011, is the **Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility**, designed to strengthen the capacity of civil society to promote reform and increase public accountability in their countries. With a total budget of €22 million, the programme will also support regional and country projects led by non-state actors. Similar amounts are envisaged for 2012 and 2013.

The four decisions come in response to actions outlined in the Commission's recent Communication entitled "A new response to a changing Neighbourhood".

More information:

4 MEMOs:

The SPRING Programme: [MEMO/11/636](#)

The Special Measure for less favoured areas in Tunisia: [MEMO/11/635](#)

The Erasmus Mundus: [MEMO/11/637](#)

The Civil Society Facility: [MEMO/11/638](#)

ENP Communication "A new response to a changing Neighbourhood":

http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com_11_303_en.pdf

European Neighbourhood Policy:

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/index_en.htm

ENPI Info Centre:

<http://www.enpi-info.eu/>

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