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**Remarks by  
President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy  
after his meeting with president of Egypt Mohamed Morsi**

It is a great pleasure to be here in Cairo: this vibrant city with such a long history and a promising future. Let me start by conveying my warm thanks to you, Mr President, for your invitation, and by thanking you for the very good exchange we just had.

President Morsi and I discussed the political and economic situation in Egypt as well as the intensification of the relationship between Egypt and the European Union. We also discussed developments in the region, in particular Syria and Palestine and Israel relations. We will be continuing discussions on these issues over lunch, and I am looking forward to that.

I have come to Cairo with a simple message: two years since the start of the momentous changes in the Arab world, a new chapter has opened in Egypt and we Europeans want the new democratic Egypt to succeed.

My trip follows the visit to Brussels, last September, of President Morsi - as first President of a democratic Egypt -, as well as a steady flow of exchanges between representatives of Egypt and the European Union in recent months, all aimed at building a new and more intense relationship which fits this new era.

We in Europe were impressed by its start. From the other side of the Mediterranean, we witnessed in awe and admiration how, across the Arab world, citizens filled streets and public squares, how young men and women openly called for democracy, freedom of speech and expression and for governments that would bring justice, development and jobs to all. And from the outset, the European Union has supported these democratic changes. We are also fully aware of the challenges and difficulties of such transitions – which many European states went through only recently themselves. And we are also fully aware of the profound differences among the societies that are in the midst of it.

**P R E S S**

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Dirk De Backer - Spokesperson of the President - ☎ +32 (0)2 281 9768 - +32 (0)497 59 99 19  
Preben Aamann - Deputy Spokesperson of the President - ☎ +32 (0)2 281 2060 - +32 (0)476 85 05 43  
[press.president@consilium.europa.eu](mailto:press.president@consilium.europa.eu) <http://www.european-council.europa.eu/the-president>

And the world at large was and still is looking in particular to the reforms here in Egypt. You are a major actor of the international community, a country with more than 80 million inhabitants, playing a key role in this region. That's why changes in Egypt have an impact well beyond your borders. The reforms your country has experienced in the last months have indeed been profound. For the very first time in your political history an Egyptian President has been elected democratically. The Egyptians are tasting the first fruits of freedom and a vibrant civil society is developing. But I am aware that much remains to be done if the transition is to benefit all citizens.

Today I have discussed these questions with President Morsi, as well as the worrying developments in the last weeks that led to an anticipated adoption of the new constitution, by referendum. I have outlined why, in our experience, in order to achieve genuine progress towards deep and sustainable democracy, it is so important to ensure consensus building, inclusiveness, and dialogue among all parties concerned.

I have encouraged President Morsi to intensify his efforts in this regard. The organisation and holding of the forthcoming legislative elections – even if all electoral processes have their own dynamics – should also be used to advance in this direction. I will also be conveying this same message to all other Egyptian political, social, religious and economic actors I will be meeting during this visit. Let me add that I have also transmitted to the President the EU's readiness to send an electoral observer mission.

A regain of political trust is also crucial to address the economic situation. Political stability and a clear legislative framework are vital to bring back investors, trade partners and tourists. They all want to be able to have full confidence in the democratic process, as remaining on the right track. In a way, democracy itself, an open, free and rule-of-law-based society, a society respectful of human rights, particularly the rights of women, and of freedom of expression and of religion, will raise Egypt's appeal even further.

But also on the economic field important reforms are pending. Since we are currently in the midst of a vital process of economic reforms and fiscal discipline ourselves, we in Europe know only too well how difficult some of the steps that need to be taken are. An Egyptian agreement with the IMF will open the door to further lines of credit and will help re-establish the confidence of international investors and economic partners. It is growth, ultimately, that will allow to overcome high levels of unemployment, particularly dramatic among the youth. I welcome, therefore, the fact that important discussions with the IMF are continuing. Nevertheless, postponing action is not an option.

As regards the more institutionalised relations between the European Union and Egypt, I have reiterated today to President Morsi the Union's support for Egypt's transition to democracy. In this respect, the EU-Egypt Task Force held in Cairo on 13-14 November opened a new phase in our relationship. The European Union and associated financing institutions have offered an amount of more than 5 billion euro (more than 6.5 billion US dollar) in grants, concessional loans and loans for the period 2012-13 in support of Egypt's democratic transition.

And we are looking forward to honour our commitment. An important part of these committed funds will have to work in tandem with the arrangement with the IMF. A rich trade and cooperation agenda is being developed, including the offer of an early negotiation of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. This is all the more vital since the EU is Egypt's most important trading partner and investor.

We have also discussed the recovery of assets. The EU understands the relevance of this issue. We have taken some important decisions and in our role as facilitators, we are working with our Member States on different proposals in order to make our cooperation more efficient.

President Morsi and I also discussed the regional situation. I commended Egypt on its important role in brokering the Gaza ceasefire late last year. The European Union is convinced that now is the time to look forward and to take bold steps towards peace in the Middle East. We are determined to work with those who are willing to join in such a quest.

Egypt clearly is a key player here, and the European Union looks forward to working with your country for the re-launch of direct and substantial negotiations, without preconditions, among the parties in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The aim should be a lasting solution ending all claims.

President Morsi and I agreed that the massacre in Syria has to stop. President Assad must step aside, in order to facilitate an inclusive and democratic transition. It is tragic that the Syrian regime has again shown that it is not willing to commit to a credible political solution to the crisis. Tragic, when we know that (according to the UN) since the beginning of the uprising in March 2011 the crisis has caused the death of 60,000 people.

We also agreed on the importance of the efforts undertaken by the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the Arab League, Mr. Brahimi, to find a peaceful solution and start a political transition. The National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces should engage with Mr. Brahimi and his mission.

We discussed recent developments in Mali and ongoing international efforts to combat terrorism and defeat the rebel and terrorist groups that are causing so much suffering. It is important that the Malian government regains full control over its territory and that reconciliation process in the country moves forward.

In travelling to Cairo and tomorrow to Alexandria, I seek to underline the importance of the partnership between the European Union and Egypt at this crucial historic moment. The success of Egypt's democratic transition is in the first place of key importance for the Egyptians themselves, but also for the region as a whole and even the world at large. This generation of Egyptian political and civil society leaders therefore has an enormous responsibility, to secure a better and democratic future for the whole Egyptian people and more particularly for its youth. The world is watching what happens in Cairo. The European Union stands ready to lend its assistance and support in this process. Ultimately, however, it cannot be but Egypt's own responsibility.

Mr President, that is why you yourself, together with social and political forces in your country, have an extraordinary task ahead of you in pushing forward a meaningful and inclusive national dialogue. I sincerely wish you all success in this endeavour.

Mr President, you may rest assured that on this path of enshrining democracy, the European Union will stand by your side as a friend, a neighbour and a partner.