

**Speech of Joseph Daul, President of the EPP Group  
of the European Parliament**

**"A Transatlantic Response to the Arab Spring"**

**Washington, DC - July 11, 2011**

Foundation Director, Lars Hänsel,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

Dear Friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here this evening in Washington at a time when the history of an entire region, the Mediterranean, is being written at an accelerated pace.

Not far from here in the suburbs of Boston, on one April day in 1775, several revolutionaries decided to rise up and give birth to your great country. The significance of 1775 for the United States can easily be compared with the significance of 1789, 1848, and 1989 for Europe. All these dates mark history because they were the occasions of revolts of populations that felt oppressed, who fought against what they considered to be tyranny and injustice. Whatever may come in wake of the Arab revolutions, history will continue to be written.

Dear friends,

Europe and the United States have historical, economic, and strategic ties with the Middle East and the Mediterranean. As a consequence, it is impossible for us to remain indifferent to the fate of this region. The challenge is knowing how to react to the recent events without repeating the errors of the past or harming the prospects of the future. Perhaps our first step should be to reflect.

For a long time, in fact, we have been living with the idea that the East and the West are condemned to contention, on the verge of a clash of civilizations. It was easy for us to believe that stability in the Mediterranean countries was the best solution. It was comfortable for us to believe that people in the streets of Tunis and of Cairo would be satisfied with the fate that was reserved for them. It is this thread of the exhausted dialogue that we must take up again.

This here is perhaps the principal challenge for us, Europeans and Americans, if we want to aid in a sincere and constructive manor the countries and people who decided to change their destinies and who as we speak continue to give the ultimate sacrifice to change their everyday lives. But the train of history is not waiting.

We have today a chance, maybe undesired, to start afresh in our relationships with the Mediterranean and the Middle East. In 1989, we Europeans with the support of our American

friends had the courage to open ourselves to our former eastern enemies who had liberated themselves from the communist yoke. We owe this to people like Helmut Kohl.

Today in 2011, it is certainly time to stop and watch the world through the lenses of another age. We have lost contact with the Arab people, and we would prefer to find refuge in the comfort of the status quo and stability. But what stability do we discuss when these overthrown governments did not know how to prevent the wars that ravaged the Middle East for decades. What stability while Europe and the United States live under the constant threat of terrorism and lose each day some of the women and men protecting us from this threat. What stability while gas prices have exploded. What stability, finally, ladies and gentlemen, while illegal immigration is a problem to which Europe cannot find a solution because thousands of people flee the misery of these societies.

I know the pain that September 11 inflicted on the American people, and we Europeans shared your emotion and your pain. Even in the post-Bin Laden era, the trauma provoked by Al-Qaida remains a reality and constant fear. But it is dangerous if we continue to stereotype Muslims and treat them with suspicion.

It is up to us, leaders of Europe and the United States, to be visionaries, by opening dialogue and promoting cooperation with the Arab people. The protestors of Tahrir Square and the Tunisian youth did not burn American or European flags. They called out for liberty, dignity, and justice.

Today, a potentially momentous opportunity has been offered to us because these people are in the process of affirming that democracy and human rights are not uniquely western values, but also universal values.

The Arab Spring is a demonstration that there is no fate, that all people of the world have this same thirst for the best. For the first time in its history, the Arab world is seeing the emergence of a sort of citizenship. Men and women are ready to sacrifice themselves to acquire rights.

The emergence of a civil society, of demanding young people, and of social networks is a major change whose impact we must fully cease. Emerging powers in these countries will be much more influenced by public opinion than historical legacy. If we want to make these countries future partners, the United States and Europe are going to have to work together.

Respecting the people also means that we must accept the results of the next elections. Of course only if these elections are free and transparent. And we must help ensure this. Yes, there exists a risk that very conservative governments, even radical, will come to power. But if we want to be credible, we cannot sit on the popular will as we could do in the past. We must work with the future governments elected by universal suffrage. At the present, what immediate future prospects can we give to the Arab world? The most urgent response needed is financial assistance.

The governments must continue to pay their dues to avoid paralysis. Then if the social dissent does not weaken, there is great risk of a counter revolution. This is why I salute the 40 billion dollars that was promised by the G8 at Deauville, even if it is insufficient.

We the European People's Party Group believe that the European Investment Bank and as well as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development should be roped into contributions.

Our support must not, however, be limited to money. These countries need our technical assistance. Our experts must be available to counsel the new governments, encourage justice and advise the media. Adapted to the new political and social realities on the ground, western expertise is invaluable. Spain, Portugal, and Greece became democracies hardly thirty years ago. For Eastern Europe, this was only twenty years ago. European and American experts who brought to fruition these democratic transitions are ready to give their support. Call on them and their experience!

Nevertheless, you must be careful when comparing the current events with 1989. In contrast to the former countries of the Soviet bloc, the Arab countries are not European. They are not destined to join the European Union. And yet we know that the prospect of adhesion to the European Union and to NATO was the driving force of reform in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The European Union, however, has some interesting alternative instruments which can be wielded to influence the countries of the Mediterranean.

The first is the European Neighbourhood Policy, which we launched in 2004. It was criticized, sometimes deservedly, but let us not be too harsh. This instrument is young and must be reformed. I welcome the desire of the European Commission to significantly modify the European Neighbourhood Policy. The new European Neighbourhood Policy should from now on put democracy and human rights at the heart of its projects in exchange for European aid.

The second instrument is the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership that we launched in Barcelona in 1995 and that French President Sarkozy relaunched in 2008 under the name, Union for the Mediterranean. Here the criticisms were numerous, but again I call for leniency. The Union for the Mediterranean is an excellent idea that perhaps arrived before its time. The Arab Spring is a unique opportunity for us to drive this process of European Mediterranean partnership. Effectively, we need both the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Union for the Mediterranean. They are complementary tools.

Finally, when we speak of peace how can we not bring up, at least briefly, the Israel/Palestine question. European and Americans are in agreement: the status quo is unbearable. Israelis must stop the construction of new settlements and accept the return to the 1967 borders by undertaking fair exchanges of land. The Palestinians must accept the legitimate existence and the right to security of the nation of Israel.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I do not believe in the damnation of history. I myself am Alsatian, and my region can witness that hereditary enemies are reconcilable. Israelis and Palestinians can make peace as the French and the Germans did. Because of this we must demonstrate that it is in the interest of all to bury the axe of war.

The Palestinians need the technologies and the savoir-faire of the Israelis. The Israelis must understand that living in a fortress is not viable in the long term. The countries of the Middle East have so much to gain from opening up and trading between one another. Are there not tremendous market opportunities for the Israeli economy if peace takes hold in the region?

To conclude, I will say that we are at a pivotal point in our history with the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

We must start all over again. The old disagreements can be settled if we, and our partners, find the will to do so. Sometimes revolutions end in tragedies, while other times they lead to a better world. One thing though is certain: a revolution always leaves its mark.

The Hungarian revolutionaries of 1956 waited 33 years before tasting freedom. In my country, France, historians even say that the French Revolution took a century to realize. Your first President, George Washington, once said "Liberty, when it begins to take root, is a plant of rapid growth." If today we do not want to wait 33 years or even a century, it is our duty and in our interest to help the Arab freedom take root as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your attention.