

**JOINT COMMUNIQUE**  
(Rome, 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2011)

The ongoing events in Northern Africa represent deep and dramatic social and institutional changes, which cause profound concern about the possible effects on our countries and on the entire European Union.

However, the situation of the last few weeks and the possible spreading of instability to the North African area and the greater Middle East region is generating high expectations towards democratic, social and economic improvement in a neighbouring region that is crucial for the European Union, especially for the Mediterranean Member States.

At the same time, it becomes necessary to adopt urgent measures to face the humanitarian crisis originated by the massive arrivals to our coasts, today Italy's, but eventually of other countries, depending on the immediate development of the situation over the region. Europe has to react according to its longstanding tradition, supporting those who legitimately look for shelter running away from persecution.

There has been a flow of thousands of migrants from Tunisia onto the coast of Southern Italy in few days, added to the already existing increased migratory pressure at the South-Eastern external EU borders. The possible opening of more routes in the Mediterranean, also due to the events which are taking place in Libya, may generate uncontrolled flows of illegal immigrants and asylum seekers into Europe, with serious consequences and potential risks to EU internal security.

Today security and stability in the Mediterranean are an objective to be pursued with determination and Europe cannot afford to remain without initiative to address the crisis in a neighbouring region, which is vital to its future.

Therefore, as Home Affairs and Internal Security Ministers of the EU Mediterranean Countries, we consider urgent for the European Union to prepare short and long term measures to address this situation, using all available tools and resources adequate to the challenge before us, in addition to strengthening bilateral and sub-regional co-operation between countries on both shores of the Mediterranean.

It is our common conviction that Europe's security and immigration policies require new impetus, focused on dialogue with the countries of origin and transit of migration flows.

At the same time, such policies should be consistent with the legal and policy framework for action that the EU has adopted through the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, the Stockholm Programme, the European Council conclusions of June and October 2009 and, more recently, the JHA Council Decision of February 2010 on the 29 measures for the strengthening of external borders and combating illegal migration.

Today, the concrete implementation of the commitments contained in the said Decisions can no longer be postponed.

In this context, we call for urgent measures aimed at tackling the flow of immigrants and asylum seekers that cross the Mediterranean and arrive on our shores. We also support the further strengthening of the joint operational measures already taken to keep under control migration flows to Europe and, inter alia, the recent actions implemented to control and deal with the increased migration pressure at the Eastern land and sea borders of Greece.

We also urge the European Union to:

- place the Mediterranean issue at the core of the EU agenda, at the highest political level with the involvement of European and international institutions and welcome the decision taken by the EU Presidency to discuss the issue at the forthcoming JHA Council and by the President of the European Council to engage a debate at the next European Council;
- build a new partnership with the countries in the Southern Neighbourhood which are pursuing political and economic reforms, involving more effective support from EU side and full local ownership;
- give full consideration, in a spirit of solidarity, to the difficulties of those Member States subjected to disproportionate influxes of immigrants;
- recognize the need and urgency of strategies that can address security, immigration and asylum taken as a whole, through the enhancement of existing EU instruments and the effective implementation of the measures foreseen;
- encourage forms of bilateral co-operation to address migration issues, both between Member States and with the countries of origin and transit of migration flows focusing, inter alia, on return and readmission and dismantling trafficking networks;
- strengthen the capacity of Frontex in order to make it a truly operational tool and improve its synergy with other bodies and with Europol in relation to possible terrorist and criminal threats;

- establish, in a spirit of solidarity, a common and sustainable asylum system at EU level by the end of 2012, as well as specific programmes to implement solidarity, such as relocation;
- promote regional assistance programmes in the South Mediterranean in collaboration with the relevant UN agencies; and
- set up a special solidarity fund, where necessary, to tackle humanitarian crisis.