

## **The Arab Spring: the role of Women**

**The EPP**, meeting in Brussels on 12 and 13 November 2013,

**Recognising** the major role of women in and after the revolutions in the MENA region<sup>1</sup> since 2011, in acquiring liberty, justice, human rights and democracy, and the contribution they could further make when fully included in the democratic processes;

**Being aware of** the on going concern of many women (and men) in those countries for civil war, repression, violation of human rights and women's rights, economic deterioration and social constraints;

**Being aware of and referring** to the demands formulated by women and women's organisations in the countries concerned since 2011;

**Referring to** international human rights law, in particular to

- the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- UN Resolution 1325 (October 2000) about women, peace and security, which calls for the participation of women and civil society in all political decision-making that comes with a conflict;
- the UN Millennium Development Goals, in particular MDGs on promoting the right of girls to education and on the importance of the role of women in societal reconstruction;

### **Referring to**

- the Velvet Revolutions of 1989 that liberated Centre and Eastern Europe from its repressive regimes;
- the European Union's values and commitments as laid down in the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) and the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights that is part of this Treaty;
- the EPP Political Assembly Resolution on 'Women in Conflict Zones and Situations', adopted on 5 June 2012 in Brussels;

### **Noting,**

- that in several countries of transition in the MENA region women are being marginalized or even excluded entirely from political bodies and that concessions on women's rights are often used as bargaining chips by politicians to maintain power by appeasing the most conservative forces;
- that the majority of the MENA countries that have ratified CEDAW, have expressed reservations against the principle of non-discrimination. We encourage all MENA countries signatories of CEDAW to quit that reservation and to apply the non-discrimination principle;
- the high illiteracy rates in most MENA countries in general and in particular of women (e.g. in Egypt being 50%);
- that economic and social demands are at the heart of the protests since 2011, women being the first to be affected by financial insecurity and unemployment;
- that women since the beginning of the revolutions are being used as targets for mutilation,

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<sup>1</sup> MENA = Middle East and North African countries, in particular Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Algeria, Syria, and Yemen, being all countries where since the beginning of 2011 revolutions and / or upheavals have taken place.

harassment, rape and killings committed by militia, soldiers, police and even demonstrators;

#### **Calls upon the European Commission**

- to ensure that issues regarding women's political participation, eradicating illiteracy and ensuring access for girls and women to education and to economic resources (i.e. Millennium Development Goals) are an integrated part of the EU's aid and policy towards the MENA countries;
- to reaffirm its already existing policy that all EU's political dialogues with third countries include questions regarding women's participation, recognition of women's rights, (domestic) violence against women, and cultural and religious tolerance;
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#### **Urges the European Commission and the EU Member States**

- to listen to women and women's organisations in the MENA countries, promote hearings of representatives of women and their organisations and take their points of view into consideration;
- to actively support their aspirations, demands, and priorities and use these in their contacts with the national authorities in the MENA region, notably that gender equality and women's rights are fully guaranteed and included in all constitutional and legislative reforms in conformity with international law and that women have equal representation and participation in all democratic processes, such as in the committees organising elections and drafting elections laws and in the constitutional reform committees drafting new constitutions and in conformity with national legislation;
- to call upon these national authorities to reform all laws that discriminate against women, including in the area of the family, marriage, child custody and inheritance, to adopt laws prohibiting all forms of (domestic) violence against women, to improve the availability of and access to education for girls and women, to strengthen measures aimed at increasing access of women to the labour market, including the right to travel free and independently.

#### **Urges the European Commission and the EU Member States**

- to present best practices by ensuring equal participation in their delegations and also in their own institutions, like national assemblies and governments;
- to ensure that financial and other assistance benefit women and men equally by earmarking such assistance;

#### **Calls upon the EPP, all EPP Member Parties and their women's organisations**

- to build and actively take part in the dialogue with women and men in the MENA region to better understand both sides perspectives on issues of women's rights and gender equality;
- to monitor their national governments on gender sensitivity in implementing their policies towards the MENA countries.