

CATHERINE ASHTON

HIGH REPRESENTATIVE

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

B-1046 BRUSSELS  
+32-2-298 85 90

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A(11)683914

Ms Ana Gomes MEP  
European Parliament  
Rue Wiertz 60  
1047 Brussels

*De Ana*

Thank you for your letter of 24 June 2011, and for your active participation in the 6 July plenary debate on the situation in the Arab World and North Africa, the situation in Yemen and the situation in Syria. I share your vision of the EU playing a significant role in working towards the resolution of the crisis in Libya, and also supporting the people of Libya, especially those in need of humanitarian assistance. I fully agree with you that the EU has a strong interest in the security and stability of Libya. As restated in the Council Conclusions of 18 July, the EU is committed to supporting the emergence of a new, stable, prosperous, sovereign and democratic Libya, through a peaceful, transparent and inclusive transition process.

I note your comments and concerns with regard to EUFOR Libya, and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) engagement in Libya more broadly. Questions such as those you raise have been taken into consideration by the Member States when setting out the scope of the mandate for EUFOR Libya. This mandate clearly sets out that any action by EUFOR Libya would fully respect the principles governing humanitarian action, particularly its impartiality and neutrality. It is imperative that humanitarian action is not jeopardised. Rather, EUFOR would aim to provide support to humanitarian operations (for instance supporting humanitarian agencies in specific tasks such as logistics, airlifts etc.). It would do this as appropriate and necessary, these being conditions which United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs would be best placed to judge. There are examples where humanitarian operations have been usefully and effectively supported by military actors (for instance, the 2010 floods in Pakistan). In a case of ongoing hostilities such as in Libya, this is a bigger challenge, not least regarding the perceptions surrounding the role of military actors. However, our shared objective of protecting civilians – preserving lives and relieving suffering – are objectives of such importance that any effort in finding a way through complexities would be worth it.

You also make suggestions that the EU should engage in Libya, through the Common Security and Defence Policy, in areas such as Security Sector Reform; Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration; and border management. Within the context of our support to democratic institution-building and reform in the Southern Neighbourhood, my services are looking into the possible use of CSDP instruments in the area of Security Sector Reform in the short, medium and long term. In Libya, the conditions are, as you know, very difficult. However, Mr Agostino Miozzo and a small team have just returned from Tripoli, where they made an initial assessment that will be followed up with an inter-service mission within the next few weeks. We have activated our SSR pool of experts and the team for Libya has been trained and placed on standby to deploy when appropriate. You will know that we have an EU office in Benghazi and the hope is to open another office in Tripoli soon. We aim to bolster this office with SSR expertise and to begin engaging with the Libyan and International Community organisations as soon as practicable.

In addition to providing ongoing humanitarian assistance which now amounts to some €140 million, we have launched activities in Benghazi in providing capacity-building for civil society, women and young people's groups, as well as to the Transitional National Council (TNC). We are also working closely with our international partners to identify where and when to combine our collective plans. These are big tasks, and a joined-up effort is vital.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continuing and very significant contribution to EU efforts in Libya. Your visit to Benghazi was an important signal of support to the TNC at an early stage in the conflict. I also appreciated the opportunity to meet with you and TNC representatives at our recent breakfast together. I very much count on the support of the European Parliament in the coming weeks and months, as we work to achieve our common goals in Libya.

*Yours truly*

*CA*

Catherine Ashton