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*To Ms Gomes and all MEPs who co-signed the open letter on the EU-Egypt Dialogue*

*Dear Colleagues,*

I would like to thank you for your letter of 7 December addressed to President Tusk and me regarding civil society in Egypt and European cooperation and financial support.

The NGO law approved by the Egyptian Parliament on 29 November is a topic that we have been following very closely. The European Union believes that civil society has a key role to play in the democratic, social, and economic development processes, as well as an important partner towards stability and sustainable security, in Egypt as elsewhere. Security and resilient, open societies go hand-in-hand and it is in the interest of security to invest in human rights. Civil society must be allowed to operate in a conducive and friendly environment, free of fear of intimidation, in order to be able to fully play its role in making societies more resilient.

In our messages to the Egyptian authorities we have highlighted the negative impact that the draft NGO law, if finally adopted in its current form, would have on the ability of civil society organisations to operate in Egypt. It would also affect our bilateral assistance and efforts to support Egypt's development process since civil society organisations play a crucial role in the delivery of programmes supported by the EU. I have insisted on these points in the meeting I had with the Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs in Cairo on 20 December.

As regards restrictive measures taken against prominent human rights defenders, in the form of travel bans, the EU has called on the Egyptian authorities to allow for the independent functioning of civil society and implement all the guarantees stipulated in the Egyptian Constitution regarding freedom of expression and association on several occasions. Notably, this issue was addressed in the latest EU-Egypt Subcommittee on Political Matters, Human Rights and Democracy held in Cairo in November 2015 and in the discussions on the definition of our Partnership Priorities under the revised European Neighbourhood Policy throughout 2016. My Spokesperson issued statements on 24 March, 2 May, 31 May and 17 September, highlighting that the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms is the pillar of the EU-Egypt Association Agreement, the basis for our bilateral partnership.

As you know, the human rights situation in Egypt was the subject of discussions that your colleagues, Members of the European Parliament Delegation for the Mashreq countries and the Foreign Affairs Committee, held in Cairo over the past months, with government representatives and members of the Egyptian House of Representatives. It is indeed important that together the

European Parliament and the European External Action Service continue to convey to our Egyptian counterparts the importance that the EU attaches to this issue.

The European External Action Service has been in touch with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and recently presented its input to the drafting of the Country Strategy for Egypt. Together with EU Member States present on the EBRD board, we will continue to insist that the EBRD's priorities and programmes address inclusiveness, for instance through women's access to economic opportunities and youth training programmes. The EBRD's support to the private sector is equally part of efforts to encourage transparent governance and promote competition in the economy.

You can count on me personally, on the EEAS, as well as on the EU Delegation to continue to closely monitor developments on the new NGO law and the situation of human rights defenders and to support civil society through all our instruments and means.

I look forward to continuing the excellent cooperation with the European Parliament, the EBRD, and other EU institutions to achieve these objectives.

Yours sincerely,



Federica Mogherini