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Let me start by expressing my appreciation of the role Qatar is playing in bringing ideas, interests and personalities together for important discussions - also during these crucial days.

I'm coming here as a European of the North.

Two decades ago our part of the world was transformed by the collapse of the oppressive Soviet empire, and new horizons were opened up in a way that come to transform not only our Europe but indeed the entire world.

There are sometimes parallels drawn between what happened then and what we are now seeing during what has come to be called the Arab awakening.

The collapse of the Soviet empire and the emergence of a new Europe was not an easy, quick, linear or unproblematic event in the way it is sometimes seen in retrospect.

It played out over years, had its profound setbacks - a decade of war in the Balkans should never be forgotten! - was for many associated with pain as well as promise and was eventually helped in a decisive way by the model and the magnetism of the European Union.

You could perhaps say that it come to its conclusion when most of these countries joined the European Union in 2004.

Democracy had been secured. Competitive market economies had been established. The institutions of the rule of law were all there.

Europe was whole and free - democratic and dynamic.

Today we are witness to an awakening in the Arab world that over time could be as transformative for our world as that huge change in Europe was.

We 500 million Europeans - and a further 100 million Europeans in Southeastern Europe including Turkey that are actively seeking to join us - are neighbors not only of the more than 200 millions living towards our East in Europe but also to the soon to be close to 400 million people of the Arab world.

And you could easily argue that how this relationship develops will be crucial for both of us in the decades to come. History has once again thrown us together.

These days we are consumed by the anguish in Libya and the anger in Syria.

Only representative government, bringing all together in societies truly respecting all political beliefs and religious convictions, can bring lasting peace to these countries.

Later this year we will see free elections in Tunisia and in Egypt, and I hope that the recent agreement also paves the way for free elections in Palestine. This will - I'm certain - serve as inspiration also to others.

But we must not underestimate the challenges the new democratic regimes will be facing.

Indeed, the challenges facing the entire region are momentous.

In its latest global report Freedom House described the region as the least free in the world. In its reports Transparency International notes high levels of corruption throughout the region - only Qatar and the UAE stands out in positive light.

Close to 60% of the population of the region is under 25 years. In North Africa overall youth unemployment hovers between 25 and 30%, and for those with some form of higher education it is often considerably higher.

What we have seen so far is a revolution of rising expectations - but what we must focus on are the policies necessary to prevent this from some years down the road turning into a revolution of failed expectations.

In theory this might not be difficult. But in the world of practical politics, with rapidly rising social demands in the more open political systems, it will be far more challenging.

Growth during the past decade has clearly been insufficient to give jobs to all. What is needed are growth rates that are app 50% higher than what the region has seen during the last decade.

Otherwise we will see unemployment and social despair rising with the political consequences this might have.

The prime responsibility for the reforms necessary lies with the countries themselves, but we Europeans - and others - must obviously discuss what we can do to help.

I would like to see a broad-based dialogue between the European Union - with Turkey included - and the Arab League on how we can proceed with this.

Since 1995 we have sought to develop a free trade area with all the countries around the Mediterranean. And we have negotiated for a free trade agreement with the GCC.

I think we now need to go beyond this.

Countries going down the road of representative governments, respect for human rights and economic reforms should for a start be offered the same possibility of so called Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements as we are now offering our neighbors to the East.

And I believe we should seriously discuss going beyond this.

There is no doubt that the impressive transformation of Turkey from the low-growth and crisis-ridden economy of yesterday to the booming growth hub of today was made possible also by it becoming part of the EU customs union from 1996.

I'm not saying this is an easy option.

To take away trade barriers towards the EU and lower them towards virtually everyone else increases pressures for change in the economy. Vested interests will be threatened. Old will have to give way to the new.

But that's the way in which growth will come, jobs can be created and a climate of entrepreneurship and innovation could be fostered.

That will be a new Arab awakening - and one that will give permanence and stability to the one we are now seeing the beginning of.

We Europeans of the North or of the South have a profound interest to help.

When the demographic tsunami in our Southern neighborhood turns into a demographic dividend in the economies of our Arab neighbors it will give a boost to us as well.

Then I'm convinced we will see the capital as well as talent of Europe coming here in much larger numbers. We will thrive together.

The politics of all of this is not without its problems. Trade barriers in certain areas certainly have their advocates in the European Union as well. And to pursue reforms in an atmosphere of escalating social demands as well as soaring prices for food and fuel will not be easy.

A better common future will require strong leadership in both Europe and the Arab world.

Then there are the other political problems. And let me just mention one of them.

The European Union has made it clear its firm conviction that now is the time to move forward not only with a peace between the State of Israel and the PLO, but between the peoples of Israel and the peoples of the Arab world.

In a period of democratic transformation - let me just mention Egypt - nothing else will do.

And we have also been clear concerning the principles of which this must be based.

If this does not happen I fear this will be a ticking time bomb under much of what we are now hoping for.

But if this happens it opens up further huge possibilities.

The vast talent of Israel can then join the talent of the rest of the region - of which it is a part - to create a better future.

In our world today we see a rising Asia, a reforming Africa as well as a more confident Latin America.

And the Arab awakening - the calls for reforms from Marrakech to Mecca - now adds further to this picture.

Together this should pave the way for a better future.

I'm happy to be able to join the important discussions here in Doha on these issues.