

ECI Blasts EU for Middle East Policy

The European Union (EU) has failed to promote democratic reforms among its immediate neighbours around the Mediterranean Sea, writes the European Coalition for Israel (ECI) in a statement on Monday. The following is a statement from the ECI:

Instead of supporting the opposition movements, which are now reshaping the region, it has kept old despots in power by providing them with important European business opportunities and by legitimizing their power base. Now the EU needs to seriously reconsider its neighborhood policy in order to help support the democratization of the Mediterranean region.

When the iron curtain fell in 1989 the EU immediately took action in order to help the newly liberated countries with financial resources and technical support to build democratic institutions. If the EU and the international community fail to support the democratic opposition's call for universal values (freedom of speech, religious freedom, etc.) the uprising will have been in vain and the nations may soon turn back to authoritarian rule. Political forces which are seeking to establish Sharia law and spread hatred in their communities can under no circumstances be supported by the international community.

The recent developments in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya call for a serious overview of the current EU support mechanisms, such as the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. How can it be that the EU in recent years has been more outspoken against the current Israeli government than with the despots that have recently fallen? By refusing to upgrade trade relations with the only democracy in the Middle East the EU has sent a clear signal that it has in fact been more concerned with strategic self-

interest than in promoting democracy and rule of law in the region.

The EU now needs moral courage to stand up for its core values and convictions. The previous strategy to wait until the uprising is almost completed before taking a stand is no longer sufficient. Now is the time for the EU to consistently support the forces of change and reforms in the region by also helping the opposition movement in Iran where two of its leaders, Mir Hossein Musavi and Mehdi Karroubi are currently held in prison.

If the EU leaders mean business they now have a golden opportunity to speak out in time against one of the cruelest and most dangerous despots still in power. This would not only serve the interests of the international community but the interest of the Iranian people who deserve the same opportunity for reform and democracy as Egypt, Tunisia and Libya.