

EU summit lines up with Washington on Egypt

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5 February 2011

The meeting of European leaders in Brussels on Friday was held in the shadow of Egypt's mass demonstrations and the brutal counter-offensive by the Mubarak regime. For its part, the EU is playing a cynical double game. In official statements, the EU calls for an end to violence and for a "peaceful transition to democracy", while at the same time signalling its continuing support and cooperation for the dictatorial regime of Mubarak and the military.

The mass demonstrations of recent days, which reached a highpoint on Tuesday with the "March of Millions" in Cairo, fill the European powers with dread. The dynamic and the revolutionary character of the movement have taken them by surprise. In almost knee-jerk fashion, they have sought to close ranks with the strongest imperialist government, the Obama administration in Washington.

Germany's foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle (Free Democratic Party, FDP), who just a few weeks ago spent his Christmas holiday at an idyllic marine resort in the Red Sea in Egypt, admitted on Thursday during a morning show on German television: "The European Union and the US are currently in close discussions." That can only mean that the German government and European institutions were informed in advance that the US administration was prepared to support the brutal actions of Mubarak's thugs.

In the same interview, Westerwelle warned against a further escalation of violence in Egypt, adding that he feared "a deterioration of the situation." What is behind these dark hints? What has been discussed with Washington? It is clear that the repeated calls to renounce violence and warnings about the freedoms of expression and protest have nothing to do with support for the Egyptian population. Instead, European governments are trying to deflect from the fact that for

decades they have supported the despotic regime on the Nile, as well as other dictatorships in the Middle East.

During her visit to Israel on Monday and Tuesday, Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) stressed that her "support for the democratic movement" in Egypt should not be misunderstood. She indignantly rejected allegations by her Israeli interlocutors that she was abandoning Mubarak, pointing to the many years of close economic and military cooperation between Berlin and Cairo.

In Brussels, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton spoke out, calling on Mubarak to respond to the will of the Egyptian population "as soon as possible". Similar comments were heard from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, who is currently in London.

On Wednesday, British Prime Minister David Cameron delivered a hypocritical speech to parliament, declaring, "We stand on the side of those who want freedom in this country, who stand up for democracy and human rights throughout the world." Cameron stressed that democratic change would have to start "now" and could not be postponed to a distant future.

What Cameron did not state is the shared position of all EU governments that so-called "democratic change" should not be determined by the crowds demonstrating in Cairo or Egypt's other cities. Rather, it should be carried out under the strict control of the governments in Europe and the US.

Discussion at the EU Summit in Brussels therefore centred mainly on who should best replace the 82-year-old Mubarak, and how this had to be done to ensure that the existing brutal machinery of power is preserved and any serious involvement and participation by the population is excluded. This is the main concern of the European governments, who thereby hope to be able to

secure their influence in the region.

In the eyes of Brussels, this role could fall to one of several figures currently being hyped as spokesman for the opposition movement. One of the frontrunners is Mohamed ElBaradei, former chief negotiator of the International Atomic Energy Agency. On Wednesday, this career diplomat spoke at length on the phone with German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle. The day before, he had already been involved in negotiations with the ambassadors of Britain and the United States regarding his proposals for an alternative to Mubarak.

ElBaradei suggested that Omar Suleiman, recently appointed by Mubarak as vice president, could serve as a transitional president. “During his period in office, the two chambers of parliament could be dissolved and the constitution revised with a view to presidential and parliamentary elections”, is how *Spiegel Online* summarised ElBaradei’s ideas. Although ElBaradei, who also maintains good contacts with the regime in Tehran, is held in high regard by the European political elite, he has very little popular support in Egypt.

In contrast to ElBaradei, the secretary general of the Arab League, Amr Mussa, is described as one of the most popular politicians in Egypt. Earlier this week, in an interview with US broadcaster CNN, he announced he intended to run for the Egyptian presidency. The German government has been in contact with him for some time. Last October, he was in Berlin to discuss the peace process in the Middle East. Afterwards, a German government spokesman thanked him for the “open and friendly exchange of views”.

Almut Möller, an EU expert on Mediterranean issues at the German Council on Foreign Relations, is quoted by *Spiegel-Online* as saying, “Amr Mussa is an internationally recognised personality, who is embedded in the Western system of values”. The West had come to know Mussa as a reliable partner in his role as secretary general of the Arab League. “Should Mussa play a leading political role in Egypt, points of contact for the [German] government would quickly be established”, said Möller.

Ayman Nur is being spoken of as a third potential stakeholder for the Western governments in Egypt. The liberal lawyer became known in the West six years ago when he was sentenced to five years in prison on allegations of falsifying documents in connection with the official registration of his party for the presidential

elections. His ban from political activity has still not been lifted meaning he would not be eligible to participate in upcoming presidential elections.

The debate about “democratic alternatives” in Egypt on the eve of the EU summit makes clear that the ruling classes in Europe and the US are determined to impose a pro-imperialist ruler in Cairo, who will secure their interests no less consistently and, if necessary, no less brutally than Mubarak.

In a trip to Tunisia on Wednesday, EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton demanded from the country’s new interim head of state that European interests in the country—in particular economic liberalisation and the prevention of immigration of destitute Tunisians to Europe—be upheld by the reconfigured government.

All the high-sounding phrases about democracy, freedom and human rights are aimed at concealing the fact that the European governments presume that, in consultation with the United States, it is they—and not the Egyptian people—who will decide on the future government in Cairo.



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