

Speech to the 32 Euro med Seminar

Honorable guests, Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Sir Winston Churchill once said: "History will be kind to me for I intend to write it". My fellow participants, history will be kind enough with Egyptians, for they did not only write it once, but actually twice. The first time was almost 7,000 years ago, when our ancestors left us a civilization that we kept talking about till 2012. However, I am happy that I will tell my sons and daughters that I belong to the generation that witnessed January 25, 2011, when our martyrs wrote history again in their blood. Therefore, I ask you all to have a moment of silence in memory of those who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of their countries... not only in Egypt, but in Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria, as well.

I first want to brief you about 3 important dates that led, in my opinion, to the eruption of the Egyptian Revolution: On June 6, 2010, an Egyptian young-man called Khaled Saied was normally surfing the internet in a cybercafé in Alexandria, before he was beaten to death by two police detectives in the city. This incident formed a popular objection among the emerging youth against the practices of the police regime in Egypt. Wael Ghoneim, a computer engineer in Google, created a Facebook page in commemoration of the fellow young Egyptian entitled "We Are All Khaled Saeed". This page has become a virtual movement or a party on the internet; with almost 300,000 fans by the end of 2010, this page became a forum for young people on Facebook.

The second important date is the first of January 2011; on new year's eve, everybody was wishing Egypt a better future, since the presidential elections were supposed to take place in September. However, an explosion occurred in a church in Alexandria while people were praying, resulting in heart-breaking casualties, including 25 dead – of which are an entire family with the exception of the father surviving, and many more injured. This incident shook the core of many Egyptians, and caused a general state of depression

and despondence among the Egyptian people, including both Muslims and Christians, since they felt that their country is in real jeopardy, and the regime in power is not caring for the people of Egypt, and have been treating them as quite dispensable.

The straw that broke the camel's back was the successful Tunisian experience to overthrow their similarly-brutal regime. On January 14, the former Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali stepped down and fled out of the country giving several Egyptians a full dose of inspiration based on the belief that what happened in Tunisia could happen in Egypt as well. A Facebook event was created by the "We Are All Khaled Saied" group asking all people to go down to streets on January 25. The choice of this particular date was very symbolic, since it is a day that was previously celebrated as a Police Day and an official vacation, and now would be one where Egyptians will be asking for freedom and social justice.

Now, as I remember the few days before the 25th of January, no one would ever think that such an unprecedented peaceful change would happen in the well-controlled Egypt. For example, our discussions in the Diplomatic Institute, fortunately located in Tahrir Square, were all centered on the number of people responding to the initiative. Some of us actually claimed that it is a virtual act where people are only clicking "attending" on the Facebook event, but would not actually go down to the streets. Others thought that at most there would be few thousands who would be arrested for a couple of days and set free later on.

What makes the Egyptian revolution more unique is the pace and tools of its mobilization. The new young generation in Egypt was often condemned for being superficial in thinking and western in appearance with their I-Pods and low-waist Jeans. However, as Wael Ghonim said in his speech : "The Egyptian Revolution proved that the power of the people is more powerful than people in power."

Yet, at the midst of this freedom euphoria, we do not forget that we have the challenge of Egypt's reconstruction. After decades of corruption and political stagnation, Egypt is

currently passing a historical turning point. Building a new system that values transparency and accountability is not an easy job. For us, today was a daydream that we had a few months ago; yet, we are all urged to tackle our challenges and set a clear vision to reach a well-established strong state. We have to aim and dream; aim high and dream far. Egypt that we dream of is civilized, democratic and a developed country; Egypt that we dream of absorbs different cultures and ethnicities, respects tolerance and enjoys diversity; Egypt that we dream of is a leading country in the regional and international arenas; Egypt that we dream of does not know corruption and connections to get an advantage over others, since equality, merit and efficiency are the only criteria to pick employees; Egypt that we dream of is a country whose mission is peace, power is hard-working people and success is its language.

The question is “Can We overcome our challenges and reach our dream?”... I declare the answer is Obama’s “Yes We Can”, because “We Already Could”.

One another distinguished feature of the Egyptian revolution is the sense of humor; I believe that this is the funniest revolt in history. While being on strike in Tahrir Square for 18 days, getting attacked by some brutal police forces and other pro-regime thugs, protestors raised funny signs and exchanged jokes on mobile devices.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I started my speech with a quote for Winston Churchill, I leave you with another quote for him; this is my message for all of you here: my five-word message is to “Never, Never, Never... Give Up”.

Thank You!