

**A NEW MEDITERRANEAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE?
THE ARAB SPRING AND EURO-MEDITERRANEAN RELATIONS**

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INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring has placed the Mediterranean region at the centre of the international agenda. The popular uprisings that originated in Tunisia soon expanded to other countries acquiring a regional dimension. The political processes that have emerged as a consequence of the protests have so far responded to three different dynamics: revolution, repression and reforms. In the first place, in revolutionary countries – such as Tunisia and Egypt – the protests have put an end to authoritarian regimes and made possible the beginning of a new-born political order. Secondly, repressive regimes – such as Libya and Syria – have spared no efforts to silence criticism and to disperse the protests with excessive use of force, committing mass human rights violations. In the third place, reformist governments – such as Morocco and Jordan – have adopted political reforms in a wise move, giving an evolutionary response to revolutionary demands. With such a wide range of possible scenarios, it is necessary to question the validity of the concept of Arab Spring as a regional phenomenon, since it is a term that encompasses national realities of a very different nature.

The Southern Mediterranean may today be entering a post-revolutionary phase. The focus may now be put on what is next: democratisation processes or a return to the ancient authoritarianism. Either way, protesters have shown a strong will to put an end to the Arab exceptionalism. The generalised analysis that emphasised the incompatibility between democracy and the Arab world has proved to be wrong. Indeed, the protests have provided proof of a strong commitment to democratic values. From this point of view, the elections in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco will become a benchmark for the consolidation of democracy in the region. It seems clear that only inclusive approaches can increase the chances of success in political transitions and for this reason all actors involved in the construction of a new order must push for a system which ensures the presence of diverse political sensitivities.

In addition to political inclusion, social inclusion should be considered as a factor defining the quality of a democratic system. In this respect, the role that youths are willing to play in democratic transitions in the South Mediterranean countries should by no means be neglected. In the first place, younger generations have a considerable demographic weight in the overall population. But, most important, youths have challenged the status quo by leading the popular uprisings that brought fresh air to the Arab world.

This EuroMeSCo report reviews the debates held in the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference 2011 “A New Mediterranean Political Landscape? The Arab Spring and Euro-Mediterranean Relations”. It is structured according to the panels of the conference, which covered the following topics: the crisis of the authoritarian system and the political, social and economic roots of the Arab Spring; revolutions, reforms and repression as diverging paths of this regional phenomenon; the road ahead for democratic transitions; the geopolitical implications of the Arab Spring; and an agenda for the future of Euro-Mediterranean relations.

PANEL 1. THE CRISIS OF THE AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN ARAB WORLD: THE POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ROOTS OF THE ARAB SPRING

Demands for political openness, freedom, democracy and socio-economic dignity have led to the downfall of certain authoritarian regimes in the region. However, we must consider whether these changes should be approached as a radical break leading us to a new democratic landscape in the Southern Mediterranean or, in contrast, whether the former elite will manage to return to power and reinstate the former regimes. In the face of this dilemma, each national reality is obviously unique and specific. Nevertheless, an attempt to define the shared points cannot but delve into the root causes of the rebellions and, in this regard, we must also delve into the political history of the Arab world.

The Genealogy of Power in the Arab World

The Post-Colonial Period: 1952-1970

In South Mediterranean countries, the post-independence period was above all characterised by national affirmation and the construction of an authoritarian State. Nasserism inspired the model of governance at the time in the Arab world, placing the emphasis on the eternal mission of the Arab nation, unity, freedom and socialism. The sources of legitimacy for this governance model were of a charismatic and distributional order. The charismatic personalities who founded the States represented the power and the States played a more intense role in the economy, appropriating distributive functions and creating employment.

Predator States: 1970-2000

From 1970 to 2000, the old regional alliances were disrupted by various events, such as the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979 and the Palestinian popular uprising against Israeli occupation from 1987 to 1993, among others. This period witnessed the passage of the nationalist Arab State to the privatised, predatory Arab State. The South Mediterranean countries used Cold War relations to freeze demands for democracy and any dissident movements were strongly repressed.

The Straw that Broke the Camel's Back: 2000-2011

In this last period, the Arab South Mediterranean countries were characterised by generalised corruption, the impoverishment of society in the face of the accumulation of wealth by the elite and a rise in unemployment, among other factors. Social changes and the inability of leaders to meet new needs and fulfil their part of the social contract caused their progressive loss of legitimacy, which was at the origin of the revolts. The capacity of Arab monarchies in the Southern Mediterranean to assuage protests by implementing reforms is most likely due to the fact that the source of legitimacy of Arab monarchies is religious and this legitimacy remains strong.

Structural Factors Originating the Revolts

Certain studies advocate the idea that the authoritarian regimes of the Southern Mediterranean remain in power thanks to three main pillars: good relations between the State and the armed forces, the capacity of public institutions to defend political interests and, finally, the international legitimacy of these regimes. All of these dynamics were called into question by the emergence of the phenomenon of the Arab Spring revolts in different South Mediterranean countries. In contrast to previous revolts, those of the Arab Spring have involved a greater mobilisation of society, seem stronger and more resilient and, despite national differences, represent a purely regional phenomenon. The following factors must thus be distinguished as structural to the Arab Spring.

Demographic and Socio-Economic Factors

Despite the importance lent to demographic and socio-economic explanations, there is no one economic factor that has altered the status quo and triggered the revolts. Nevertheless, the spectacular rise in population in the Arab world has led to a rise in unemployment and a decrease in the number of well-paid posts and salaries. The structural nature of the problem seems evident and led to the frustration of ample sectors of the population finding difficulties in accessing jobs.

The Role of Youths and Women

Frustrated career expectations and exclusion of youths from the economic system led to the frustration of their life expectations, becoming a central component in the mobilisation of protests. Increased inequality and corruption dashed the expectations of a significant sector of Arab society, leading to the emergence of new social movements. In this context, the sources of legitimacy of authoritarian regimes have evaporated.

With regard to women's participation in the revolts, they have been particularly active in Tunisia,

where they have even obtained parity in parliamentary representation. The importance of the role of women in the different revolutionary movements of the South has nonetheless remained practically invisible in the Western media.

The Sphere of the Media and New Technologies

The media are a key element insofar as they indirectly assist mobilisation of activists via a contagion effect. Technological development, and particularly access to Internet, has entailed faster and more reliable access to information by the public at large, which facilitated the expansion and spread of the revolts.

PANEL 2. REVOLUTIONS, REFORMS AND REPRESSION: THE DIVERGING PATHS OF THE ARAB SPRING

This session went over certain events that formed part of the Arab Spring. The insurrections followed highly diverging paths: some led to revolutions, others provoked reforms and yet others suffered severe repression. The region is fragmented. During the session, the cases of Egypt, Syria and Morocco were put forward as examples of divergence in the Arab Spring. Also discussed were the issues of the inclusion of minorities in the democratisation processes and the use of term “revolution”.

The Arab revolutions can be considered part of a broader context, that of a profound international economic crisis as well as a generational crisis. Youths feel excluded, not only in Arab countries but also in Spain, Greece, the United States and Israel. Reforms in the Arab world will bring significant social changes, but they will also and above all entail a major change in relations between Europe and the Arab world. And, probably, the new regimes that will be established in Arab countries will be much more aware of the need to demand more from their relations with Northern countries.

A Reformist Revolution: The Case of Egypt

The 2011 revolution in the Arab world and in Egypt in particular must be distinguished from the revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries, as well as from communist revolutions or the Iranian revolution. In the past, the revolutions that had broken out in Egypt had been more ideological; the total destruction of the State apparatus had been the target. Today, the Egyptian revolution is more of a reformist revolution, the aim being to rebuild institutions and not destroy them, despite the desire of certain groups to start from scratch. The aim of these changes is radical

reform in order to undertake a democratic transition towards a democratic regime.

Syria: The Revolution of the Three “Noes”

The Syrian movement is a movement of three “noes”: no to violence, no to communitarianism and no to international military intervention.

The revolution in Syria, as in Libya, has involved crimes against humanity. Syria, a country of 23 million inhabitants, has registered to date, according to the figures in a report by Avaaz (a global movement of people-powered campaigns) and its partner Insan (Syrian human rights organisation), at least 5,000 deaths, 12,000 wounded, 12,000 people handicapped for life, 70,000 people arrested and tortured in a system of circular terror: fear has impregnated all social strata.

The Syrian revolution is also characterised as a cultural revolution, first and foremost against fear, more than simply a revolution against the regime. Moreover, it is the most extensive revolution from the geographical perspective: over 150 municipalities rise up in protest every Friday. And, finally, the revolution remains pacific despite the violent situation into which the country has fallen, with the Syrian regime demonstrating no political flexibility whatsoever. Syrian revolutionaries only use their own means and are leading the revolution quietly. Indeed, the presence of the media is nearly non-existent and extremely controlled.

Since 15th March, the situation has been very delicate in Syria: the violence is perpetual and a civil war is on the verge of breaking out. In fact, the Syrian regime shows no political flexibility at all; on the contrary, its visage is bloody.

Today, approximately 30% of Syrian society is hesitant, for one thing because the society is comprised of over 25 different religious-ethnic groups that the regime has manipulated, particularly the Alawis, who have been taken hostage by the regime.

Moreover, the Syrian opposition has taken a long time to unify or even create an alliance, in contrast to what happened in Tunisia or Egypt, where the opposition used the lapse of time to prepare for the “after” stage by devising projects (for health, justice, the Constitution).

The position of different Arab countries has been to observe the Syrian revolutionary experience, yet they still hesitate to recognise the opposition, for the regime is financially supported by some of these countries. Bahrain, which is a US military base, has touted the Iranian conspiracy theory. The position of Turkey is ambiguous: at the same time as it takes in exiles, the Turkish government has sent a delegation of support to the Syrian opposition. Iran displays an efficient, intelligent diplomacy that has

already made contact with the Syrian opposition and is seeking pragmatic guarantees. Despite the rivalries, Israel's position to date has been to prefer to maintain the Bashar Al Assad regime for fear that a new regime, possibly Islamist, could destabilise the region. This implies that the position of its allies, the US and the EU, has not been as active as one would have expected.

The Particular Case of Morocco: Real or Superficial Reform? The 25th November Elections Will Be the Acid Test

Morocco has been the country to react most quickly and flexibly to the protest movements. However, too much complacency has been shown by European countries. Even before the referendum, European powers were praising the regime. The questions to ask are whether changes are truly deep and how the monarchy can be turned into a parliamentary monarchy.

Indeed, King Mohamed VI reacted very early, but he ignored the young people, in both his actions and his words. His speech on 19th March made no reference whatsoever to the youths, and the commission he appointed comprises scholars and certain politicians associated with the Administration.

Despite certain improvements, such as the supremacy of international conventions or the recognition of linguistic and cultural plurality, the core remains intact – the King remains at the centre of the Moroccan political system. Moreover, the constitution continues to block the Sahara issue – and the reform does not allow the creation of regional parties.

In accordance with the constitutional reform, Moroccans will elect a new Parliament in the forthcoming months. However, the discrepancy between the demands of civil society and the new situation created by the reformed constitution could engender frustration. All the more so since 8½ million people not eligible to vote are youths aged 18 to 25. Added to this are the 3 million Moroccans of the diaspora who, due to the hastiness with which the elections have been called, will also be deprived of their right to vote.

The Gulf States Await Their Revolutions

The hypothesis that the Gulf States are immune is questionable. The monarchies of these countries will have to undertake serious changes in order to maintain their legitimacy. Indeed, a high number of youths are beginning to be concerned by unemployment in their countries and they are starting to put serious pressure on the system. The social contract idea implying that the population would become well off if elite families remained in power is nearing an end.

The families in power retain a high degree of legitimacy based on economic success. Now that the

financial crisis is arriving, regimes are being called into question. Certain countries have undertaken reforms, but for them to be truly effective, the families in power must be perceived as responsible. For the moment, more reforms than real revolutions can be observed, for politics remain highly personalised rather than constitutional, which hinders protest movements. The Gulf States are thus taking the path of evolution rather than revolution, and the Gulf Cooperation Council has fostered this approach to the Arab Spring.

The Inclusion of Religious Minorities and the Place of Political Islam in the Democratic Process

The panellists recognised the importance of including the different minority groups in the democratic process, as well as the risks of excluding certain groups, in particular on the basis of religious convictions.

In Egypt, the debate focuses on the articulation between Islamists and secular liberals. There is a mutual fear between these two political forces, but common ground must be sought between the Islamist conservatives who are democratic and the liberals who accept Islamic religious values.

Certain religious groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, have shown signs of recognising the rules of democracy; they have created, for instance, a separate political party in Egypt, and in Syria they have developed a political discourse since 2004 further removed from their charter and closer to secular Syrian parties. Other religious groups could, on the other hand, represent a real threat to democracy, such as the Salafists, who express a more retrograde, reactionary discourse.

The debate then turned to the issue of the Christian minority and its role in the Arab revolutions. In Syria, the Christian minority has participated in the revolution, despite the manipulation of the clergy by the Syrian regime. Mosques in Syria are serving not only as a place of prayer but one of assembly, where even Christians have met before going to protests.

In terms of the European position on political Islam, the EU cannot foster democratic values while holding little-defined positions on the place of Islam in Southern Mediterranean societies. Certain panellists recommended the adoption of a declaration by the EU supporting the holding of free, fair elections and vowing to accept the results obtained by Islamist parties.

The Term “Revolution”, the Dilemma of Content and Packaging

Debate revolved around what is understood by the term revolution and how it should be defined. An intellectual and journalistic challenge arises when one attempts to grasp the content of the term “revolution”, its implications and its representations. Indeed, the issue that arose was to ascertain

whether, if the actors of such movements consider these events a revolution, one should automatically take up the term or if, on the contrary, calling something revolutionary also means there are more profound political and social changes.

At present, it would seem as yet too soon to evaluate whether the insurrections that have taken place are real revolutions. Certain individuals held that the revolution of 1989 was more authentic; while others considered that the fall of a homogenous bloc was not synonymous to revolution, and that there is a range of registers. And, finally, certain individuals held that a revolution can only be termed as such if it is followed by a change in mentality.

Prevalence of the Conspiracy Theory among Forces Associated with Authoritarian Regimes

In Tunisia as in Syria, the conspiracy theory has emerged in an attempt to impose silence on opposition forces. Some are sceptical of such a theory, but it must be noted that, namely in Tunisia, old tensions have been manipulated in order to divert democratic intentions and distract the population from the real democratic debate. In Syria, the regime's attitude has been to put up media barriers vis-à-vis Europe and the United States and thus circulate the conspiracy theory.

PANEL 3. DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS: THE ROAD AHEAD

The success of democratic transitions in Southern and Eastern Europe depended on a virtuous circle of agreements and policies, among them the transformation of the political, administrative and judicial systems, socio-economic policies based on growth and development, and the participation of civil society. Today, countries in the Southern Mediterranean should implement pro-democratic political initiatives open to different political actors – including religious parties – and avoid the dangers and pitfalls threatening the transition towards democracy. In this regard, the lessons offered by the transitions in Southern and Eastern Europe could provide historical reference points of use to today's Arab world, despite the specificity of each particular case. The experiences of Spain and Poland in particular throw light on the case of Tunisia.

Tunisia: Where Should the Democratic Transition Begin?

From the moment after the Tunisian revolution, Tunisia sought frames of references in its vicinity. The Spanish transition is certainly an appropriate frame of reference, but Tunisia must create its own model. One must thus consider what steps should be followed in order to consolidate democracy, since a successful democratic transition in this country could likewise become a source of inspiration for the remainder of Arab societies.

Elections and Constitutional Reform

After Ben Ali fled the country, it was clear that the Tunisian people would accept no more autocrats. The revolution in Tunisia was pacific, non-negotiated and conducted by the civil society, without the control of any political party. The democratic option emerged as the best one and the different political forces focused on the transition process, which included the election by universal suffrage of a Constitutional Assembly on 23rd October, and the drafting of a new Constitution. Debate on the future of Tunisia revolved precisely around the issue of the sequence of events: what should take place first, the elections or the drafting of the new Constitution? The choice between the two alternatives also demonstrates a preference for seeking either legitimacy or stability. In the case of Tunisia, it was finally decided to elect a Constituent Assembly by universal suffrage, which will be in charge of drawing up the new Constitution. As in the Spanish transition, legitimacy was prioritised over stability, which is not the case in Egypt, where preference is given to stability.

Structural Reform of the Public Sector and the Media

Beyond the processes of elections and drawing up the new Constitution, structural reforms must be undertaken within key sectors in order to ensure the consolidation of democracy in the country. In particular, reforms of the police system, the judiciary branch and the media are essential for the construction of a new, inclusive political system open to different social and political forces.

Reform of the Police System

The reform of the police institution aims to move from a repressive police force to one serving the people. An essential point is the dismantling of the political police, which carried out the systematic repression of dissidence movements under the Ben Ali regime without any respect for human rights. However, the restructuring of the police institution is proving particularly complicated due to the lack of a well-defined organisational chart. According to one of the participants, Ben Ali had prohibited the publication of appointments in the official State gazette, so that even the Ministry of the Interior did not have the organisational chart. To deal with the total lack of knowledge as to the composition and structure of the police institution, the new authorities have dedicated a great deal of efforts to reconstructing the police force's organisational chart, with good results to date.

Reform of the Judiciary

The reform of the judicial system must still overcome a slew of obstacles and it remains one of the main challenges for the democratic transition. Corrupt judges formerly operating under the Ben Ali regime still hold the key posts and the monopoly they exercise on judicial decisions results in unfair trials.

Reform of the Media

The former regime had the maximum power in the media sphere, the main media networks being the property of the Ben Ali family. As the property of Ben Ali and his family has been confiscated, the media have also been placed under judicial control. However, judicial control only applies to financial aspects and not to information content. The official media networks continue to manipulate events today, sending false messages as they did before the revolution, which calls for in-depth reform.

Relations between Tunisia and Europe

Relations between Tunisia and Europe go back to the Association Agreements of 1995. Europe is Tunisia's premiere economic partner, given that 80% of its trade is with Europe. The European Union's collaboration with the authoritarian regimes of the Southern Mediterranean seems to demonstrate that it had disregarded the principles of the Barcelona Declaration by treating Tunisia as a market and not a living society and prioritising interests very different to human rights. However, on the basis of close relations maintained to date, one could expect Europe to play an important role in the Tunisian democratic transition. Moreover, today there is a desire to change attitudes. If Europe wishes to support democratic transitions, it must do so from the perspective of national appropriation.

The Spanish Transition: A Frame of Reference but not a Model to Follow

The Spanish transition has become a frame of reference for processes of democratic transition in the Arab world. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the Spanish transition can be considered a model to follow step by step, since different political, economic, demographic and cultural characteristics make each country a unique case with specific needs.

In light of the Spanish experience, it is clear that reforms must be accelerated and the nature of the new State established as soon as possible in order to struggle against the resistance offered by immobilist sectors. The legitimacy of the political process is one of the cornerstones of any successful democratic transition and includes a great number of factors: the participation and inclusion of different political and social forces, transparency and electoral representation, among others.

Another lesson to be learnt from the Spanish transition is that one must not cultivate oblivion with regard to the past. The justice system has an important role to play in democratic transitions, in order to show respect for the victims of dictatorships.

The Polish Transition: The Role of Religion in the Democratic Process

The Polish transition could also be taken as a frame of reference for certain Arab countries. Although

they are very different societies, Poland shares certain elements with Egypt, namely with regard to the role of religious groups in politics. The phantom of Islamism has blinded the West for years, and Europeans often perceive the Muslim Brotherhood as a threat, forgetting that in certain cases, even within Europe, religious groups have played an essential role in favour of democracy. This is the case with Poland, where Catholic groups constituted a significant counterforce during the dictatorship period and later contributed to the consolidation of the democratic system. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood will most likely also play a central role in building democracy.

We must keep in mind that authoritarian, despotic tendencies are not an Islamist speciality: the majority of dictators that the Arab Spring overthrew were to a certain extent secular and, moreover, they strongly repressed Islamist movements for decades.

The Polish experience demonstrates that transitions in the Arab world must be inclusive and cannot exclude Islamist parties from the political field, for the creation of a certain social consensus is necessary for democratic transition to succeed. Indeed, transitions are precisely based on the negotiation of a new order based on a broad consensus and therefore everyone must feel represented in the political process. The only limit to consensus that should be applied in a successful democratic transition is that called forth by the dilemma between including political forces and the transitional justice system.

PANEL 4. GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE ARAB SPRING

These last months have witnessed the most extraordinary political changes in North African and Middle Eastern nations since they achieved their independences. Even if this seemingly regional dynamic was mainly stirred by domestic rationalities, the importance of the international context cannot be undermined. The political landscape of the region is likely to become increasingly fragmented according to diverse national dynamics, which questions the usefulness of the term of the Arab Spring.

The Implications of the Arab Spring for International Relations

During the debates held in this panel different scenarios were discussed with regard to the geopolitical implications of the transformations in the Arab world. The political uprisings in the Arab world seem to have eroded the United States' capability to set the agenda in the Middle East; reaffirmed the capacity of the Turkish foreign service to proactively cope, and take advantage of uncertain regional scenarios; contributed to the regional isolation of Israel; pushed the EU to redefine its long-term strategy and priorities towards its Southern neighbourhood and finally highlighted the displacement of the EU's prominent economic role by leading emerging market economies (e.g., China).

The US in the Middle East: A Declining Power or Mere Loss of Interest?

Recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have proved the uncontested US regional hegemony to be over. The loss of US power within the region has translated into a growing inability to set the agenda and shape developments in accordance with its geopolitical interests. Paradoxically, its decline responds to the growing inability of the United States to “achieve contradictory goals”: to promote democratic values without challenging its geostrategic interest; growing foreign policy autonomy of States which were considered US allies; and the inability to exercise active diplomacy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, some panellists considered that there is no such decline but merely a growing disinterest of the US Administration in regard to the region, partially due to the declining US oil-dependency towards the Gulf.

The Reaffirmation of Turkey as a Regional Power

In order to regain regional influence, Turkey used to follow a proactive diplomacy in the MENA region regardless of the nature of political regimes. Following the uprisings in the region, Turkey has shifted its former regime-blinded policy into an active promotion of democratic regimes, even if this seems contradictory with traditional privileged relations with Assad’s regime.

Erdogan’s “Arab Spring Tour” to Egypt, Tunisia and Libya clearly reflects the Turkish pragmatic foreign policy: attempting to regain and consolidate its influence in those countries by means of soft power and growing economic capabilities while counter-weighting the losses derived from the deterioration of its formerly privileged relations with Syria.

The Growing Isolation of Israel

The alienation of Turkish-Israeli relations – especially deteriorated since the flotilla affair – is expected to sharpen Israeli isolation in the region. As Turkey is expected to enhance its relations with Egypt and Jordan, both countries will find it hard to maintain diplomatic relations with Israel. Moreover, the establishment of more representative regimes is expected to result in the dissemination of a more pro-Palestinian regional environment. Having lost Mubarak and Turkey, Israel no longer has a strong ally in the Middle East.

Reconsidering the European Union’s Relations with Its Southern Neighbours

Traditionally, EU foreign policy towards the Southern Mediterranean had sidelined political reform and human rights promotion while focusing on combating terrorism, containing illegal immigration and further liberalising Mediterranean Partner Countries’ trade regulations. By doing so, the EU unwittingly contributed to the persistence of autocratic regimes. After the Arab Spring, the EU

long-sustained preference for the preservation of the status quo (erroneously confused with stability) at the expense of democracy and human rights has become no longer sustainable.

Notwithstanding, the EU will have to face a more heterogeneous and fragmented Mediterranean. The last two key European Commission (EC) communications regarding the Southern Mediterranean after the Arab Spring – A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity and A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood – have been criticised due to their maintenance of a logic rooted in former priorities such as security, vagueness and an exceedingly EU interest-based approach. Against this background, panellists recalled the need to strengthen civil society organisations and called for the “Civil Society Facility” and the “European Endowment for Democracy” to be set in motion as early as possible. Also, the EU was asked to cooperate with Turkey in order to benefit from the complementarities that could emerge between both actors, since the EU is in a much weaker position than in 1995 and Turkey enjoys greater political sympathy in the Mediterranean.

CLOSING SESSION. THE ARAB SPRING AND EURO-MEDITERRANEAN RELATIONS: WHAT AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE?

The political upheavals and revolutions in the Southern Mediterranean have called into question the current framework of cooperation between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean and the very inner assumptions that used to articulate that cooperation.

The Bilateral Track: the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Use of New Instruments against Traditional Approaches

The EU has invested significant efforts to respond to the political changes in its neighbourhood. It has promoted the removal of sanctions and embargoes to countries undergoing democratic transformations and has exercised persuasive diplomacy and re-examined its programmatic policies.

Panellists of this session articulated their reflections over the EU mid-term strategy towards the Mediterranean “A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity” and the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Both EC communications unveiled a new set of policy proposals to promote democracy in the Southern Mediterranean region, while continuing the process of trade liberalisation.

Since their launch, new questions have arisen regarding how to respond to individual experiences while promoting a regional approach (the so-called differentiation), how to balance partnership and conditionality and how to enhance consistency and effectiveness on the basis of past experiences.

Introducing Differentiation in EU External Policies: A Dilemma between Responding to Diverging National Needs and Promoting a Regional Approach

The EU has often implemented its policy towards the Mediterranean in accordance with the multi-annual Regional and Strategy Papers, as developed into Country Strategy Papers (CSP) and National Indicative Programmes (NIPs). By introducing national-based documents, the EU has actively tried to address the tension between the specificities of each country and the promotion of a regional approach. However, as some panellists pointed out, the implementation of EU policies has been highly criticised due to the alleged application of double standards.

With the Arab Spring this debate has re-emerged due to the growing fragmentation of the Mediterranean. Current developments in the region require a much more tailored policy that pro-actively seeks co-ownership with regard to national developments and the identification of political priorities.

Redefining Political Conditionality: Between Mediterranean Co-Ownership and the EU's Preference for Positive Conditionality

A common feature of EU external action is the use of conditionality. Conditionality is understood as a process of managing relations with third countries by offering them incentives in return for the implementation of reforms. The use of conditionality has been used in EC cooperation policies since the 1980s, but acquired a new impetus with the enlargement process of the 1990s. Some elements of that conditionality have been incorporated into the ENP with limited success.

According to experts of this panel, the redefinition of conditionality after the Arab Spring within the two EC communications is still encapsulated by some dilemmas that cannot be solved only by introducing clearer benchmarking criteria. Among them is the one between engagement and condemnation, or the use of positive and negative conditionality tools.

The EU has shown a long preference for the use of positive conditionality and the last EC documents have reinforced the use of more incentives for those countries where more progress is made in the fields of democracy, good governance, rule of law and human rights protection. However, the “more for more approach” revealed some concern among panellists, who expressed reluctance on how the EU will engage with regimes less keen to cooperate. Also, panellists regretted that the EC communications do not specifically describe the reallocation of funds among countries that could match the new “more for more approach”. In addition, panellists expressed concern on how the future benchmarks in the field of democracy, good governance, rule of law and human rights protection will affect the right to self-determination of the transitions to democracy and national sovereignty. Finally, some participants in this panel

regretted that the protection of minorities was not even foreseen as a criterion for the execution of conditionality.

Regarding the incentives suggested by the EC (the so-called 3Ms – money, market access and mobility), panellists considered that only mobility partnerships have significant value to Southern populations. Yet the credibility of such partnerships is declining due to the context of growing securitisation of immigration.

In contrast, the allocation of extra funds to the MENA area – even if welcomed – was considered to be secondary and its assessment subject to the future distribution among countries, instruments and programmes (e.g., 2014-2020 Multi-Annual Financial Framework). Finally, the experts' opinion was divided with regard to market access. Some of them considered that trade is of the utmost importance to overcome the economic downturn after the revolts, while others considered that, as trade liberalisation is not at the top of the peoples' agenda, it is the ultimate proof of the unwillingness of the EU to revise its relations with the South Mediterranean countries.

Finally, the vagueness of the EC when defining negative conditionality was also underlined. Experts highlighted the importance of considering Southern civil societies as valid interlocutors and the need to commit politically to them and finance their initiatives.

The Efficiency Duty: the Euro-Zone Economic Crisis and the “Less for More” Approach

The economic crisis in the Euro-zone has hit European financial perspectives, and especially those funds committed to external action whose impact is not measurable in economic terms. In such a context, EC communications make special reference to aid-effectiveness, as declining amounts of money are foreseen for greater ambitions (the “less for more mantra”). According to experts, the evaluation of aid-effectiveness will drastically rely on the eventual introduction of new benchmarking criteria and good-practices and the final adoption of the next EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework.

The Multilateral Track of Euro-Mediterranean Relations: The Union for the Mediterranean

During the debates, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) did not retain as much attention as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the ENP. Due to the underlying logic of the UfM – sidelining political questions and promoting specific projects of a highly technocratic nature –, this organisation may not be in a position to meet the high expectations of Mediterranean societies. Nonetheless, the UfM still retains two features that can be considered as valuable assets.

First, the development of ambitious added-value projects is needed to overcome the natural downturn derived from the Arab Spring. Secondly, and more importantly, the UfM is still the unique regional forum based on the strictest equality of its members, which can prove of added value for the establishment of more equal and balanced Euro-Mediterranean relations.

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