

Europe and the Arab Revolutions. The quest for a new Euromediterranean paradigm.

MEDPRO Final Conference, Brussels, 26 February 2013

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The Great Opportunity for Transformation

Since the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was launched in 1995 with the Final Declaration of the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference, Europe and its Mediterranean partners have tried to build a common area of peace, security, shared economic progress, dialogue and intercultural understanding around the Mediterranean Sea.

The launching of the Barcelona Process sparked an immense wave of hope – and even optimism – regarding the final step towards modernity that Arab and Mediterranean countries would take as a result of the economic progress that their trade integration and association with Europe would trigger. The agreement reached was moreover based on a firm commitment to the jointly declared principles and values of advancing towards democracy, political pluralism, human rights and respect for civil liberties. Fifteen years later, the general feeling was that the expected economic triumphs and guaranteed social gains had fallen far short of what people had been led to believe and, above all, that the promises of democratisation and of political opening had been completely circumvented. Ossified regimes held tight to an authoritarian system that awarded the benefits of progress to a strict dominant minority, leaving the vast majority of the population on the sidelines. The EU's financial, economic, technical and political support did not give rise to the desired social and political transformation, but rather, to the extent that it was effective, was increasingly seen as providing support for the current regimes, objectively contributing to perpetuating authoritarianism to the benefit of the groups in power and the associated economic elites. The economic progress of a few therefore co-existed with the frustration of the many, the much greater numbers of the middle and lower classes. These citizens were moreover increasingly aware of and knowledgeable about the situation due to years' of accumulated educational efforts and the emergence of new media and social networks, in particular Al-

Jazeera television, that had broken the former monopoly of the either official or western social media.

In this context, the heroic act of self-immolation, spurred by rage and dignity, of the young Mohammed Bouazizi unleashed not only a democratic revolution in Tunisia, but also the wide-ranging grassroots democratic revolutionary movement throughout the Arab world. Had it been limited to just Tunisia, the revolution might have remained an isolated phenomenon, and the regional powers would no doubt have made sure that it was ephemeral and short lived. However, the triumph of the revolution in Egypt, the major demographic, geographic, cultural and political hub in the Arab world, ensured that, one way or another, its effects would be felt in all the countries.

The revolution began and first triumphed in Tunisia, the first country to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union in 1995, precisely because it was the site of the deepest discrepancies and contradictions between the oppression of the Ben Ali regime and the economic and social progress and modernised outlooks achieved thanks to the sustained efforts of the entire Tunisian society from the early days of independence under President Bourguiba. The modernising policies adopted in education, enhanced women's rights, creation of a modern state and government, move towards Europe, efforts to industrialise, etc., that were the legacy of the Bourguiba government were joined, beginning in 1995 and despite the growing authoritarianism and oppression, by the continuation of these efforts by the Tunisians, who moreover took full advantage of the facilities provided under the Association Agreement with the EU, the Barcelona Process's Euromed programmes and the sectoral governmental policies that they promoted in the country.

The Arab democratic revolutions are thus not the expression of the failure of Euro-Mediterranean policy, but rather of the triumph of its universal principles thanks to the extraordinary courage and civil dignity of its people but as well to the extent its admittedly limited means could be put to use, the fruit of both a possibilistic EU's Euromed Policies policy and the failure of the repressive regimes that severely curtailed its implementation.

It is still too early to know the outcome of the different civic movements that make up the Arab world's democratic revolution. In the short term, they differ from country to country; however, in the

medium term they will all be touched by the transformation. The awakening of civic consciousness cannot be undone and, once it has been awoken, the survival of traditional authoritarian regimes is unthinkable. But the outcomes and the speed are different, and we do have already a South-Mediterranean neighbourhood more differentiated than ever.

The internal and external consequences of the revolution are moreover immense, whether it triumphs immediately or, in the case of recalcitrant regimes after immense suffering of its own people. The internal transformation of the countries will be huge, both in terms of their political systems and economically and socially, but the consequences will not stop there. They also affect the international environment, these countries' relations with the EU and with the rest of the world. Democratic revolution alters the geopolitical environment itself, opening new avenues of interaction between internal transformation and the geopolitical environment. This gives an important role to new players in the Med-region be it Turkey, Russia or China, along with the traditionally present Europe and US.

It is thus of utmost importance to determine what has changed in the Arab world, what changes the various Arab springs, autumns or winters have wrought in the geopolitical environment and how these changes will open new channels for evolution. Once again, the relationship with the EU will be pivotal for the Mediterranean world; therefore and most importantly, Euro-Mediterranean policy must be adapted to ensure that the lofty goals of the Barcelona Process, set in 1995, can once and for all be achieved.

So, the Arab Revolutions compels us to the Search for a New Paradigm in Euro-Mediterranean Relations

1. The democratic revolution of the Arab countries both needs and offers a major opportunity to make the overall approach of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership an effective reality. It is worth noting some of the factors that will affect this possibility:

- The Arab democratic revolutions have done away with the myth of the Arab exception and, therefore, are paving the way for the principles of democracy, pluralism and human rights to become the effective reality of the Arab countries. But this still is in the making.

Democracy is not only having elections but building a democratic society.

- The democratic civic movements of the Arab world are striving to compete with Islamism from a political point of view. They are certainly, and convincingly, defeating and rendering completely obsolete the radical Islamist movements involved in terrorism. Beyond this, although from the first democratic elections moderate islamist parties have taken grip of government, the secular and clearly modernising nature of the revolutionary and democratic movements may have an increasing effect on shrinking the space that, in the absence of other actors, had been occupied by clandestine political Islamist movements in many Arab societies. Movements such as the Tunisian Nahda or even the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt already in government, but in a less favourable light than they thought when they were locked in a more or less blatant struggle against dictatorships. All democratic transitions, if they are so as has already been seen in Southern Europe, especially in Spain and Portugal, ensure that, in the process of the transition, moderate parties be they islamists or modernizer gradually prevail over extremist ones, which are ultimately relegated to a marginal role. This was the experience in those countries. This is what we call a transition to democracy and this is what in the end we expect from the Arab revolutions if things go well. But nothing is still certain.

- The new democratic governments in the Arab world should encourage the rule of law and the fight against corruption. That would foster not only a political regeneration, but also an environment conducive to the prevalence of the rule of law and confidence and, therefore, to the recovery of both domestic and foreign investment.

- The democratization of the Arab societies would, most increasingly, foster understanding between peoples to the extent that conflicts had previously been manipulated by dictatorships in a bid to perpetuate their hold on power. This applies to the entire region, both in terms of improving the chances for understanding between the different peoples in a would-be democratic Middle East and with regard to other conflicts, such as that in the Western Sahara.

- If MPCs – in particular Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan, in addition to Turkey – are able to guide their political process in such

a way that it does not damage too severely the economic growth, this same economic success will, in turn, facilitate the re-fueling of their relations with the EU, their main trading partner and the complement of their economic, demographic and political reality in every sense of the word.

- To take advantage of this set of opportunities, the EU must launch a major effort to support the Arab democratic movements in order to secure their triumph and consolidation, which are not yet guaranteed. It is imperative to support the stability and progress of the new Arab democracies that can emerge from the civic and revolutionary movements. The economic moment is particularly complicated for these countries, beginning with Tunisia and Egypt. But continued instability in the region and the clashes and war between civic movements and the regimes that have responded with repression, as in Libya and still in Syria damage the people, the country and the economy and, therefore, the social and political stability of their country, condemning it to disaster, putting in danger the entire regime, specially their neighbours. The EU and the international community at large must thus provide effective and unwavering support for the new Arab democracies. Only then can they help them not miss the new wave of democratisation that, in this sense, too, is doing away with the Arab exception. After the previous waves of democratisation in Southern Europe, South East Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America in the seventies, eighties, nineties and two thousands, the Arab world can not miss its boat.

2. It is therefore essential for Europe to undertake a major effort to re-launch the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. It is time to move onto a new stage in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) towards the South. In March 2011, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission released the joint communication entitled “A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean,” followed by another one entitled “A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood: A review of European Neighbourhood Policy.” Both documents have initiated the as-yet unfinished profound rethinking of the Euromed Policies with a view to adapting them to the new opportunities and demands of the MPCs and their new international context.

To this end, significant groundwork can be found in the efforts and accomplishments of over 15 years of Euro-Mediterranean policy,

which today may finally find the necessary environment to achieve its full potential. However, a substantial increase in the funding for this new stage is required, even if the current time of economic and financial crisis is not a particularly propitious one for Europe to do so. The allocation of less than one billion euros a year from the Community budget for the Neighbourhood Policy towards the South pales in comparison to the figures bandied about for the bailouts of even small countries within the EU. Indeed, one billion euros for the entire set of MPCs now seems ridiculous compared to figures that consistently top seventy or eighty billion per Member State with shaky finances in need of rescue, even if the rescue funding will, theoretically, be repaid.

Additionally, and more importantly, from the point of view of its conceptualisation and instruments, Euro-Mediterranean policy will likewise require major transformations. The Euro-Arab and Euro-Mediterranean dimension of the Neighbourhood Policy towards the South should be singled out for specific attention, so as to allow the MPCs to be effectively integrated into the large area of economic, social and political progress that the European Union has entailed throughout the different stages of its development. This radiating prosperity and progress, which have fully encompassed Central and Eastern Europe in the last twenty years, must likewise spread to the new democratic countries of the Arab world.

For Eastern Europe this transformation has taken since 1989 ten years of turmoil and recession and, by now, ten years of growth. We have to be prepared for a similar cycle from 2010 to 2020 in the Arab world. So, that would entail for the Arab Mediterranean countries 10 years of meager skinny cows of which we are about to begin the third year, before the fat ones come.

This singling out of Euro-Mediterranean policy was already initiated with the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) as the expression of the partnership between Europe and the MPCs from the Arab world and Israel. Until the new democratic governments of the Arab world can be consolidated and the new opportunities for peace in the Middle East become clear, it will be difficult to build and promote the UfM's political institutional structure beyond the ministerial meetings. The summits will continue to be problematic, but both the Foreign Affairs and sectoral ministerial meetings should be held regularly, in order for the projects and a greater agreement to prosper.

In addition to the EU's bilateral relations with the MPCs, conducted through the bilateral ENP and the specific Action Plans for each country, regional projects must succeed to be implemented through the UfM Secretariat. The Secretariat should be the main new instrument for identifying, agreeing and seeking support and funding for the implementation of projects with a real impact able to serve as examples for the region's countries.

3. The key to the effective functioning of the UfM is the involvement of the EU's institutions. To date, or until recently I should say, the UfM has been excessively influenced by President Sarkozy's primitive approach based on re-nationalising Euro-Mediterranean policy to the detriment of the Community character it so clearly had during the classic stage of the Barcelona Process. For this new stage of Euro-Mediterranean policy conducted through the UfM to be strong and effective, the EU institutions must reclaim their pivotal role as the European party to the Partnership. The EU institutions – the Commission, the Council and the External Action Service – must view the UfM and its permanent Secretariat as their main instrument for regional or multilateral Euro-Mediterranean relations and projects.

- An initial step has been taken by the EU institutions assuming the Northern Co-presidency of the UfM, finally taken over from France, whose time in the position had already been prolonged far longer than originally envisaged.
- The second step requires that the European Commission, in particular (which today controls the purse strings of the budget and the instruments of the ENP) becomes fundamentally involved in the UfM and to work with its Secretariat, to make it the venue for reaching agreements and a suitable instrument for designing and implementing effective Euro-Mediterranean regional projects.

These truly urgent initial steps need to be followed by many more, especially now to provide short-, medium- and long-term political and economic support to the democratic movements and for the stability of the new Arab democratic governments. Meanwhile the effort to re-conceptualise and update Euro- Mediterranean policy and the UfM itself is likewise required. It has to be carried out jointly by all northern and southern stakeholders in order to promote this greater shared endeavour, your blue option in MedPro climbing

moving to the green scenario of the Euro-Med Union, the high hopes for which must not be dashed.