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Unfulfilled Promises

An assessment of the Arab Spring, its challenges and prospects

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Well over a year into the process, the "Arab Spring" still poses a complex puzzle. The Arab Awakening has proved to be a historically unprecedented political season for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, both domestically and globally. Upheavals in early 2011 facilitated crucial democratic transitions in a number of countries, giving voice to long repressed societal demands and political movements. Also, the removal of authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya as well as massive revolts in Syria and Yemen altered deeply rooted geopolitical imbalances and injected unprecedented, and still largely unforeseeable dynamism both in the region and beyond. Large parts of the Arab world seem to have been touched by the winds of change; tangible outcome in terms of consolidated new order, however, remains scarce. Old leaders have been washed away, but many of the structural weaknesses and clientele structures prevail for the time being.

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THE BIGGER PICTURE

Change in the Arab world should be seen as part of a larger phenomenon of adaptation to the parameters of a globalized world. The progressive global integration of markets has reached societies and politics. Access to information, new tools of communication, growing aspirations for a 'better life' and the perceptions of change elsewhere raise frustration and discontent with bad governance, over-regulation, corruption and repression in many countries of the world. If this pattern prevails, political crises, popular uprisings and the break-down of regimes are to be expected in many parts of the globe. In global comparison, as indicated by regular assessments such as the Freedom House Index or the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, the Arab world was lagging way behind global change towards better governance, matched only by Central Asia and Africa.

The Arab Spring initiated a departure from this pattern, although it still could not be called a pan-Arabian trend. Algeria and the fragile post-conflict situation in Libya weaken transition in North Africa, the struggle over Syria occupies the momentum for change in the Middle East, and affluent status quo regimes stand in the way of transformation in the Gulf. On the other hand, new political groupings, if not movements, are forming everywhere around the demands for opportunity, social justice, equality under the law, personal dignity and political participation. Many have voiced their claims for more than a decade and have seen too little in response. Most would prefer evolution to revolution; the prevailing mood is not radicalism but the desire to be heard.

A year after the fall of dictators in North Africa, change in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East still offers

exciting opportunities to the people of the region to build democratic and more responsive governments, to address their fundamental needs and to actively participate in the development of a new political order. On the other hand, the past year has revealed a significant regressive potential. Nowhere in the region have mass demonstrations achieved swift and thorough change. Where previous authoritarian governments have been ousted, new governance is being built slowly. Violence prevails in countries such as Libya and Syria, but also occurs frequently in Egypt and Bahrain. By no means is the revolution over.

Especially in light of the difficulties of building new order, it has become evident that any successful transformation of political order will require organizing politically, to establish and nourish widespread political dialogue, to prepare for elections and to assume political responsibility. In many countries, constitutional changes or a full constitutional revision will have to be prepared, debated and approved.

Governments arising from such transitions are being immediately confronted with the imperatives to restart the economy, to improve the performance and accountability of the public administration, to act decisively on corruption, and to re-establish security. All of these crucial challenges need to be confronted by domestic actors. They could at best be supported from outside, while principal ownership lies with the peoples of these countries and their representatives.

As has been demonstrated in the transformation processes of Central and Eastern Europe, the establishment of democracy and market economy will take a decade or more. For Europe's southern neighbourhood, this time span could well be longer in light of the lack of a membership perspective. Also, the level of difficulty exceeds that of the last wave of transition in Europe. Demographic pressures are more profound, and social cleavages run deeper compared to the former Eastern bloc. What is more, in most Arab societies consensus over the goals and outcomes of transformation appears to be weak. Already, new political elites in the most advanced transition countries, Tunisia and Egypt, show deep polarization over process and result of constitution building.

For Europe and the European Union in particular, these developments bear the great potential of a more peaceful, prosperous and responsive neighbourhood. On the other hand, the past year has given indications that ailed transitions could lead to new conflicts if not civil unrest or war, economic recession and increased externalities, ranging from massive flows of refugees to environmental hazards or new security threats. Europeans thus have important reasons to support the success of the transitions in the MENA region where and when they occur. To thoroughly understand current developments and to engage with actors is of immediate need and high relevance to EU policy. After all, constructive engagement of the EU in building peaceful and legitimate order, economic development and social stability in Europe's neighbourhood would greatly contribute to strengthen Europe's role in the world. Likewise, failure and regression in the region would significantly weaken Europe's stance beyond the neighbourhood.

DIFFERENTIATION AND FRAGMENTATION: A BALANCE SHEET OF REFORM

When demonstrations against the regime began in Tunis, the landscape of governance in Arab countries was rather diverse. As the Arab Spring unfolded, this national and regional differentiation has deepened further. In Tunisia and Egypt, ageing regimes, based on once popular social and

national movements, surrendered to the mass protest, the apparent loss of followership among the elites and the military when their lack of internal legitimacy and external support became evident. In Libya, with its quasi-federal tribal structures, the regime sought to defend its rule with military force, and collapsed in a civil war only after the rebel forces took control over the country with the help of an international military intervention.

Syria's Assad regime is heading the same way, escalating the violence against its own population and radicalizing the opposition. As in the case of Libya, the regime seems incapable of breaking the resistance while the opposition lacks the means to topple the regime without external intervention. Unlike Libya, the Syrian power struggle could upset the highly fragile equilibrium in the region, in particular regarding the Sunni/Shia divide, with or without an international military intervention. For both Libya and Syria, future transformation seems heavily burdened by the fall-out of civil war, the experience of massacres and manifold destruction, the radicalisation of society and a deepening of ethnic or religious cleavages. The impact of war is felt in civil-war stricken neighbours to both countries, Algeria and Lebanon. While both show demand and potential for change, the process appears to be dominated by the fear of return of civil war conditions.

Moderate monarchies in the region with a modernisation agenda of their own have responded differently to the pressures of the Arab Spring. In Morocco and Jordan, constitutional changes and reforms have been initiated to channel the demands for more participation, better governance and greater accountability. Similar processes have emerged in the Gulf, mostly in Oman, Qatar and Bahrain, the latter launching a dialogue process only after a military crackdown on the Shiite opposi-

tion groups with the help of Saudi forces. Other Gulf monarchies obviously seek to meet demands primarily with ambitious economic programmes.

This sketch does not fully cover the topography of the Arab Spring – its impact also plays out in other countries of the region, each of which shows a unique setting, such as the power struggles in Yemen and Sudan, the impact of change in the region on the rivalling Palestinian actors, or its effects on the highly volatile balance in Iraq.

In sum, while most Arab societies have responded to the Arab Spring, the differences in response and outcome dominate the scene. No one country seems to follow the same process and appears to head in the same direction as others. In the summer of 2012, four countries have emerged as promising cases of transformation to better governance and higher legitimacy: Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan. Much of the European and international support is focused on them.

In spite of their differences, Tunisia and Egypt exemplify the range of issues and challenges that have to be mastered by the transformation. Elections had to be held with little time for the newly emerged opposition groups to form viable political organizations. Process and results in both countries revealed a deep political fragmentation of society and the dominance of (better organised) Islamist parties and groups. Both factors play out in the process of constitutional reform, in debates about the role of Islam in politics and the legal system or in the redefining of public service.

At the same time, the economic agenda is burdened with the left-overs of the previous regimes, over-regulation and under-administration. The revolutions have affected key sectors of the economy, both in industry and services, notably in

tourism. While a miracle would be needed on the labour market, the attractiveness of both countries as a business location remains low, not least because of the extremely low intra-regional trade accounting for about 2 % of regional gross domestic product (GDP) only. On the fiscal side, liquidity is short; state budgets have shown a deficit beyond 8 % for Tunisia and beyond 10 % for Egypt. Key to improving the economic, social and civic performance will be to overcome the many deficits of public administration – a complex task requiring much more than the change of constitution and legal norms and regulations in order to cut down on patronage, corruption and in-transparency.

A closer look at recent developments underlines the complexity of transformation in the Arab world. In particular, four clusters of transition issues, their outcomes and handling by old and new political elites, will shape the outlook of Arab politics in the years to come:
1. Democratic governance, political participation, the rule of law and effective administration.
2. Economic development, employment and fiscal consolidation.
3. Internal security and security sector reform.
4. Cooperation within the MENA region, internationally and with the EU.

Europe, and the European Union in particular, will have to become engaged in all four areas. The true drivers, however, will have to be the Arab political actors themselves. It is their choices and their capacities that will decide on prosperity, stability and good governance.

AVOIDING IDEOLOGICAL POLARISATION AND PROMOTING CONSENSUS IN TRANSITIONAL DOMESTIC POLITICS

The most striking result of the democratic awakening in the MENA region is the emergence of political pluralism in several countries in the area. This took the form of freer elections (as in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Algeria) and, in some cases, triggered either a constitutional (as in Tunisia and Egypt) or a semi-constitutional process (as in Jordan and Morocco). Other countries seem willing to follow, although with varying degrees of ambition, from the recent elections in Libya to the 'enlightened' reforms adopted in Qatar. These developments will prove with little doubt a complex and sometimes contradictory process, depending on both the political and cultural maturity of each country concerned and the power structure inherited from past and current regimes. However, it is undeniable that a progressively democratic wave is taking root in the MENA region, confounding long-standing assumptions as to the inherent incompatibility between democracy and the Arab world.

What is more, the on-going political developments in many countries of the region clearly show the rise of political Islamism as well as its growing influence on society and politics alike. Indeed, the unparalleled transformation of the political landscape in the MENA region should neither surprise nor excessively alarm observers from both within and outside the area.

As a matter of fact, the emergence of faith-based politics is deeply intertwined with the very history of Islam, which is an orthopraxis and, as such, a creed embracing all aspects of human life. As a consequence, political power in the MENA region has long been dependent on reli-

gious legitimacy: that was, inter alia, the case of the Ottoman Empire, whose Sulṭān was also Khalīfah (i.e. leader of the faithful) or the pre-1969 Sanussi Kingdom of Libya, and it is still the case – albeit in a rather different context – in Morocco, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, since the late 20th Century, Islamic modernism has been spreading throughout the Muslim world in general and in Arab countries in particular, as a reaction to both the decay of Ottoman legitimacy and rising Western imperialism.

Nonetheless, fragile statehood and unsolved contradictions inherited by colonial powers in the region favoured, among other things, the rise of authoritarian regimes in most MENA countries, especially through coups d'état (such as in Egypt, Syria, Libya and Iraq) or as a result of bloody civil wars (like in Algeria and Yemen). Despite their seemingly secular narratives, the new regimes soon failed to deliver on their promises of renewal by establishing corrupt, illiberal and mutually hostile political systems throughout the whole region. In that context, Islamist movements have been denigrated as potentially lethal adversaries of incumbent regimes and their largely unsuccessful modernisation efforts. Such persecution was particularly easy to achieve during the Cold War, due to instrumental support for local undemocratic regimes by the two competing blocs, and also overcame the end of bipolar competition thanks to the general interest of both traditional and emerging world powers in maintaining regional stability. The radical and bloody shift of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 also strongly contributed to forging Western cultural assumptions of the unsolvable irreconcilability of Islam and democracy, with little understanding of the historic circumstances in which those developments had taken place. Moreover, this increasingly widespread belief later became unintended

collateral damage of an ideologically-biased post-9/11 international security agenda.

However, the growing failure of the Arab nationalist pattern in most of the region did not come without consequences for the evolution of political Islamism. In response to the lack of functioning institutions, widening socio-economic inequality and the militarisation of public life, political Islam could attract growing consensus in Arab societies by creating parallel power structures, notably based on alternative labour and social security systems. This was, inter alia, the case of the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-'Iwān) in Egypt, Hizbu-llāh in Lebanon and Ḥamās in Palestine. These dynamics, however, were not allowed to translate into official politics in most countries, and even when they did so, they were immediately condemned and violently repressed by incumbent regimes, as was the case with the Algerian elections of 1991.

Such attitudes contributed to growing extremism among several Islamist movements, which sometimes degenerated to both domestic and international terrorism. This was particularly notable in the Middle East and the Arab Peninsula, where radicalism smartly exploited growing political unrest, social backwardness and inequality as well as unsolved regional conflicts. Moreover, the adoption by Western countries of a security-focused approach in the early 2000s led to the development of a contradictory stance towards the political evolution of the MENA region, based on supporting democratic developments only when outcomes matched Western expectations, as in the case of the electoral victory of Ḥamās in Palestine in 2006. Though the radical discourse and the supposed links with terrorism of that movement encouraged tough international reactions at that time, incoherence between rhetoric and practice, especially on the part of Europe,

diminished the West's credibility and leverage in the area. This might also have encouraged, at least to some extent, authoritarian regimes to step up their repression of faith-based organisations. Even moderate Islamist movements – with the remarkable exception of post-2002 Turkey – ultimately remained a political pariah in the eyes of both Western decision-makers and local rulers, lurking in the streets of Arab capitals like Marx's notorious ghost.

The Arab Spring deeply challenged the status quo by allowing faith-based movements to participate in the political arena. In some cases, they joined transitional governments and are currently involved in forging new constitutions. In the remarkable case of Tunisia, elections led to the victory of a moderate Islamist party, Ennahda, which is expected to pursue a democratic agenda inspired by Turkey's Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), while forming a binding governmental coalition with secular political movements. Moreover, the recent presidential elections in Egypt also resulted in success for the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate, who pledged to inaugurate a new era in the country's history based on internal unity and good relations with all neighbouring countries. Should such experiments prove successful, a new political season might unfold, making Islamist democracies a credible and, possibly, dominant model for the whole MENA region. Nonetheless, in many cases this will also require a steady shift in the political agendas of faith-based parties, from a predominant focus on social and moral issues to more tangible, policy-oriented programmes.

Although the rise of such new political forces can be hailed as an unavoidable and healthy step towards the creation of pluralistic and democratic countries able to address the aspirations that ignited the

revolts, the fact remains that the risk of ideological polarisation is clearly present, especially in those countries undergoing a process of deep political transformation. As a matter of fact, a number of internal cleavages can be identified, notably between secular and religious movements and between moderate and radical Islamists, reflecting competing visions on a wide range of crucial issues, among which the relationship between the state and religion, the economy and finance, the status of women, and future relations with Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

As a consequence, the internal political climate is at risk of deteriorating seriously and ideological polarisation could easily turn into lasting decisional paralysis and result in, at least to some extent, a power vacuum to be filled by either populist or revisionist forces. This would, in turn, prevent the fulfilment of societal demands and could result in continuing and violent unrest.

All this makes the need for consensus and dialogue between post-revolutionary political forces particularly crucial, representing the conditio sine qua non for every subsequent policy initiative. This is not an easy task and it definitely requires a great amount of self-restraint, patience and do ut des in highly politically-sensitive areas, while ensuring the respect of benchmarks consistent with universally agreed standards. These entail the safeguarding of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and association, gender equality and the protection of minorities.

Moreover, further attention will need to be paid to monitoring each party's commitment to the principles set forth in emerging constitutions and ensure their early implementation in law-making and enforcement in the months and years to come. Nonetheless, building up a lasting consensus in

transitional politics will ultimately help to consolidate democracy at home, while providing an encouraging example for other countries undergoing a democratic process both in the region and beyond.

PROVIDING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT, GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT THROUGH A RENEWED SOCIAL CONTRACT AND A SUSTAINABLE AND REGIONALLY INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

It is self-evident that successful political transitions cannot be separated from socio-economic development, especially towards better living standards. This is particularly true in the case of the MENA region after the Arab Spring.

As a matter of fact, rising unemployment – combined with food and fuel price volatility – was one of the reasons behind the huge protests which shook Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011. The largest and best educated young generation in modern Arab history met with ageing industrial policies and the constraints of cronyism. At the same time, the impact of the Arab Spring on the economy of several MENA countries is proving particularly harmful, resulting in long-term inflation, the postponement of consumption and investment decisions, a decrease in regional trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) and – consequently – brings risks of a new and massive rise in unemployment. This is also worsened by the fact that, with the exception of Libya, the most promising political developments in the region are taking place in resource-poor countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco, which cannot rely on energy resources to counter the macroeconomic impact of the upheaval. Should current governments fail to address the on-going situation, this will have long-ranging social and political implications.

Such an outlook requires governments to effectively address the numerous structural obstacles to sustainable and inclusive growth for the years to come. The first issue to be tackled is undoubtedly job creation, especially among young people and women. According to available data from the OECD and the World Bank, approximately 25 % of the young people in the MENA region officially lack a job. This problem is particularly acute among the most educated, showing a wide gap between university standards and the needs of domestic labour markets. What is more, this dramatic situation is only partially balanced by the size of the informal economy, due to the precariousness and over-exploitation of employees. Unemployment among women is reported to be worryingly severe due to a combination of societal prejudices and a lack of appropriate policies and regulation. All this has resulted in long-term unemployment in the region as a whole ranging between 10 and 25 %, while demography demands the creation of 25 to 50 million jobs over the next decade simply to maintain employment at current levels.

This growing emergency clearly points to fallacies in the economic structures and formulas still in place in most of the region. These include widespread corruption, cronyism, a suffocating and unsustainable public sector made up of governmental bodies and state-owned enterprises, and low entrepreneurship. Such conditions, combined with little trade diversification in most countries and poor intra-regional trade (including in economies with no endowment of natural resources) deeply affected past economic growth. Moreover, such distortions – notably the distribution of jobs or subsidies for the purpose of achieving consensus – contributed to increasing social inequality, even in those countries embracing economic reform in

the last two decades. On top of that, FDI has mostly been limited to either non-tradable or low capital-intensive sectors, thus slowing down the catching up of regional export-oriented production with the international value chain.

Such a sombre context demands a sustainable and balanced policy response, based on short and long-term measures alike. In the short term, it is essential for governments to tackle the immediate needs of their populations by increasing investment in the welfare system, including social security, housing, health, education and professional training. This should aim at re-forging a more equitable social contract to protect the weakest sectors of society from a deteriorating economic environment. In this regard, strong emphasis should be placed on targeting youth and women as priority recipients of these measures. Also, since public budgets in many countries of the region are already under severe strain, immediate financial assistance by international donors is strongly needed, including by the EU. This is also particularly important in order to avoid the adoption of popular yet ultimately harmful measures, such as food and fuel subsidies as well as arbitrary expropriation of domestic or foreign-owned undertakings.

At the same time, however, more ambitious and structural measures should be adopted by local governments in order to enhance market efficiency, thus spurring inclusive growth and widespread employment. This requires, above all, improving transparency and the rule of law as well as increasing capital endowment and productivity. Though external actors can definitely play a role in this too – especially by providing expertise, sharing best practice, offering long-term loans and making substantial trade concessions – it is clear that primary responsibility lies with local leaderships.

It is obvious that this endeavour will need to build on a solid and courageous vision, fostered by a wide consensus on priority development goals by the whole spectrum of political forces in each country. Moreover, this process will prove time-consuming and will bring sometimes painful social consequences, thus requiring prompt welfare instruments to be put in place. Nonetheless, the potential to fulfil societal expectations through inclusive and balanced growth is very high and should be achieved through specific policies that aim to widen the market's players, scope and sectors. These include, among other things, the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as the development of increasingly technology-intensive manufacturing, services (such as tourism) and renewable energies (especially from solar sources).

Moreover, proper efforts should be devoted to reinforcing the regional dimension of economic development, in terms of both inter and intra-regional trade and FDI. As a matter of fact, the MENA countries offer promising complementarities between capital and labour-intensive – and between energy-rich and poor – national economies, which could foster the creation of interdependent economic areas, for example between member states of the Agadir Agreement (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan) and those of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates). Finally, the potential for stronger and more comprehensive economic integration with Europe remains largely unexploited and thus needs to be encouraged through more ambitious vision and policies, as argued in the final section of this paper.

GUARANTEEING EFFECTIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE SECURITY SECTOR REFORM THROUGH DEMOCRATIC OVERSIGHT AND ENGAGEMENT BY CIVIL ACTORS

The issue of security and internal order has played a paramount role in the Arab Spring from a twofold point of view. On the one hand, the resolve to get rid of oppressive domestic security apparatus was a crucial driver of the fight for liberty in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and it is likely to become more and more pressing as incumbent regimes in Morocco and Jordan have to grant more pluralism and freedom to their own citizens. On the other hand, the impact of the Arab Spring on internal stability has been remarkable, exposing emerging governments to a wide range of challenges and threats, including the spread of small and light weapons (SLWs), reduced law enforcement and the rise of violently competing militias, as well as vulnerability to organised crime and, in some cases, to transnational terrorism.

All this looks even more worrying in the light of persistent instability in the region, including border disputes (e.g. between Morocco and Algeria), bilateral and/or internal conflicts (e.g. the wider Arab-Israeli issue), mid and low-intensity civil wars (e.g. in Syria, Yemen and Lebanon), enduring risks of state failure (e.g. Libya and, notably, Iraq) and rising security concerns (e.g. the Iranian nuclear programme and its impacts on foreign and military policies in Israel and the Gulf countries).

It is thus essential for transitional governments emerging from the Arab Awakening to address the issue of security sector reform with the aim of providing their citizens both with democratic and civil society oversight as well as with a fairly high level of public order and internal security. The task is, of course, extremely challenging due to the need to strike an often fragile balance between national stability and personal freedoms in a fast-changing political and institutional scenario. It also goes without saying that no one-size-fits-all solutions can be applied, as situations vary on the basis of past relations between toppled regimes and security forces, of the role of this apparatus in society (including in political and economic life) and their reactions to past and on-going unrest, of the degree of sectarianism and internal cleavages, as well as of the susceptibility of current regimes to external influence or interference.

As a consequence, security sector reform will follow country-specific paths, although some common criteria for successfully pursuing this exercise can be sketched out here. The first pre-requisite is the existence of a strong civilian leadership willing and capable of imposing its control on the security forces. As history in Europe and elsewhere clearly demonstrates, this is far from easy to achieve and requires above all wide political consensus on the need to oversee security institutions, including external and internal intelligence. Moreover, as shown by recent developments in Turkey, relations between the political leadership and the security apparatus can lead to long-standing confrontations, sometimes shaking a country's very stability.

The second condition is that society at large – including civil society organisations and notably NGOs – could play its part in both discussing internal security matters and priorities, and contributing to ensuring democratic control over security forces. This could be done by fostering security policy debates through independent research, information campaigns and public events, as well as by increasing collaboration with and impartial advice to relevant governmental bodies involved in

internal order and security, notably to the ministries of the interior and defence.

The third, crucial criterion for effective security sector reform in the MENA region is finding a balance between eradicating figures compromised by association with the old regimes and allowing an effective and functioning security machine. While 'mass purge' solutions have proved to be particularly counterproductive – as the case of post-2003 Iraq suggests – it goes without saying that indiscriminate amnesty policies would be both politically damaging and morally indefensible, and would also undermine the case for enforcing democracy and the rule of law domestically. As a consequence, specific benchmarks should be agreed upon by local political bodies in order to be employed in re-engineering personnel structures and responsibilities. Though this requires setting up specific legal provisions at national level, a clear principle should be established, i.e. the removal and judicial persecution of figures responsible for gross human violations both before and during regime change, including torture, mass murder and deportation, as well as ethnic or religious cleansing. In this regard, independent boards made up of selected representatives of both the judiciary and the civil society sectors should be established in order to impartially investigate the past conduct of security personnel.

Reforming the security sector in those MENA countries undertaking major pro-democracy reforms will undoubtedly necessitate a great deal of time and effort, as well as a favourable overarching political climate which, for the time being, is probably present in Tunisia only. As a matter of fact, while both Morocco and Jordan seem to be only at the beginning of a still uncertain top-down political transition, Egypt's political life is still marked by the influence of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which makes any security reform effort particularly difficult to pursue in the current situation. However, history suggests that no real or long-term democratic transition is achievable if elected bodies do not retain ultimate control over the legitimate use of force. As a consequence, governments in the MENA region will need to tackle the issue in due time if they are serious about meeting their citizens' growing demands for freedom and security.

In this respect, there also seems to be wide scope for international cooperation in this sector, both from within and outside the region. As a matter of fact, not only would intra-regional collaboration facilitate the strengthening of mutual trust in a traditionally sovereignty-centred area, but it could also possibly pave the way for future practical security cooperation. Moreover, the issue of capacity building should be addressed urgently, in the light of existing security challenges in the region. In this regard, Western countries – and particularly Europe – should be available to provide training and technical assistance in a wide variety of areas, spanning from prison reform to border security, if so requested by local governments.

FORGING TRUSTFUL, REALISTIC AND PRO-ACTIVE EU-MENA COOPERATION

It is fair to argue that the Arab Awakening took Europe by surprise. As a consequence, the prompt response by both the EU and its member states to the most significant geopolitical shift in their neighbourhood for more than twenty years was initially slowed by a mixture of bureaucratic intricacy and political cacophony.

As a matter of fact, the revolutions in the MENA region coincided with the early implementation phase of the new European External Action Service (EEAS), which

is designed to provide Europe with an increasingly united stance on the international scene. This put enormous pressure on its still embryonic institutional machinery and made coordination between EU member states and EU external policies hard to achieve and project outside. At the same time, some member states' initial support for contested regimes served to severely undermine the EU's credibility as a normative power and risked dealing a major – and potentially fatal – political blow to the entire post-Lisbon European foreign policy.

However, after some hesitation, the European Union managed to develop a clear political endorsement of the Arab Spring as well as to start adjusting its relevant policies accordingly, through a series of specific on-going and planned strategies, programmes and mechanisms. These include the so-called 'three Ms' (money, market and mobility), the SPRING (Support to Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth) programme, the Civil Society Facility, the European Endowment for Democracy and the geographical extension of the Erasmus Mundus Programme. The EU's renewed approach to the MENA region mainly entails a fully-fledged revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in the Southern Mediterranean, based on positive conditionality (the so-called 'more for more' approach, which links EU assistance to political and economic reforms in recipient countries), increased country-based differentiation, more focus on socio-economic sustainability, progressive regional trade liberalisation with the countries of the Agadir Agreement, pro-'deep democracy' measures including support for local civil society, and – albeit rather timidly – some willingness to ease existing hurdles to people's mobility.

On top of that, the EU has made some progress regarding sanctioning mechanisms put in place vis-à-vis repressive regimes in the region. This was notably the case with the UN-backed military intervention in Libya, as well as with the diplomatic and economic embargo against the Syrian regime. However, while the operation in Libya was carried out in a 'coalition of the willing' format under NATO command, with no involvement of EU crisis management tools, the current strategy adopted against Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria risks delivering too little to prevent massive violence from spreading across the country and beyond. As a consequence, it can be said that the Arab Spring has thus far represented a missed opportunity to revitalise the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in an area of key interest for Europe.

Though undoubtedly more courageous than past policies, especially when it comes to supporting pro-democracy movements in the area, the EU's response to the Arab Spring still presents a considerable number of uncertainties, among which three issues are to be highlighted. The first one concerns the consequences of the financial crisis on Europe's leverage, in terms of both its current and future capacity to offer assistance to MENA countries. Indeed, while it is generally agreed that the EU's financial commitment did not match initial expectations and grand plans, its irrelevance might grow still further in the future should the European Commission fail to be granted its request to reinforce the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI) in the relevant chapter of the next EU budget, for 2014–2020.

The second issue to be tackled relates to the risk of a steep decline in Europe's 'soft power', i.e. in the EU's capacity to act as an attractive model for regional peace and integration. As a matter of fact, EU member

states' current inability to secure a common strategy to deal with the aftermath of the economic crisis, the rise of populist and anti-democratic political movements in both the EU's founding countries and newcomers, and the widening gap between citizens and politics at all levels risk, among other things, undermining the appeal of the European project, thus weaken the EU's overall influence on the international scene, including in the MENA region.

The third and final difficulty may come from the growing influence of third players in the region. As a matter of fact, the Arab Spring was followed by a season of strong politico-diplomatic activism by Turkey, even if this entailed a definite revision of Ankara's so-called 'zero problems with neighbours' regional policy. Moreover, the USA's declining interest in the region was made clear by the adoption of the so-called 'strategy from behind' during NATO's campaign in Libya, and US policy is likely to remain such due to the current, election-driven domestic retrenchment. At the same time, regional and non-regional players such as some Gulf petro-monarchies – and to some extent China – have the opportunity to exploit the Arab Spring to inaugurate a post-Western geopolitical transition on Europe's closest periphery by promoting their controversial (and arguably unstable) political and socio-economic patterns, thanks to their remarkable financial leverage. All these dynamics risk deeply affecting, in a way or another, Europe's influence on political and economic developments in the area, thus lowering both the power of its narrative and the effectiveness of its tools.

Against this background, it is nonetheless imperative for Europe to inaugurate a new era of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, based on trust, realism and pro-activeness. These principles have some important policy implications.

Firstly, Europe will have to commit to a continuing dialogue with the emerging political and social actors in the MENA region. Indeed, this might prove far more challenging and time-consuming than ever before. As a matter of fact, the political vision dominating most of the countries affected by the Arab Spring marks a clear departure from the instrumentally pro-Western stance of past regimes. This, in turn, is likely to translate into a push for more equality, but also for more autonomy, in relations with Europe. At the same time, the emergence of pluralistic yet still fragile democracies offers a unique opportunity to Europe to engage local stakeholders – starting from NGOs and other civil society organisations – in boosting the openness and interconnectedness of their own societies. To do so, however, a thorough analysis and understanding of societal values, interests and dynamics at both national and sub-national level will be essential for Europe in order to take concrete actions to foster collaboration and mutual trust with the MENA region.

Secondly, an ambitious but realistic vision about the future Euro-Mediterranean architecture should be developed. As a matter of fact, the existing EU-led initiatives alternated between bilateral (i.e. ENP) and multilateral (i.e. Union for the Mediterranean, UfM) approaches with disputable coherence and, ultimately, little success. While the EU's past record of cooperation provided remarkable tools, processes and mechanisms on which to build further action, a brand new vision of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation is also needed, combining present work strands with renewed political impetus. This requires, above all, wide political reflection about the level of ambition to be implemented in future initiatives, especially focussing on ways to enhance EU-MENA integration in the absence of an EU mem-

bership-centred perspective. This could take, among other things, the form of a stronger push to create a Euro-Mediterranean free-trade area, based on a common acquis (according to the 'everything but institutions' formula), as well as on the free circulation of capital, goods, services and people. Nonetheless, considering the existing and presumably continuing diversity of political and socio-economic standards in the region, the EU should also seek closer cooperation with those MENA countries which are more willing and capable to pursue a reform agenda. This might entail a 'two-speed' model for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, based on increased economic integration and advanced political dialogue. This could, in turn, translate into a driver of further cooperation at regional level. In this regard, a viable starting point could be focussing on a 'pilot country' (e.g. Tunisia) to start in-depth dialogue and negotiation on issues such as economic liberalisation, enhanced mobility and energy collaboration. Nonetheless, it is also clear that no effective renewal of the EU's strategy towards the MENA region will be possible without firm political engagement by member states, which in turn demands a hard-to-achieve consensus on the geographical priorities of its current neighbourhood policy.

Thirdly and finally, it is also clear that, in dealing with the new political landscape of the MENA region, Europe will also need to maximise its synergies with several increasingly relevant regional players. This includes, first of all, working more closely with Turkey on a wide range of regional issues, from development assistance to crisis management. In this regard, Ankara could provide Brussels with its knowledge of and influence on political and societal dynamics in the region, as part of a joint strategic approach to the common neighbourhood, independent of Ankara's or Brussels' reading of Turkey's EU-accession process. Furthermore, cooperation with local regional organisations is essential in order to achieve a fully shared commitment to securing stability and development in the MENA region. This includes strengthening dialogue with the Arab League, which seems increasingly willing to take progressive political responsibilities in the region, as witnessed in the cases of Libya and Syria. Moreover, collaboration with both the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Islamic Conference Organisation (ICO) is vital in several areas, including (respectively) a number of regional security issues and intercultural dialogue. Nonetheless, continuing cooperation with the United States, Europe's most like-minded global partner, remains vital to promoting long-term development and security in the region. As a matter of fact, in spite of its growing reluctance to direct engagement, Washington retains deep-rooted interests in the area, notably in the Middle East and the Gulf. It is thus essential to boost solid transatlantic cooperation, especially at EU-US bilateral level, in a number of sectors, starting with ensuring more synergy and convergence between the EU and the USA's regional financial assistance programmes.

Finally, from the Arab point of view and reinforced by popular consent, no concrete progress towards truly regional political cooperation can be achieved without tackling a number of regional issues, starting with the Arab-Israeli conflict. As a consequence, the EU should also strive to build on its post-Lisbon foreign policy tools and ensure more coherence and unity between member states, in order to promote viable and fair political solutions to long-standing animosities in the area.

CONCLUSION

Europe is linked to the Arab world via the Mediterranean Sea and not separated by it. The Arab Spring itself will not be another 1989; the trajectory of transformation is different and less clear; its normative goals are not identical, and the region holds considerable regressive potential. Whatever the outcomes will be, they will affect Europe in political, economic and social terms as well as regarding its values and its security.

While the political responsibility to seize the many opportunities offered by the Arab Spring to achieve enduring prosperity and stability in the region ultimately lies in local governments, there is actually much that Europe can do to help reaching such ambitious objectives. This ranges from technical and financial assistance to re-launching a more ambitious and comprehensive political framework for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.

Through the Arab Spring, the Arab peoples have connected themselves to a world from which they seemed distanced in cultural and political terms. However, it is not convergence to a global life-style what old and new political movements are seeking in their emancipation from the old regimes. Rather, most are striving for a better life, with economic opportunity, equality under the law and personal dignity. As part of their concept of dignity, identity, expressed in cultural and religious terms, plays a significant role, which will set Arab democracy, law and governance apart from the previous waves of democra-

tization. These factors will also play out in the 'Arab evolutions', the often-underrated processes of change next to the revolutionary fall of regimes. Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have captured most of the international attention; the long term transformation of the Arab world, however, will depend on the outcomes of evolutionary change in countries such as Morocco, Jordan, and the monarchies of the Gulf.

Just as the revolutionary moments of the past year lacked strong leaders who would become the voice and face of change, the Arab countries at large lack a lead nation in their transformation. Egypt, which has traditionally been seen as an intellectual centre of the Arab people, is struggling too much with its own process of change to serve as a consistent inspiration to others; Tunisia is too small; Morocco too different in its way ahead, while the Arab peninsula seems to embrace the momentum of change too reluctantly to be leading it. This pattern of fragmentation and differentiation would look much different if there were a strong momentum of regional integration emerging in North Africa, building on consolidated new political order in the countries of Maghreb and Mashreq. Their example would impact on the Middle East, which in itself will never be the same again, irrespective of the outcome of the struggles over Syria, and it would reinforce the need to integrate further around the Gulf, building cooperation not entirely on the top levels of government but based on the consent of the governed with those who rule.

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