

EUROPEAN UNION'S INEFFECTIVE MIDDLE EAST POLICY REVEALED AFTER REVOLUTION IN TUNISIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the successes as well as shortcomings of European Union's policies in the Middle East region, and in Tunisia in particular with special reference to the effectiveness of these policies in tackling the problems of this area. The paper also makes recommendations and suggestions for the development and adoption by the EU of foreign policy prescriptions for increased stability, democracy and peaceful evolution of the region. It that Europe needs to behave more like a regional power and less like a big NGO in its dealings with post revolutionary Tunisia, asserting its own vision of how it would like to see the new polity develop and behave.

Key words: European Union, Revolutions in the Middle East, Tunisia, Middle East, European Security.

AVRUPA BİRLİĞİ'NİN TUNUS DEVRİMİNDEN SONRA AÇIĞA ÇIKAN ETKİN OLMAYAN ORTADOĞU POLİTİKASI

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada, Avrupa Birliği'nin Tunus'taki ayaklanma sürecinde başarılı ve başarısız politikaları ve AB'nin bu süreçte ne kadar başarılı olduğu analiz edilecektir. Aynı zamanda çalışma AB'nin bu süreçteki hatalarına bakarak Birliğin Ortadoğu'da istikrar ve demokrasinin evrilme sürecinde nasıl daha etkin politikalar üretmeleri gerektiği anlamında öneriler sunacaktır. Çalışmanın argümanı ise, Avrupa Birliği'nin sivil toplum kuruluşundan ziyade, daha çok bölgesel bir güç olarak davranması gerektiğidir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Avrupa Birliği, Ortadoğu'da Devrimler, Tunus, Ortadoğu, Avrupa Güvenliği.

Introduction

The events in Tunisia first and then spreading over the Middle East area were a bitter lesson for the EU's indulgent policy towards Ben Ali's repressive regime. Europe has remained silent for a long time and did not show any intention to intervene in Tunisia even

when Ben Ali removed various democratic rights and freedoms. European fear from any kind of destabilisation in the Middle East prevented the EU in supporting democracy in Tunisia. The EU's foreign policy towards the North African (Mediterranean and/or Middle Eastern) states focused mainly on economic matters. Security, counter-terrorism and maintaining stability remained at the second rank because of the shortcomings which are both inherent to the EU itself and the countries in the region. This approach and the policies implemented (or not implemented due to several reasons) to achieve this objective discredited the EU's foreign policy and considerably deteriorated its standing in the region.

The passive role of the EU is surprising since Europe is directly affected by the social tensions and the political turmoil in the Maghreb. The EU should be particularly concerned about the situation in the Southern neighbourhood, which can destabilise the whole region. As conflicts began first in Tunisia will spill over to the other countries, - not difficult to predict when we consider the unstoppable rise of the globalisation-, the economic and social situation could get worse, Islamist movements could gain more grounds and the pressures to migrate either legally or illegally to Europe could grow.

With the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership with the Barcelona Declaration in 1995, the EU committed itself to consolidate stability, peace and prosperity in the Mediterranean region. It was clear that the Mediterranean and the Middle East was of a high importance for the EU. But when it comes to practice, it has been concluded that the EU remained ineffective in fulfilling these objectives which are laid down in Barcelona. The EU's efforts to support human rights and democracy in the region have not led to democratic structures, expected political change and good governance. This was partly due to the EU's inner problems but it should not be forgotten that, at the end, the demand for democratic change must come from the society itself.

This paper analyses the successes as well as shortcomings of European Union's policies in the Middle East region, and in Tunisia in particular with special reference to the effectiveness of these policies in tackling the problems of this area. The paper also makes recommendations and suggestions for the development and adoption by the EU of foreign policy prescriptions for increased stability, democracy and peaceful evolution of the region.

The importance of the Middle East for the European Union

The Middle East is a prominent region for both the EU and its Member States. The Middle East, specifically the Arab-Israeli conflict and the subsequent peace process has been a foreign policy priority for the EU since it was first able to act as a (more or less) coherent

international actor with the introduction of the European Political Cooperation (EPC) (Smith,2002:167). In the European Security Strategy (ESS), resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is identified as the strategic priority of Europe and it stated that the EU must remain engaged and ready to commit resources to the problem until it is solved. It is identified by the EU officials as “mother of all conflicts in the Middle East” (Youngs, 2004; 2003; 2004). It is considered as a single strategic threat to Middle Eastern security, with which the solution of other conflicts is bound up. There are three main reasons for this:

The first one is the geographical proximity of the region to Europe; any social and political instability or insecurity like the rise of radical Islamism and terrorism in the Middle East would adversely affect the EU’s internal social and political stability and security due to spill-over effect. In terms of internal social and political stability, the presence of important Jewish and Muslim minorities in some of European states results in European concerns about disastrous impact of hardening of the Arab-Israeli conflict on internal social cohesion (Schmid, 2006: 9). Moreover, uncontrolled migration flow from the region is perceived by Europeans as a challenge to their security and stability. Particularly in the post-Cold War era, EU policy makers started to consider stability in the Middle East as an integral part of “security in Europe”(Bilgin, 2004: 274).

“Geopolitical reasons alone are important reasons for the necessity of an integrated Mediterranean Policy. For this, it is enough just to look at the map. Look first at the Balkans, and then at the entrance to the Atlantic Ocean. Take the Dardanelles and the oil-producing Middle East; and do not forget that the Mediterranean lies on a North-South axis, which is essential for the links between Europe and Africa. We have to ask ourselves seriously the question whether the Community could survive after a considerable disturbance in the Mediterranean area” (Natali, 1982: 1). Actually, as stated also by Lorenzo Natali, the Mediterranean and the Middle East has long been a unified space and an economic and cultural entity that boasts great wealth and diversity. The differences and conflicts this region has known since time immemorial have not affected the unity of the Mediterranean region. Fernand Braudel expressed this idea very well when he wrote: “...with a space which is conducive to creativeness with its free waterways, its spontaneous proclivity to free exchange, its diverse and yet similar expanses of land, cities teeming with unceasing dynamism and its wide assortment of integrated human breeds, the Mediterranean maintains a perpetual power of revival and reconstruction over successive generations” (Braudel, 1991: 120).

The Mediterranean began history on the edge of civilization. Egypt and Syria were already old when the maritime empire of Crete unified the Aegean in the second millennium BC and set up trading posts in Sicily and perhaps Andalusia. A thousand years later, Phoenicians and Greeks were still planting colonies in the Western Mediterranean as in a new World. Civilization in the Mediterranean migrated from east to west. And as Georges Duby stated: "... the source is over there, in the great site of Mediterranean – the deep source of our culture, civilization" (Duby, 1991: 132). Moreover, "the Mediterranean is not just a sea; it is composed of several seas and these are full of islands, interrupted by peninsulas and enclosed by toothed coasts. The life of Mediterranean is mixed with the land that of its poetry is pastoral whereas sailors are peasants... the history of the Mediterranean cannot be separated from the history of surrounding land" (Braudel, 1994: 18). Accordingly, the Mediterranean and the Middle East cannot be separated from each other since some countries are both Mediterranean and Middle Eastern like Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan. In fact, the Mediterranean enjoys a strategic location at the junction of three continents: Africa, Asia and Europe. The countries of the Mediterranean are divided by variations in populations, ideologies, political regimes, social differences and the level of economic development. This area is also the focus of political tensions and conflicts. Political instability in the region threatens the world peace in general. Jesse Lewis emphasized the importance of the region describing it as a "vast political echo chamber where developments in any one country – and many events in countries outside the region – are reverberated and intensified, often exploding with violence that in turn is felt in other parts of the globe" (Lewis, 1976: 1).

The second reason behind the importance of the Middle Eastern security for world is related to energy security. European States are largely dependent on Middle Eastern oil and natural gas. European states wanted to ensure sustained flow of oil and natural gas at reasonable prices (Bilgin, 2005: 140).

Historically, colonial ties had already established relations between most of the Middle Eastern countries and the Member States of the EU. The third reason of the Middle Eastern significance is that some of the EU Member States; Britain and France have a special relationship with the region because of their status of being former colonial powers in the region. Due to these reasons, preservation of the security, stability and peace in the Middle East is very crucial for the EU Member States. That is why they have sought to actively involve and play an active role in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) since early 1970s.

The EU and the Middle East Peace Process

The EU has been actively involved in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) in the 1990s and its participation in the process has increased in the post 9/11 era. The EU is one of the members of the Quartet on the Middle East, which was designed for mediating the peace process and composed of the EU, the US, the UN and Russia. In addition to that, the EU has continued to be the largest donor of financial aid to the Palestinian Authority and the MEPP. The EU supported the reform process of the Palestinian Authority toward the creation of an independent economically and politically viable, sovereign and democratic Palestinian state. The EU encouraged the Palestinian reform process in areas of the advancement of judicial independence, promotion of accountability and transparency in the fiscal system, the security sector reform, reorganization of administration and the executive, holding of free and fair elections, development of a modern education system and media based on peace, tolerance and mutual understanding, the promotion of pro-peace civil society.

The EU also increased its role in the security dimension of the MEPP with the launch of two European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) operations: EUPOLCOPPS and EU BAM Rafah. In the post-9/11 era, the EU remained committed to a negotiated settlement resulting in two states, Israel and an independent, sovereign and democratic Palestinian state. They are also planned to live together in peace and security on the basis of the 1967 borders and in the framework of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, based on the UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1515, the terms of reference of Madrid Conference of 2002 and the principle of 'land for peace'. Thus, it can be observed that the EU actively involved in the MEPP in the post-9/11 era. Since 9/11, the US policy towards the MEPP changed and the US decided to adopt a multilateral approach to the peace process, with cooperation with European governments (Musu, 2007).

As a result, the Quartet on the Middle East, which provided multilateral framework for the EU's participation in the political and diplomatic dimension of the MEPP, was established. The EU has played an active role in the political and diplomatic dimension of the peace process. Furthermore, during this period the EU has started to play a prominent role in the security dimension of the peace process through its EDSP operations. During this period, an increase in international recognition of the EU as a significant player in the political, diplomatic and security dimension of the Middle East conflict and also a revival of peace process which was blocked since the second half of the 1990s is observed.

Despite continuing mutual violence between the Israelis and the Palestinians especially, since the outbreak of Al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, with the launch of the

Road Map by the Quartet in April 2003, the closed road to the peace in the Middle East has been opened. Despite the international community's efforts, at the end of 2005, which constituted the deadline set by the Road Map for the final settlement of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, the Road Map stuck in gridlock. The Israeli unilateral actions including construction of Security Fence and Disengagement Plan and continuing mutual violence between the Israelis and the Palestinians decreased the prospect of the successful implementation of the Road Map and led it into a dead end. Moreover, in 2006, significant events, which had decisive effects on the MEPP, had taken place.

First one was Hamas' sweeping victory in the Palestinian legislative election of 2006, and the Quartet's decision to boycott the Hamas-led Palestinian Government when it refused to meet and implement the three principles put forward by the Quartet on the Middle East including non-violence comprising the laying down of arms, recognition of Israel's right to exist and acceptance and fulfillment of existing agreements and obligations, including the Road Map. The EU also decided to impose sanctions on the Hamas-led Palestinian government and suspend its direct aid. Due to the escalation of violence in the region, the EU's two ESDP operations in the Palestinian territories have been temporarily suspended.

Second one was Israel-Lebanon War of 2006 and subsequent huge military contribution of EU Member States to the expanded UNIFIL by providing the backbone of the force, which enabled the EU Member States' significant military presence in the region.

Actually, the importance of the Middle East generally for the West and specifically for the EU has been increased and intensified by the globalisation- which has often been perceived as largely equivalent to Westernisation since it refers to the spill-over throughout the globe of ideas and institutions of usually Western origin. In the Middle East, the decade of globalisation was marked by endless wars, US hegemony, economic dependency and insecurity (Hinnebush, 2003). Although it has been argued that globalisation strengthened Islamic fundamentalism and due to its ambiguity created a contradictory and tension filled situation (Griffel, 2011; Kellner, 2005: 177-188). However, against most expectations and arguments, the process of globalisation often acted as an impetus to democratisation rather than an obstacle. People with different ideas are now able to come together and participate in global culture and to make politics through gaining access to global communication and media networks. Peace, democracy and stability are spreading (at least sometimes in theory) by delivering economic prosperity which people would not keen on sacrificing in conflicts.

Globalisation and the Middle East

Globalisation is as the term itself implies: a global and indiscriminating sweep that standardizes the commercial, military, cultural, and human resources around it with respect to one nation or group of peoples at the top. In a 'globalized' society, the entire world bends to the will of global community and its institutions and follows standards set by them. It leaves no country or continent untouched, and is almost impossible to avoid. Globalisation has many effects that – in theory – bring some form of prosperity or greater good to all involved, but without a doubt it benefits most the group in power.

The problem with globalisation with respect to the developing nations of today is a simple one: the fact that it's already there. With the powerful nations already at the core, the very definition of globalisation dictates that they will remain there, and that the remainder of the nations and groups, especially the developing and Third World nations, will stay at the periphery, which means will be subject to the rules and restrictions as set forth by those in the lead. Here, one thing that matters most is whether or not it is possible for the status quo to change and for one or more nations, to move from the lower ranks to the higher echelons of world globalisation ladder; and is possible for the Middle East in particular?

The Middle East is an especially intriguing specimen in this context; where most countries have reached some sort of equilibrium with the world around them (the best recent example may be Caucasia), the Middle East has faced continuous violent turbulents for the past century, leaving its inhabitants focused on issues of every-day existence - more immediately important than globalisation, and the assertion of their role as a world power. However, trends from all components of globalisation have manifested themselves in recent years in the Middle East; which has the power to in turn lead to globalisation with portions of the Middle East as a major source of influence and/or power a possibility.

At the moment, the Middle East is in a temporary position of supreme economic power: with the rest of the world highly dependent on fossil fuels and not yet researching alternate fuels to the extent as they should; and therein the Middle Eastern nations have an opportunity to take things further, if it is taken promptly and dealt with rationally (Moreno, 2004: 13-22). With the Middle East being the number one provider of oil in OPEC, the rest of the world is at their mercy: no matter what leverage they hold, in the face of no oil, the Middle East will prevail (Morse and Richard, 2002: 5).

The Middle East is considered as an economic power due to a lucky coincidence with which thousands of years of fossil fuel collected and left the rest of the world dependent on them for energy and survival. Though it can be said that the Middle East already is a global

economic power, oil alone is not enough, especially when, sooner or later, it will either run out or be replaced with something cleaner, cheaper, more efficient, and better (Greene, Hopson and Li, 2005: 23-56). The true play for power needs to come in the form of a self-sufficing economy built on the manufacture of finished goods and services, and not just the provision of raw materials for processing and sale elsewhere (Whathers, 2004). For the Middle East to truly claim its role as an honest and official world economic power with the full intention of remaining that way, it must engage in large-scale manufacturing and goods business.

Given the current affluence in the Middle East and abundance of company start-ups and investments, the Middle East has a prime chance to ascertain its position and concrete its role if approached the right way. A political superpower can be defined as a nation or union/group with enough influence on the political process of the entire world, and can use this influence to accomplish almost anything (Soderberg, 2005: 43-46). For a nation to become a political superpower, there are many obstacles that must be overcome, and even more feats that need to be accomplished, but there are varying levels of importance within these ranks. A political superpower must have some means of reinforcing a decision should pure politics fail (military, economic, or otherwise), it must also be united in its stance from within, and clear in its goals (Soderberg, 2005: 66).

The Middle East has serious issues prohibiting it from becoming once more the superpower, "empire" that it once was centuries ago, that range from a lack of unity to governmental disarray and fear of modern progress, to constant conflict and disagreement amongst the various Arabi nations as well as between the Middle East as a whole and the rest of world (Wilson and Williams, 2005: 22). While it may be possible to envision a joint Middle Eastern global economic power, it is much more difficult to imagine a unified Middle East of one political mind, largely due to the sectional and regional socio-political divisions in the region (William, 1999: 82).

Given the present political conditions in the Middle East, it becomes obvious that a political superpower rising from the ashes of a once-great empire is at present quite remote, and will require an enormous amount of effort and time for all the parties involved to realize the benefits and strength of their collective power-potential, to set aside their differences, and to accomplish something in the court of world politics. Although certain individual nations in the Middle East possess a fair share of political clout and power that may have at one point been enough to make that nation a global power and/or a leader in geopolitical world globalization, its current might does not enable it to steal the limelight from the current

superpowers and heads of political globalization, namely the United States, Russia, and the European Union (Evans, 2003: 20).

The problem is that politics alone is no more than a method, nothing tangible, and nothing spectacular. However, politics, once mixed with economic, military, and cultural aspects, politics becomes a formidable weapon. The steep requirements for political superpowers can be seen as stemming in a large part from the military prerequisites. So, without a military presence or the threat of military action, politics alone is of no avail; and without the military might, one can never escape the political trends set by other nations (Altman and Gubrud, 2004).

In the Middle East, the problem is compounded by the extent to which foreign military forces have infiltrated the landscape, such that not a single country remains physically uncompromised. It is hard to build a military presence to rival that of existing political superpowers, but it becomes an immensely harder obstacle when at the slightest indication of true military motivation results in punishments and threats from the superpowers at the top, making it all the more difficult for the Middle East to ever shed itself of the military shackles it imposed on itself when it invited foreign military forces to intervene in regional affairs (Sobhy, 2005: 14).

The Middle Eastern culture is one of the oldest and best-preserved traditions remaining. In globalisation, ethnocentricity is one of the most important and final blows that shape the true form of the world and the attitude the various peoples will take towards it. In an ethnocentric society, such as that of today, most nations/societies attempt to wipe and/or discredit any and all remaining traces of previous cultures after ascertaining their own cultural presence in the area (UIUC, 2006).

In the Middle East, according to Rubin, culture and religion have reached a point of interchangeability, where the Middle Eastern culture is built on the religion and is passed along with it. Largely due to its association with Islam, the Middle East has actually already taken the initial steps required to become a world cultural power by successfully rejecting almost all forms of cultural globalization from the West – something that no other nation or group has succeeded in doing (Rubin, 2003: 1-2). The steps required for ascertaining a people and their culture as a global power in that field are two-fold, namely first concretely holding onto their own original ideologies and beliefs, and then spreading them on to others. And in both of these fields, the Middle East seems to be succeeding spectacularly. As Rubin mentions in his article, the Middle East has successfully rejected all attempts to ‘modernise’ the region except those that the Middle East itself deemed to be positive and helpful, not a

detriment or a loss of identity. At the same time, the Middle Eastern culture, again, through Islam, is being spread across the face of the planet faster than any other religion, and is steadily gaining ground and heading straight towards number one (Young, 1997).

As a result, it becomes obvious that in order for any of the above-mentioned factors and components of globalisation to ever take place with the Middle East as a center of activity and innovation and a recognised and undisputed world leader, it is of the utmost importance that the Middle Eastern nations and peoples pool their resources and capabilities together, otherwise the sheer magnitude of the existing world globalisation order makes it physically impossible and not even thinkable for one Middle Eastern nation alone to take on the world order. Middle Eastern unity and a place in the status quo need not come in the form of all Middle Eastern nations uniting under one flag, but rather simply managing their resources more efficiently, establishing democracy and democratic institutions, forming a true representative Arab Union that is not built on talk and money but instead truly dedicated to making a difference for the Middle East and uniting them to make of the various nations a powerful entity capable of presenting itself solidly for the rest of the world to see.

Current Relations between the European Union and the Middle East

The European Union's southern neighbourhood is still being shaken by a revolutionary wave. Egypt and Tunisia have managed to overthrow autocratic regimes, Libya is struggling to get rid of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, and tensions are likely to persist in other countries for months to come. Whether or not regimes fall, EU policies will have to change drastically, whether to respond to successful regime change or to successful repression of protests. A number of increasingly accepted conventions about the Arab world – that democracy and human rights were perhaps not universally shared values; that privatisation and other economic reforms could be given priority over political change – have been thrown out of the window. But the success or failure of the regions' revolutions will be defined above all by what follows the overthrow of autocrats.

The question now is how to move from peaceful protests to stable and healthy political, economic and social systems in the region. The emergence of democratic, pluralistic and fairer societies is just one of the possible outcomes, and perhaps not the most likely in all cases.

The place to start the battle for the success of the post-revolutionary neighbourhood is where the wave of revolutions started: Tunisia. There are strong prospects that Tunisia could become the first country in the North African region to consolidate a genuine democratic

system. On the other hand, it could also still become simply another failed revolution. Either outcome would have great implications.

Jasmine Tunisia: Where things began

Tunisia is currently full of hope and excitement following what is known there as the karama (dignity) revolution. It is now focused on the question of how to support the country's transition to democracy. However, both the mood and the situation remain fragile. The streets of Tunis are still laden with armoured cars, the military still patrols the streets and the police are still mainly in hiding –and, as the main instrument of former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's repression, they seem to remain discredited for a long time. In addition to this tension, there are substantial political uncertainties. There is no clear revolutionary leadership, substantial divisions are emerging between the political and civil society actors emerging from the fog of revolution, and ministers come and go, while escalating social demands complicate the picture.

Besides uncertainty existing in the relations with the EU, there is also a sense of bitterness vis-à-vis the EU's unconditional support for Ben Ali. This situation was disappointing for Tunisians since there occurred a sense that the EU wanted democracy for itself but not for Tunisia. This lack of confidence on the EU may come from colonial past and paranoid future. Whereas those taking part in the so-called colour revolutions in Serbia or Ukraine looked to Europe for inspiration, the revolution in Tunisia happened despite Europe. And, for most Tunisians, the EU is associated with France and Italy – the closest, most visible and present member states, which are seen as having been in close relations with Ben Ali.

Ineffectiveness of the EU in the Middle East Region

Overall, the EU is falling far behind of fulfilling its objectives in the Middle East. This is due to several reasons: three sets of problems can be derived. The first set of problems is that; although the EU is concerned primarily with political stability, it does not exclusively seek to achieve it through economic growth, which is itself supposed to flow from policies of free trade and internal economic liberalisation. Moreover, the economic policies advocated by the Barcelona Partnership¹ are based on hypothesis that seems not only simplistic but also far too optimistic. Instead of increasing productivity, free trade could increase redundancy and output levels in the Mediterranean (Marquina, 1997: 37). At the same time, the effects of free trade on investment could turn out to be negative rather than positive. If this dashes hopes for

an increase in exports, such an increase in itself will not become revenue available to pay back public debt (Kienle, 1998: 4).

Besides the proposed positive linkage between investment and job creation depends on additional factors such as transparency, efficiency and independence of the judiciary and political stability, including the countervailing effects of productivity increases. So, it becomes easy to come to the analysis that political liberalisation and the additional stability are difficult objectives to achieve solely through economic liberalisation. Neither general prosperity, nor the relative political stability that in the best cases could result from economic reforms, leads to a widening of political participation or increased respect for human rights.

The second set of problems concerns the problems, which are inherent to the EU's structure. To strengthen this argument, Jörg Monar explains that the EU's policy in the Mediterranean suffers from a gap between expectations and outcomes (Monar, 1998: 39). This discrepancy can be expounded in part by the particular institutional and procedural constraints of the EU's dual system of foreign affairs. The institutional constraints of the EU's "dual" system of external affairs clearly have an impact on the EU's Middle East Policy and it seems that it is negative one. Although the EU is trying to get rid of these constraints by several recent attempts, the decision-making process is still so slow, and often reduced to the lowest common denominator among the member states' interests; sometimes it is even paralysed. There are problems of continuity, because of the six-monthly rotation of the EU Presidency, and consistency on the EU side. Negotiations with the non-member Middle Eastern countries and the implementation of EU policies can be suspended by internal problems of the Union system. However, the Middle Eastern countries have to keep in mind that there exist two contradictory powers within the Union; which are sovereign member states in international relations on the one hand and strong supranational elements on the other. Accordingly, it is not fair to expect the Union to act like a unitary nation-state in its relations with them. Middle Eastern countries must accept that because of its internal institutional constraints, the Union has inbuilt limitations to its acting capacity and an important potential for blockages, not only in decision-making but also in the policy implementation process. Acceptance of this reality can help to reduce disappointments emerging from exaggerated expectations and give greater elasticity to relations between the EU and the Middle East.

Moreover, the weakness of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) prevents the EU from acting cohesively and decisively in bringing its weight to bear within the Middle East Policy². However, weakness of the CFSP is not the only reason behind the ineffective

Middle East Policy. There are other factors behind this. First of all, there is again an absence of a common security/military perception in the EU. Developments in the Middle East are followed its special attention by the EU's southern members and hardly even recognised in the North (Gillespie, 1997)³.

Another reason behind the ineffectiveness of the EU's Middle East Policy is the absence of trans-Atlantic coordination and common understanding with respect to the Middle East. In a sense, this lack of coordination is an aspect of the weak status of the EU's CFSP. In the 1990s, many Europeans maintained that the US did its best to prevent a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) to from emerging. However, others claim that European governments, not the Americans, were responsible for failing to enforce the CFSP. Whatever the truth, EU-US synergy in the region, explicitly mentioned in the first common goal of the December 1995 "New Transatlantic Agenda" (Krenzler and Schomaker, 1996: 9-28) , has not worked. Besides the issue of NATO reforms, there are other differences between the EU and the US over the Middle East⁴. In general, the US would have preferred to see Europeans linking the Middle East and the Gulf to the Mediterranean area and taking more responsibility in the former arena. All these differences are reflected in the fact that, while the Europeans felt committed to the Mediterranean, the Americans (with some exceptions), (Lesser, 1996) , used to talk more about the "Greater Middle East" (Blackwill and Sturmer, 1997; Gompert and Larrabee, 1997). Above all, it is wrong to assume that the process of European construction through the EU will automatically spill over into the area of defence cooperation (Hayde-Price, 1991: 132). As Berndt von Staden has argued, the concept of a EU incorporating a defence policy component is ahistorical, and rests on a profound misunderstanding of the nature of community integration: "... it (the EU) will remain an entity which will only find the guarantee for its security in the backing of the Atlantic alliance" (Von Staden, 1990: 36-37).

Despite all these reasons behind the ineffectiveness of the EU in the Middle East in general and Tunisia specifically, Tunisians know they will need European help. There is a sense of pragmatism that the EU is a strong economic power on its doorstep, with relevant experiences to share and possible support for its transition. In other words, the EU has the opportunity to make amends for past failures by offering prompt and generous help that Tunisia needs and deserves⁵. Above all, this will serve European interests in helping to consolidate a more stable and pluralistic southern neighbourhood. The EU should not start where it usually does: teaching and preaching. This time a realistic approach is needed. The EU should offer advice where it is asked for, financial assistance and trade where it is able,

and also some quick eye-catching measures, across all sectors, to show that it stands with Tunisia's move towards democracy. Europe has an interest in supporting Tunisia in becoming an established democracy that could serve as a model in a turbulent but still predominantly authoritarian Middle East region.

Confusion Prevails

Since Tunisian independence in 1956, the Tunisian people have only known two presidents, who were both more or less authoritarian: Habib Bourguiba, who ruled from 1957 until 1987; and Ben Ali, who ruled from 1987 until 2011. This means that Tunisia has no previous experience of successful, ordered political transition. The revolution therefore marks not just the departure of a president but the end of an epoch. Yet the road onwards is already confusing. Tunisians seem to be united around the end goal of democracy, but there is a lack of clarity and – understandably – a divergence of views on how to get there. Some want gradual political reform, others want to preserve the economic and social origins of the revolution, and others still call for the Tunisian people to stop protesting and go back to normal life.

The population is increasingly atomised. While Ben Ali remained in power, the protesters were united by a single goal. But since his departure in January, the protests have become narrower in focus and sometimes more parochial. Some people protest in front of the Interior Ministry against former police abuses, while others, such as the staff of the national airline, go on strike for higher salaries. There are few structures – for example, political parties or NGOs – through which these demands can be channelled. It is striking that, six months after Ben Ali resigned, there is still no charismatic new leader in the mould of Lech Walesa or Vaclav Havel. Interim president Fouad Mebazaa has announced elections by 24 July to elect a constituent assembly that will write a new Tunisian constitution. In the meantime, however, the country's transitional government is struggling to enforce its authority over a population that does not accept its legitimacy or that of most local government.

On paper, the government has huge power, because the parliament, itself still filled with Ben Ali's people, has given the interim president the right to govern by decree. But, there seems to be little fear among Tunisians that the interim authorities will try to consolidate their position and stay in office. The danger instead is of a fluid and unelected transitional government that is unable to persuade the people to accept its decisions. The interim government has repeatedly been forced to make concessions following complaints that it had

not moved quickly enough. At the end of February, caretaker Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi resigned, along with the two other ministers remaining who had served in Ben Ali's government. The interim president's decision to hold elections for a constituent assembly also meets one of the protesters' key demands (the earlier plan to vote first for a new president under the old constitution risked, in the eyes of many, inadvertently creating a second Ben Ali). A political reform commission appointed by the government in January will help devise the code under which the elections are held. But this sequence of reform extends the time for which an interim, unelected government will run the country, leading to a risk that the crisis of authority will only worsen in the coming months.

Another urgent question is what role people who were part of Ben Ali's political system should play in Tunisia's regeneration. Under Ben Ali's centralised and tightly controlled system, the party and the state were virtually the same. Tunisia now is at the edge of a twofold road. On the one hand, it needs to keep those people to be able to continue running the country effectively and offer elite networks a stake in the success of the post-revolutionary environment. On the other hand, it needs to weaken the former elites enough to make sure the revolution is not hijacked by the old guard and corrupt interests. A number of the new political parties are viewed as vehicles through which the old elite can get back into power through the back door. The issue will clearly be divisive.

Creating an independent civil society

Sihem Bensedrine is a journalist and human rights activist who was arrested and harassed under Ben Ali and who has lived in exile for the last few years. For years, she was the driving force of the opposition radio station Kalima, which broadcast only through the internet and satellite.⁶

Now back in Tunisia, Bensedrine has plunged into the political turmoil that could see her country transformed into a more democratic state. She is trying to obtain radio and television licences to start regular broadcasts and to provide the public with better and freer access to information. Ordinary citizens frequently knock on her door asking for help with everything from addressing injustice by state institutions to caring for sick relatives. Tunisian pro-democracy activists such as Bensedrine are full of energy and optimism, and although their organisations are weak, the expectations of them are already huge. Despite the will of the Tunisian people to consolidate the political change that they have brought about, counter-revolution – in other words, a quiet re-appropriation of power by wolves in democratic sheep's clothing – is not impossible. Without the development of checks and balances as the

new democracy emerges, the old elite could use its money, power, Networks and, in particular, its ownership of the majority of private media outlets to entrench itself successfully in the new system and push back many of the changes.

Under Ben Ali, it was difficult for political parties other than the leader's Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) party or civil society groups to develop, since they were subject to tight legal constraints and the country's political culture allowed no space for the idea of a "loyal opposition" (Christopher, 2010). The long-term success of Tunisia's transition to democracy is likely to depend in large part on whether it now develops national institutions and civil society groups that can organise debate and monitor the government effectively. Among the most important priorities are national representative political parties, an independent and Professional judiciary, and NGOs with countrywide reach.

Independent media will be equally important. Social networking websites – in particular, Facebook and Twitter, which have been accessible in Tunisia only since 2008 – were among the well-documented enablers of the revolution. WikiLeaks, which documented for the first time a level of corruption among the ruling elite that most Tunisians suspected, also had a big impact. The internet will undoubtedly continue to play a critical role in information dissemination and holding both the transitional government and whatever follows it to account. However, only around 27 per cent of the Tunisian population use the internet, and access can often be sporadic, so more traditional media will also play a critical role in the development of a democratic society (Christian-Peter and A. Möller, 2011).

The interim government has lifted restrictions on press freedom. But although the three main newspapers are now able to discuss issues facing the country, training is needed to improve their ability to carry out accurate and professional investigative journalism, as their operating environment has changed so radically. Television is likely to remain the most important medium for years to come. It will be difficult to establish diversity and choice on domestic television and radio in time to support genuinely competitive elections in six months' time. Currently there are only a few private channels, which are owned by Ben Ali, his family and his networks. While their broadcasting is not counter-revolutionary, some civil society groups fear that it could shore up the positions of many of the members of Ben Ali's administration, without providing support for, or coverage of, an effective opposition. Al Jazeera is more popular than the domestic television channels, but while contributing to pluralism in general, it is unlikely to support the development of democracy within Tunisia by hosting local political talk shows or investigating corruption.

An independent communications authority has been set up, but it is not yet clear how far or how quickly it will contribute to greater pluralism of the media by granting more licences to new media outlets. The development of a new press code is also problematic. There is plenty of legal expertise within Tunisia's universities, but, as with the constitution and the electoral code, there is little trust in the transitional government as a legitimate entity to oversee this process. Without clear guidelines on different candidates being accorded sufficient airtime to make their case for election to the public, it is unlikely that elections will be genuinely free and fair. On the other hand, until elections have taken place, a question mark hangs over whether the interim president and government are competent to approve the guidelines for developing this framework.

Challenges for a new democracy

Amine Ghali is the programme director of the Al Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center, a Tunisian NGO set up in 2006 which, as one of the few regional organisations working on democracy promotion, has been active in Tunisia in the run-up to and following Ben Ali's departure. According to Ghali, Tunisia needs to learn from previous successful transitions and failed revolutions, from South Africa and Argentina to Poland and Ukraine. He says Tunisians have a lot of questions regarding what they should do next and could benefit from the experience of others.

Despite the atmosphere of optimism in Tunis, it still remains possible that, in the coming years, the process of transition in Tunisia could produce a centralised system that is perhaps freer than that of Ben Ali but nonetheless quite authoritarian. In recent history, many revolutions failed to produce consolidated democracies – for example, in Iran in 1979, in 1989-91 in post-Soviet states such as Belarus, Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, or in Kyrgyzstan in 2005. In Tunisia, just like elsewhere, democracy may not easily take root in one go, and may require more than one upheaval, moving between phases of centralisation and democratisation before it consolidates. Since most candidates for presidential or parliamentary office with experience of government in Tunisia will be those who have served under the previous regimes, the old guard is likely to gain more than a foothold under the new system if the electorate places confidence in experience.

One of the well-known reasons why Europe, the United States and the international community accommodated Ben Ali's regime and others like it for so long was a fear that Islamists were the only alternative organised political force. In fact, no strong leaders are emerging from this corner either. Indeed, Rachid Ghannouchi, leader of the Islamist party

Ennahda – who has been allowed by the transitional government to return to the country – has ruled out running for president, and some observers in the country predict that his party is likely to maintain a relatively low profile throughout the elections. Civil society appears broadly in agreement that the various Islamist groups should be included in consultations about the transition process. Many want to draw on the example of Turkey under the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which they see as a positive example of reconciliation between Islam and democracy.⁷

However, some European diplomats in Tunisia note that even if Islamists win only the expected ten per cent of the vote in future parliamentary elections, they may begin to play a decisive role in the development of legislation. Their financial structure in Tunisia is unclear, but there is a possibility that over time they could build up strongholds across the country, especially if economic grievances persist. This would follow a pattern of growing support for Islamist groups elsewhere in the region, such as Hamas, Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood, who have organised an alternative system of welfare when governments have failed to do so. They could therefore have a bigger impact than expected in the first parliamentary elections if they are delayed much longer than six months, or in subsequent rounds. Tunisians feel that the regional context will play an important role in determining whether or not democracy takes root in their country. While a sense of being a pioneer of Arab democracy might help, isolation could be harmful, and there are no guarantees as to how the change of regime in Egypt, the armed uprising in Libya, or protests in Morocco, Bahrain, Yemen, Algeria and elsewhere might end. In any case, Tunisia is not likely to get too much help from the Arab world, since other countries' elites either would prefer the Tunisian experiment to fail or, as in the case of Egypt, will be too busy managing their own post-revolutionary transitions.

Economy without Democracy or Democracy without Economy?

The number one issue with the potential to make or break the democratic transition is the economy. Demonstrations continue daily in Tunis and around the country as people seek to highlight the many social and economic grievances – unemployment, low salaries, high-food prices – that were suppressed during Ben Ali's oppressive rule, and which ultimately triggered the revolution. Although the transitional government and its ministries are the target of many of these protests, they are increasingly also aimed at other employers too: the revolution has shown that protest works. So far, the interim government has been forced to accede to many of the demands of the protesters. Unless it can stabilise the situation, fears

around security may lead to the emergence of a strongman – whether from the ranks of the previous regime or elsewhere. As the ultimate guarantor of order, the army is currently very popular, and could possibly step in as a last resort if social tensions appear to be getting out of hand.

This on-going state of protest also risks paralysing the urgently needed economic recovery. The interim government puts the cost of the uprising to Tunisia's GNP at €6-8 billion, but with a different sector on strike each day, it is hard to see how growth can be kick-started. The governor of Tunisia's Central Bank, Mustapha Nabli, has said that social pressures are the major challenge to economic recovery in the next few months.⁸ This adds to investor uncertainty: in the aftermath of the revolution, Moody's downgraded Tunisia's credit rating to Baa3 from Baa2, and it may still drop further. It also does not provide a very encouraging image to the tourists that Tunisia badly needs to encourage to come back – bookings with Tunisian travel agents are down 50 per cent for the first three months of 2011 compared with last year (Jaouadi, 2011).

While concerns about the economy are shared by the entire population, the disconnect that the rural population (which makes up around 33 per cent of a population of 10 million) feels from the transitional government in Tunis further aggravates its sense that its concerns are not being addressed.⁹ Levels of rural poverty are high, and European trade policy has only really benefitted the larger farms of 200 hectares or more. An unfair system of land tenure which predates independence means that around 50 to 60 per cent of farmers with smaller holdings have no right to pass on their land to their children.

Clearly, there is no quick or easy solution to such a deep-seated problem, but it will be important that the transitional government at least communicates an awareness of, and attention to, these rural questions that contributed to bringing thousands of people onto the streets during the revolution. A high-profile initiative, such as the appointment of a commission to look into this question and to make recommendations to the new government once elected, could be an important step. So far, rather than receiving recognition for their grievances, the rural regions have had to suffer extra costs, such as treating those seriously injured in the protests in overstretched and under-resourced hospitals – not to mention the influx of refugees from Libya coming across Tunisia's south-eastern border. Without any indication of support, there is a risk that rural communities will believe that their revolution has been betrayed.

A chance to change

The Association of Democratic Women is an illustration of the EU's failure to challenge Ben Ali's regime. The organisation received a €30,000 grant from the EU in support for its activities, only to find that the money was frozen in a bank account by the authorities. Instead of putting pressure on the Ben Ali government to release the money, the EU requested the funds back from the NGO at the end of the financial year. Given such experiences, the emerging political class in Tunisia understandably sees Europe as having been at best silent about and at worst complicit in the abuses of the Ben Ali regime. They are aggrieved that, as the drama of their revolution unfolded, it took European leaders so long to come down off the fence and express support for those demanding change. In particular, Tunisians are well aware that the EU's neighbourhood policy, which was, in theory, aid and trade in return for progress on democracy and human rights, operated very differently in practice. Leading politicians from EU member states had largely uncritical relations with Ben Ali, and although the European Commission delegation tried to take a tougher line on political questions, it was frozen out by the regime and, in more recent years, has concentrated on technical collaboration on a project level. Useful co-operation projects with non-state actors on issues such as rural poverty had restarted in the last few years. However, the commission largely ignored the failure of Ben Ali's regime to live up to its commitments to reform in return for aid. The Union for the Mediterranean, with its clear focus on commercial projects, added further to this impression of EU hypocrisy.

A number of incidents in recent years particularly undermined the EU's rhetoric about the importance of political reform in Tunisia. The most recent of these was the opening of discussions on advanced status, or privileged partnership, for Tunisia within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2010. The EU aimed to capitalise on the relatively open business environment but did not insist on the attendance of key civil society groups in consultations. Worse, this step took place while the legislative assembly was in the process of passing a bill that subjected human rights defenders to criminal penalties for contacting foreign organisations and institutions to raise concerns about abuses.¹⁰

Some member states were more principled than others in these instances, but unfortunately the different attitudes of member states only added to the impression that there was no unity behind an EU neighbourhood policy that supported political reform. Different member states were driven by different interests, but the prevailing European approach was always the lowest common denominator. Even specific written agreements on the importance

the EU places on on-going contact with civil society working for political reform, such as the EU guidelines on human rights defenders, seem to have been largely ignored.¹¹

The Mediterranean member states were particularly important, not only because they call the shots in EU foreign policy towards Tunisia but also because their national efforts are much more visible than the EU collective. This is no surprise: these are the states with the biggest business interests to protect and the biggest stake in the “stability” that could keep illegal migration in check. The pattern is familiar elsewhere: the less you have to lose, the more principled the behaviour. Tunisian activists are particularly critical of France and Italy for their ties to Ben Ali. Spain and Germany – the latter of which also has a large economic role in Tunisia – are also influential but not judged as harshly by Tunisians. This European approach continued even as the Ben Ali regime collapsed. Tunisians are particularly scornful of former French foreign minister Michèle Alliot-Marie for offering help to Ben Ali in dealing with the protests. Only when Ben Ali had fled the country did the EU move beyond relatively anodyne calls for respect for the rule of law and human rights to express support, through a statement on 14 January 2011 by Catherine Ashton, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Stefan Füle, European Commissioner for the European Neighbourhood Policy, for the “Tunisian people and their democratic aspirations.”¹² Even then, there was little the EU institutions could do beyond what France, Spain and Italy allowed them to. Member states’ embassies in Tunis were focused on getting their own citizens out of the country, and then – particularly in the case of Italy – managing their borders to counter the flows of thousands of migrants leaving Tunisia, rather than supporting the Tunisians in consolidating democracy. The EU always seemed to be acting slowly and reluctantly in the face of events in the same way as the interim government in Tunis, rather than getting out in front with a clear and bold indication of support for the democratic revolution.

However, despite this history, Tunisian civil society does still seem to be open to the right kind of EU support. The EU is by far Tunisia’s most significant trading partner, with €9.9 billion of Tunisia’s €11.8 billion exports going to the EU and two-thirds of foreign investment coming from the EU.¹³ The EU also represents an important group of democracies with recent experience of democratic transitions. The US is not that visible in Tunisia, Maghreb integration has failed and, in any case, other Arab states are likely to be consumed by their own post-revolutionary transitions or will have few stakes in seeing the revolution succeed.

The EU therefore still has a chance to make amends for past failures by offering prompt and generous help with the transition. Although the Tunisians are still open to co-operation with Europe that can support their transition, the reputation of the current ENP towards the southern neighbourhood is rather damaged. If the EU wants to take the opportunity to be a supportive friend in Tunisia's transition over the coming months, it must frankly recognise that things cannot simply continue as before. The European External Action Service (EEAS) initiative led by Pierre Vimont to revisit the whole EU policy towards the southern Mediterranean is another important acknowledgement that a "post-Lisbon" EU should now be in a position to aim for a big change (Willis, 2011). The challenge for the EU is not to refocus its assistance from one region to another, but to sufficiently support countries that perform well in terms of reform, and most importantly to spend money on the basis of a political strategy.

The test will be whether there is political will over the medium and longer term. So far, the evidence suggests that the EU is not willing to take sufficient action to realise its ambition to be Tunisia's "main ally in moving towards democracy," as Ashton put it in her opening statement to senior officials meeting on Egypt and Tunisia in February.¹⁴ Ashton called for a historic response by the EU and should be given credit for making efforts to raise money from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment (EIB). Yet this effort was eclipsed in the Tunisian press by the pledge by member states of €17 million of extra financial aid that Ashton was able to announce during her visit. The offer looked particularly low when compared to the €100 million that Italy requested in the same week for support in dealing with the influx of Tunisian migrants at Lampedusa and elsewhere.

Recommendations

If the EU is serious about acting as Tunisia's closest partner in supporting its transition to democracy, it will need a plan of action that is, as former Tunisian industry minister Afif Chelbi put it in February, "up to scratch."¹⁵ An overhaul of the neighbourhood policy within greater economic assistance clearly linked to progressive transition towards democracy is absolutely necessary, but this will take time to bed down, and to prove itself to the Tunisian people. In the meantime, Europe needs a more ambitious, immediate response. At this critical moment, the EU should look for striking ways to show that it is now firmly committed to offering its support to Tunisia's transition. A few high-profile actions at this point would

demonstrate that the EU is sensitive to the enormous step that Tunisia has taken and the costs that it has incurred. These measures could include:

- identifying “crisis points” in the regions where the revolution started and where short-term aid would go a long way, such as overstretched hospitals running out of medical supplies and injured protesters in need of sophisticated medical treatment.
- continuing to send high-level politicians from the EU and member states to express support for Tunisia’s transition, as Spanish prime minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero did in early March, and to show that Tunisia has not been forgotten amid later dramatic events in Egypt, Libya and elsewhere.
- generous assistance for the south-east of Tunisia, near the Libyan border, which is facing an extra pressure from large influxes of refugees from its neighbour.
- a quick boost to the Tunisian tourist industry – which is a vital sector to kick start Tunisia’s economic growth. This could include a campaign to encourage Europeans to take their holidays in Tunisia, spearheaded by ministers and the high representative going there as tourists at their own cost.

In addition to the €17 million of additional aid, which should be increased if possible, the EIB has announced a lending fund of €1.87 billion to be placed at Tunisia’s disposal.¹⁶ This money should be closely targeted on the economically distressed regions, in order to demonstrate to protesters that their concerns are being listened to, and to allow the elections in July to take place amid relative calm. The potential that a void in offering social and economic support could be filled by Islamist groups that consequently gain a stronghold provides an extra incentive to provide immediate aid to the poor agricultural regions.

The immediate issues for Tunisia’s credit rating are security and political stability, which are priority areas for the interim Tunisian government. However, EU governments could support the recreation of a climate for investment and tourism through high-profile statements and visits to Tunisia with business leaders to encourage foreign direct investment and to provide a significant reinjection of dynamism in the economy. They could hold a European Council meeting in Tunis, combined with a major event profiling Tunisia as a stable and exciting environment for tourism and business. They could also support the upgrading of Tunisian infrastructure, particularly in internet and telephone communications and in ports, which business managers have cited as obstacles to investment (Alexander, 2010). Economic assistance, whether in agriculture or business investment, would not only benefit the country but also help shore up the position of the interim government, which would appear as a partner in these activities. In addition to economic support, the EU should offer support in

building the structures for a multi-party system. The EU has already committed to election observation, and this has been welcomed by the transitional government. But beyond this, there is enormous scope to share experience, particularly from Central and Eastern European countries, which have been through a similar process in recent memory. The EU could:

- help develop civil society and independent media so that they are professionally run and know how to monitor government effectively. Specifically, the EU could provide technical advice on how to set up a broadcasting council that could grant licences to contribute to developing the capacity of independent local media.

- help build political parties, with support from European political foundations. The EU could also use this moment to think about a more far-reaching commitment to democracy assistance by funnelling support to democratic transition in Tunisia and elsewhere with more speed and flexibility than the bureaucratic structures of the EU currently allow.

- help to develop mechanisms and electoral processes that can facilitate a political environment. This could include the development of an election commission to communicate with the regions to explain the steps being taken towards the transition to democracy and to encourage participation in, and registration for, the upcoming elections. In the medium to longer term, perhaps the most important focus for the EU is to ensure that its future neighbourhood policy is genuinely focused on supporting and entrenching political reform. Through negotiations with candidate countries, and agreements on partnership, co-operation, and association with neighbours to the east, the EU has a clear framework, and strong monitoring capacity, for developing and maintaining an institutional structure that provides a basis for stable democracy in countries moving through transition. If the newly elected government of Tunisia seeks support, the EU should follow up on the promise of close partnership in putting this framework and experience at Tunisia's disposal, while making sure that it contains clear benchmarks for a continuing transition to democracy, to which positive conditionality is applied. If this framework were applied more broadly and consistently across the neighbourhood, it should be possible to have a differentiated policy that genuinely rewards reform. In that case, the old problem of ad hoc advanced status would not rear its head again: Tunisia could achieve an elevated status because it is genuinely advanced in the region this time.

An invitation to Tunisia to join the Council of Europe would reinforce the supportive framework for its transition to democracy over the longer term, and the EU should push in Strasbourg for this invitation to be extended. Drawing on the EU's own resources there is also much that could be done to support the development of mature democratic institutions in

Tunisia over the longer term. It could offer to send a rule of law mission to Tunis with a mandate¹⁷ that includes:

- strengthening a more professional and independent-minded judiciary by sharing expertise and sponsoring training programmes.
- offering administrative support to the commission on corruption and helping to build anti-corruption measures into the new institutions.
- seconding administrative help and legal and casework specialists to the commission on accountability to share expertise on transitional justice. The caseload facing this commission is already unmanageable, and its mandate is currently restricted to the two months in the run-up to the revolution. In the longer term, there is much more work to be done to offer justice to the victims of abuses during over 30 years of repressive rule. Morocco, South Africa and Chile are viewed as relevant examples, as well as Romania. Prison reform will also be an important area where the international community can share experience and expertise.
- offering expertise and funding for security sector reform. Police reform will be the most difficult and important task in this respect. Engagement with the army will also be an important dimension. Joint EU-Turkey initiatives in this respect could also play a role.

The potential cost for Europe of failing to engage differently with Tunisia at this fragile historical moment is high. But, as the process of political reform gets underway in Tunisia, there is still every chance that, in the coming years, we may see it emerge as the first genuinely democratic Arab state.

The opportunity for the EU to play a new and supportive role in this process is there. Consolidated democracy in Tunisia would be an enormous success story both for the Tunisian people themselves who will have secured it and for the EU. Moreover, may be the most important one, it would also be a model for the other states in the region emerging from the other side of the momentous wave of protests that we are currently seeing across North Africa and the Middle East.

Conclusion

The European record in pre-revolutionary relations with Middle Eastern countries has not been glorious. Responding to events on the Mediterranean's southern littoral – and, at least implicitly, to the failures of European policy thus exposed – Commission President José Manuel Barroso and High Representative Catherine Ashton jointly proposed on 8 March a new policy framework, entitled “A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the

Southern Mediterranean”.¹⁷ In general, it wisely focuses the “partnership” proposal on the countries of the southern Mediterranean littoral. It thus offers a prospect of developing trans-Mediterranean relations in a way that will not immediately be jeopardised, like the EU’s previous efforts to develop a “southern neighbourhood policy”, by getting caught in the mangle of the Arab/Israel dispute.

The new proposal’s central thrust is the need for the EU to exercise conditionality properly in the future (“more for more”); and it proposes the simple but important proviso that entry to the partnership should depend on a “commitment to adequately monitored, free and fair elections”. The main areas where reforming North African states may look for help can be summarised as “mobility, markets, and money”. In particular, it proposes:

- *A Differentiated, Incentive-based Approach.* In the future, European aid and trade should be made available to North African states on the basis of real progress on democracy and human rights. The proposal says that “a commitment to adequately monitored, free and fair elections should be the entry qualification for the Partnership”.

The Ashton/Barroso proposals are a good start in terms of targeting those areas where Europeans could and now should do more to respond to the historic events across the Mediterranean. Mobility (i.e. easier travel to Europe), better access to European markets and financial help certainly hit the mark. But the implicit offers are cautious in the extreme – and this in a document that has not yet been watered down by the member states and the European Parliament, as will surely happen in response to European political and sectional pressures. The EU should take a much bolder approach in four areas: mobility, market access, money, and democracy and institution building.

- *Democracy and Institution-Building.* Various forms of enhanced support to civil society. The Ashton/Barroso proposal also talks of increased help; in these areas. Yet Europe clearly has an interest in ensuring that liberal forces – political parties, NGOs and think-tanks – develop their capacities and influence the transition from authoritarianism, even if they will struggle to win the forthcoming elections. One way to address this conundrum – wanting to be supportive, but avoiding destroying those in need of help – may be to set up a intergovernmental system between the UN, the EU, and private foundations and corporations prepared to offer support to those who want it. A good way of doing this would be to create a European Endowment for Democracy that could operate in the EU’s southern and eastern neighbourhoods, as recently proposed by Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski (McCain and Sikorski, 2011).

Last but not least, a final element of developing and implementing an effective foreign policy towards post revolutionary Middle East will be EU cooperation with the US. Obama's skilful repositioning of the US, first in his June 2009 speech in Cairo, and subsequently his decision to tell Mubarak to go, has limited the damage done by the revolution to America's predominant position in Egypt. Links with the Egyptian military will remain strong (as long as Congress continues to vote for the aid), and Egyptians know that the US role in the search for a wider Middle East peace is indispensable. But there is no doubt that the "new Egypt" will be readier to assert its independence of US foreign policy, and in particular to take a tougher line on Israel/Palestine. There, it may find European views and policies closer to its taste. These shifts open up the prospect of the EU and the US playing usefully complementary roles in the Middle East in general: both supporting the transition to a genuine democracy; the US holding the hand of the Middle Eastern military; and the EU working with the new democratic governments on issues which the US will not touch.

- *Mobility*: The prospect of easier travel to the EU, in particular for students, researchers and business people, in exchange for tougher action by North African states to control illegal immigration, better law enforcement cooperation, and better arrangements for the return of illegal immigrants.

Cautious visa liberalisation for certain categories of visitor is proposed, in exchange for major efforts by the North African states to curb illegal migration. Any Arab reading the concluding sentence on this topic ("In the long-term, provided that visa facilitation and readmission agreements are effectively implemented, gradual steps towards visa liberalisation for individual partner countries could be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the overall relationship with the partner country concerned and provided that conditions for well-managed and secure mobility are in place.") will understand that Europe does not plan to throw open its doors. Immediate steps should be taken to ease travel and study by halving the cost of European visas (Dennison, Dworkin, Popescu and Witney, 2011).

The EU should also think creatively about Student Exchange initiatives such as joint campuses, or the opportunity for Egyptian students to spend a year in European universities and vice versa (a "Dido" programme, modelled on the successful European Erasmus programme).

- *Economic Development*: An extra 1 billion euros of European Investment Bank (EIB) funding by the end of 2013, hopefully with a matching contribution from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

Here, the proposal to make available an extra 1 billion euros of EIB funding by the end of 2013 (a 20 percent increase) and a similar sum from the EBRD (assuming that body agrees to extend its lending to North Africa) will be welcome news in Egypt. So too will the offer of macroeconomic assistance. As described above, Egypt's public finances will inevitably deteriorate this year, as the direct and indirect costs of the revolution take their toll, inflation worsens [economist Nouriel Roubini expects the consumer prices index to be at 13-14 percent (Gurushina, El Said and Ziemba, 2011)], and the cost of government borrowing on the markets increases (Standard and Poor's lowered Egypt's long-term foreign currency sovereign rating from BB+ to BB in February).

- *Trade and Investment*: Better access to European markets, including for agricultural and fisheries products, leading ultimately to Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade, subject to North African states achieving "regulatory convergence" in areas such as competition policy and phytosanitary standards. But market access only works if Tunisia and other Middle Eastern countries are able to produce – and allowed to export into Europe – products and services that benefit their own economy as well as Europe's. The EU has already granted a complete dismantling of customs duties and quotas for Egyptian industrial products and some agricultural products. But this is not enough. The Ashton/Barroso proposal rightly calls for accelerated conclusion and EU approval of certain trade liberalisation agreements, notably on agricultural and fisheries products with Tunisia and Morocco; Egypt now needs similar treatment. And the repeated references in the proposal to such dull-sounding matters as "conformity assessment" of industrial products and "sanitary and phytosanitary measures" recall that there remain major non-tariff barriers to trade across the Mediterranean. To address the full range of obstacles to trade, the EU should consider funding a task force of policymakers and businesspeople from Europe and North Africa to produce a study on "EU-North African Trade 2020", akin to the Reflection Group created by the European Council in 2009.

- *Enhanced Sectoral Cooperation* in energy, education, tourism, rural development, transport, and electronic communications technologies.

- *EU Financial Assistance*: Starting with Tunisia and Egypt, the EU bilateral assistance programmes (worth respectively 240 and 445 million euros for 2011-2013) will be "screened and refocused". EU macro financial assistance (loans to governments) will also be available to back up International Monetary Fund (IMF) lending.

Unfortunately, however, the Ashton/Barroso proposal envisages European help being offered only in support of IMF assistance. It is hard to envisage IMF assistance being

provided without a requirement to slash state subsidies, notably on petrol and bread, which account for some 25 percent of public spending. But, in Egypt's post-revolutionary situation, any government that moved to cut subsidies in the next couple of years would be asking to be unseated. A group of Tahrir Square activists are therefore launching a grassroots campaign aimed at cancelling Egypt's huge debts, which could hamper growth. EU governments should give this a fair hearing. Cancelling the debt that Egypt owes in exchange for a long-term programme to address subsidies and a benchmarked process for democratic reform would be an important sign of support for the moderates and a lever for post-election reforms.

As a result, in the short term, the EU should strengthen the Ashton/Barroso proposals in the way described above. In the longer term, however, both the Brussels institutions and member states also need to keep in mind that an important root of European failures in North Africa in the past has been its excessively bureaucratic and insufficiently political approach. Europeans therefore need to think more clearly about the extent and nature of the leverage they should be able to exercise, and the size of the stakes that should encourage them to do so. The access of post-revolutionary humility that has led European leaders to defer to those who have made the revolutions makes a welcome change, but now risks being overdone. Europeans should be prepared not just to listen, but also to transmit – and preferably in ways more pointed than the usual statements couched in bureaucratic language and tiresomely focused on Europeans' own emotional states: “encouraged”, “disappointed”, “dismayed” and so on. For example, when the military resorts to summary tribunals, Europeans should be prepared to tell them in clear terms that they are offending against basic principles of human rights, and tarnishing their reputations. Even the old regime was sensitive to outside criticism; they took considerable pains to defend themselves against cases brought before the African Union Court of Human Rights in Gabon. Indeed, while Egyptians see themselves as the Arab world's leaders and can therefore take a dismissive view of the Arab League, they tend to be more concerned for their reputation in the African Union (AU). The EU should push the interim government to invite a European election-monitoring team, perhaps in association with the AU, to cover this autumn's elections.

In the EU's case, the very idea of developing such relations has seemed distasteful. But if the EU truly wants to play the sort of international role of which it talks, then one small but useful step in the right direction would be the appointment of a defence and security adviser in the European delegation.

In short, Europe needs to behave more like a regional power and less like a big NGO in its dealings with post revolutionary Tunisia, asserting its own vision of how it would like to

see the new polity develop and behave. To be taken seriously in that mode, however, Europe will have to be seen to offer more than a set of technocratic incentives with strings attached. A more political response by Europe to the Arab awakening must involve the eventual articulation of a vision of how the EU would like to see relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean evolve.

What is needed is not so much European altruism as European imagination. Helping Tunisia will, however, also benefit Europe. Moreover, framing future cooperation as a joint endeavour that will help both parties is likely to be met with more enthusiasm than another series of technocratic diktats, which EU policies often resemble. Tunisia could over time allow European firms to cut shipping times and transport costs by moving their production away from China and India. In short, North Africa could give the EU an economic edge, just as Spain, Portugal and Greece did in the 1980s and eastern Europe did in the 1990s. As Jean Pisani-Ferry of the Bruegel think-tank has pointed out: “Not only for goods but for services too, Europe needs to promote much more than it has so far the adoption of an outsourcing model in the most labour-intensive segments of the value chain, as Germany has done with great success – and which in part explains its bounce-back in global markets. While this model entails job losses in the North, it also preserves jobs by keeping production sites competitive and creates jobs by paving the way for development of the South” (Pisani-Ferry, 2011).

In sum, Europe needs to replace the defensive, arms-length posture it has displayed to its neighbours across the Mediterranean with a declared readiness in due time to embrace them in the sort of intimate and interdependent relationship that both will eventually need. That sort of message – of a “NAFTA-like” vision for the relationship between Europe and North Africa is of course a hard sell in a Europe that is only slowly recovering from recession, with low growth and high unemployment, and populist alarm over immigration. But it is the job of politicians to find ways to plant the indigestible truths – that the only sure answer to uncontrolled immigration is the development of the economies of the southern littoral, and that though outsourcing economic roles to North Africa may look like exporting today’s jobs, it will actually be securing Europe’s export competitiveness for tomorrow, not to mention creating new export markets. It is time for European politicians – beginning with those in the north of the continent, for whom it is easiest – to start to lay out a direction of a march which, over time, should lead to prosperous, democratic and economically complementary societies on both shores of *mare nostrum*.

END NOTES

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¹ For more information on the EU-Mediterranean countries Partnership relations under the Barcelona Declaration 1995 (in which most of the Middle Eastern countries are member like Egypt and Tunisia) see: Ayşe Bahar Turhan (Hurmi), "EU-Turkey Relations in the context of the Barcelona Process", unpublished Doctorate Thesis, Leicester University, UK, 2004.

² On historical and institutional analysis of pillarisation, see: N. Winn and C. Lord (eds.), *EU Foreign Policy Beyond the Nation-State: Joint Actions and Institutional Analysis of the Common Foreign and Security Policy*, Houndmills, Plagrove, 2001.

³ for more detail, see: "Special Issue on Western Approaches to the Mediterranean", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol.1, No.1, Autumn 1996, pp.157-211.

⁴ For more detail on the different perceptions of the EU and the US on the Mediterranean and the Middle East, see: Ayşe Bahar Turhan (Hurmi), "EU-Turkey Relations in the context of the Barcelona Process", unpublished Doctorate Thesis, Leicester University, UK, 2004, Chapter III.

⁵ "The European Union and Tunisia have agreed to set up an ad hoc group to work on a roadmap to achieve an advanced status between the EU and Tunisia", 11 May 2010, European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI), Latest News, available at: <http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?idtype=1&id=21537> and "A majority of Tunisians think that the EU is an important partner of their country and that Tunisia and the EU have sufficient common values to be able to cooperate. Among other findings, the latest poll revealed that nearly two thirds of Tunisians believe that education in their country has improved as a result of EU policies...", 4 May 2011, European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI), Latest News, available at: http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=226&id_type=3&lang_id=450. Perceptions of the other Middle Eastern countries toward the EU can be found in the official site of the ENPI available at: <http://www.enpi-info.eu/>.

⁶ See: <http://www.kalimatunisie.com>.

⁷ See: "Tunisia's opposition leader hails Turkey as model, ahead of visit," *Agence France-Presse*, 25 February 2011, available at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=tunisias-opposition-leader-to-visit-turkey-report-2011-02-25>.

⁸ "A Conversation with Mustapha Nabli, Governor of Tunisia's Central Bank: The Economic Dimensions of Unrest in the Arab World," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, 23 February 2011, recording available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=3165>.

⁹ The World Bank, *World Development Indicators for 2009*, available at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>.

¹⁰ For more detail on the NGO law, see <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/06/18/tunisia-move-against-human-rights-defenders>.

¹¹ For the text of the guidelines, see: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/GuidelinesDefenders.pdf>.

¹² "Joint statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Stefan Füle on the events on [sic] Tunisia," *European Union Press Release*, Brussels, 14 January 2011, available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/118865.pdf

¹³ Export figures from Eurostat; investment figures from Alexander, "Tunisia".

¹⁴ See "EU to rush trade deal with Tunisia as 'exodus' continues," *Euractiv.com*, 15 February 2011, available at <http://www.euractiv.com/en/global-europe/eu-rushtrade-deal-tunisia-exodus-continues-news-502150>.

¹⁵ "Tunisian minister slams 'ridiculous' EU aid," *EUbusiness*, 17 February 2011, available at <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/italy-tunisia-aid.8ny/>.

¹⁶ See: newworldconsulting.wordpress.com/.../eib-allocates-1-87-billion-euros-to-finance-priority-projects-in-tunisia/, 5 March 2011.

¹⁷ European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "Joint Communication to the European Council, the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions", 8 March 2011, available at http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011_200_en.pdf.

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