

The European Union and Change in the Middle East and North Africa: Is the EU Closing Its Theory-Practice Gap?

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Abstract

The wave of change in the Middle East and North Africa once again exposed disconnections between theory and practice in the EU's approach towards the Mediterranean. Despite the adoption of transformation in the Mediterranean as a goal, in practice the EU policies have been geared towards preserving the status quo in the southern Mediterranean due to the priority of enhancing European security in areas such as terrorism, migration, economy and energy. The EU's review of its Neighbourhood Policy in light of this wave of change suggests an awareness of the need to close its theory-practice gap. However, there are continuing limits to the EU's prioritization of the needs of its partners in the Mediterranean, which in turn diminishes its prospect to live up to its potential as a transformative actor that supports democratic consolidation in the region.

Keywords: Change, Middle East and Africa, European Union, European Neighbourhood Policy

Avrupa Birliđi ve Ortadođu ile Kuzey Afrika'da Deđişim: AB Teori-Pratik Açığına Kapatıyor mu?

Özet

Ortadođu ve Kuzey Afrika'daki deđişim dalgası Avrupa Birliđi'nin Akdeniz'e yaklaşımında varolan teori ve pratik arasındaki kopuklukları bir kez daha açığa çıkarmıştır. Akdeniz'de dönüşümü bir amaç olarak kabul etmiş olmasına rağmen, terörizm, göç, ekonomi ve enerji gibi alanlarda Avrupa güvenliđini pekiştirme önceliđi sebebiyle, AB politikaları pratikte güney Akdeniz'de statükoyu korumaya yönelmiştir. AB'nin, bu deđişim dalgası ışığında gözden geçirdiđi Komşuluk Politikası teori ve pratik arasındaki bu açığı kapatması gerektiđine dair bir farkındalık olduğuna işaret etmektedir. Ancak, AB'nin Akdeniz'deki ortaklarının ihtiyaçlarını öncelemesi hususunda devam eden sınırlamalar, onun

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bölgede demokrasinin yerleşmesini destekleyen dönüştürücü bir aktör olma potansiyelini gerçekleştirme şansını da azaltmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Değişim, Ortadoğu ve Afrika, Avrupa Birliği, Avrupa Komşuluk Politikası

الاتحاد الأوروبي والتغيير في الشرق الأوسط وأفريقيا الشمالية :

هل ان الاتحاد الأوروبي يسد فراغ النظرية – التطبيق

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خلاصة :

ابرزت موجة التغيير في الشرق الأوسط وأفريقيا الشمالية مرة أخرى الفواصل بين النظرية والتطبيق الموجودة في نهج الاتحاد الأوروبي ازاء منطقة البحر الابيض المتوسط. فبالرغم من تقبل الاتحاد الأوروبي بالتغيير في تلك المنطقة كغاية، فانه وبسبب اولويته لتوطيد الأمن الاوروبي في مواضيع مثل القوة والاقتصاد والطاقة، فان سياسات الاتحاد من الناحية العملية متجهة نحو الحفاظ على الوضع الراهن في المناطق الجنوبية من البحر الابيض المتوسط.

ان سياسة الجوار التي اقامها الاتحاد الاوروبي باعادة النظر فيها على ضوء موجة التغيير هذه، تشير الى وعي الاتحاد بين النظرية والتطبيق. غير ان التحديات المستمرة في موضوع اعطاء الاتحاد الاوروبي الأولوية لإحتياجات شركائه في تلك المنطقة تضعف من إمكانية الاتحاد تحقيق فرص له كلاعب له قوة التغيير ويعمل على تعزيز ارساء الديمقراطية في المنطقة.

الكلمات الدالة : التغيير، الشرق الأوسط وأفريقيا، الاتحاد الأوروبي، سياسة الجيرة الأوروبية.

Introduction

Protests and uprisings for dignity, justice and responsive governments recently brought an end to autocracy in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and forced adjustments in Morocco, Jordan and Yemen. While the Syrian regime currently seems to be the most resilient against change, whether democratic consolidation will be the result remains to be seen in other countries as well. Despite this, the Middle East and Africa has entered a period of change which requires adjustments in other actors'

foreign and security policies. For the European Union (EU), this wave of change or the “the Arab Spring” has once again demonstrated that the normative or civilian power of the EU, which declared transforming its neighbourhood in line with its values such as democracy, human rights and rule of law and through peaceful means as its goal, has been far from successful in the region. This is despite the fact that since the launching of the Barcelona Process in 1995, the EU has defined the Mediterranean as the region where a structural or common foreign and security policy should be pursued.

The EU's policies towards the Mediterranean have evolved in three main frameworks.¹ The first of these, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) was established at the Barcelona Conference in November 1995 and had identified political-security, economic-financial and social-cultural fields as its focus for both multilateral and bilateral cooperation between the EU and its southern partners. This was followed by the incorporation of a southern dimension into the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004 in order to reinforce the bilateral pillar of the EU-Mediterranean cooperation and facilitate differentiation among partners in terms of their needs and progress towards reform. The latest addition to these policies of the EU towards the Mediterranean has been the launching of the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008, which aimed at improving the cooperation through specific projects on mostly environment and energy. From the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the incorporation of Mediterranean countries into the European Neighbourhood Policy to the launching of the Union for the Mediterranean, the EU has declared that it aimed to bring about change in line with its values in its southern neighbourhood. However, achievements towards creating a truly Euro-Mediterranean partnership and transforming the Mediterranean into an area of peace, democracy, cooperation and prosperity - the overall aim of these initiatives and policies - are meagre.

Specific objectives of these EU policies towards the region are no doubt noteworthy, such as to provide a steady platform for political dialogue by the Euro-Med Partnership; to address sectoral develop-

1 This article focuses on the EU's structural policies towards the Middle East and Africa, which is often referred to as the southern Mediterranean and it does not cover the EU approach towards specific problems or individual countries in the region, such as the war in Iraq, or Iranian nuclear capacities. For such an analysis see Rosemary Hollis, “Europe and the Middle East: Has the EU Missed its Moment of Opportunity?”, *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, Vol.2, No.2, January 2011, pp. 33-56.

ment issues in a bilateral framework by the European Neighbourhood Policy and to engage in specific multilateral projects aimed towards tangible results under the Union for the Mediterranean. Nonetheless, its multilateral frameworks, the Euro-Med Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean have been hostage to regional conflicts, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict. Lack of financial resources has been another problem for the Union for the Mediterranean. The European Neighbourhood Policy, on the other hand, has used conditionality to induce cooperation in security issues, instead of political reform. Limited incentives of this bilateral framework did not help bringing about change either.

Analysis of the EU policies and the methods it used to implement these shows that there have been severe disconnections between theory and practice in the EU's approach towards the Mediterranean. Despite the adoption of transformation in the Mediterranean as a goal, in practice the EU's policies and their implementation have been geared towards preserving the status quo in the Mediterranean since it prioritised improving European security in its extended definition, including concerns about terrorism, migration, economy and energy. As a result of this concern, the EU did not directly address or equally prioritise the needs of southern Mediterranean societies for political representation, human rights or rule of law in these policies. This article will proceed with a brief analysis of the EU's past practice in the southern Mediterranean that led to this theory-practice gap. It will then focus on its new approach towards the Mediterranean as outlined in the review of European Neighbourhood Policy, which was completed in light of the wave of change in the region. As this evaluation will demonstrate, despite this EU attempt to address shortcomings in its previous approach towards the region, a radical overhaul of policy towards prioritising its southern partners' needs cannot be observed. Flexibility in terms of offering more incentives, inclusiveness in terms of embracing the actors that are more representative of the people in the region, and taking initiatives towards a fair resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict appear as key to the EU's success in the transformation of the region. Therefore, although the EU's review of its approach towards the region suggests an awareness of the need to close this theory-practice gap, there are continuing limits to the EU's prospects to live up to its potential as a transformative power that supports democratic consolidation in the region.

The Gap between Theory and Practice in the EU Policies towards the Mediterranean

As mentioned above, the EU policies and their implementation have worked towards preserving the status quo in the Mediterranean despite the declared goal of transforming the region in line with the EU values, such as democracy, human rights and rule of law. This is because in practice the priority has been improving European security and not the needs of the individuals or societies in the region. To start with the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), within the political and security pillar of the EMP the need for regional security was highlighted. However, the Middle East Peace Process was not part of the EMP's agenda. Similarly, while the issue of weapons of mass destruction was part of the agenda, Arab concerns about Israel's nuclear capabilities were not addressed in this framework.²

Another development within the political-security pillar of the EMP which reflected the domination of European concerns over the needs and priorities of the people in the region was the incorporation of migration and counter-terrorism as additional areas for cooperation in 2005.³ The emphasis on these security concerns played into the hands of the autocratic regimes in the southern Mediterranean with severe ramifications for individuals in these countries. The EU thereby gave additional justification to these regimes for linking issues of terrorism, migration and Islamism in order to sustain their regime/state security and did not scrutinise their maltreatment of immigrants.⁴ As terrorism and Islamism started to be seen linked, regime stability instead of democratization became a pressing concern for the EU. In addition, in the eyes of the people in the region, the EU's failure to recognise the victory of Hamas in Gaza in 2006 Palestinian elections has been the epitome of its double standards when the issue is democracy in the

2 Nikalaos Tzifakis, "EU's Region-Building and Boundary-Drawing Policies: The European Approach to the Southern Mediterranean and the Western Balkans", *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2007, p. 51.

3 Council of the European Union, Five-Year Work Programme, 10th Anniversary Euro-Mediterranean Summit in Barcelona, 27-28 November 2005, 15074/05 (Presse 327), 28 November 2005, <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/05/st15/st15074.en05.pdf>

4 Pinar Bilgin and Ali Bilgiç, "Consequences of European Security Practices in the Southern Mediterranean and Policy Implications for the EU", *IN:EX Policy Brief*, No 11, January 2011, p. 5, 7. For these scholars, even the EU development aid is increasingly tied to southern neighbours' signing readmission agreements. (p. 6).

region.⁵ While the EU put conditions on the recognition of Hamas as a legitimate interlocutor, a similar reaction to the Israelis for their settlements in the occupied territory, partition wall, checkpoints, curfews or separate road systems, which violate the Palestinian human rights and harm peace talks has not come forth. Overall, these worked to undermine the EU's normative power which comes from its pursuit of policies on the basis of values, such as democracy, human rights or peace.⁶

Within the second pillar of the EMP, the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EMTFA) by the year 2010 has been the goal. However, the EU method to establish EMTFA through separate bilateral negotiations with each partner on the basis of separate Association Agreements led to the generation of a hub and spokes regional trade system.⁷ The EU has become the hub that enjoys the benefits of a free trade regime with every Mediterranean partner, while the latter is the spokes between whom the same arrangement is not facilitated. Therefore, the system worked towards increasing the EU competitiveness at the expense of its Mediterranean partners, since the firms would rather locate themselves at the hub and benefit from a preferential treatment in all markets than stay at the spokes, where there will be no tariff reductions in relation to other southern partners.⁸ Moreover, initial free trade agreements excluded agriculture, the area that southern partners have a comparative advantage, from the free trade regime.⁹ Besides, despite the adoption of economic liberalisation by these countries, benefits of economic growth did not trickle down to wider segments of the society and alleviate high levels of unemployment and poverty, which in turn led to calls for social justice during the uprisings in the region. This situation also challenged the widely held assumption that

5 Rosemary Hollis, "No Friend of Democratization: Europe's Role in the Genesis of the 'Arab Spring'", *International Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 1, 2012, p. 91.

6 Michelle Pace, "Paradoxes and Contradictions in EU Democracy Promotion in the Mediterranean: The Limits of EU Normative Power", *Democratization*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2009, p. 47.

7 On the pervasiveness of the hub and spoke system in the EU approach towards the Mediterranean see Paul James Cardwell, "EuroMed, European Neighbourhood Policy and the Union for the Mediterranean: Overlapping Policy Frames in the EU's Governance of the Mediterranean", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2011, pp. 219-241.

8 Nikalaos Tzifakis, "EU's Region-Building", p. 52.

9 Limitations on Egyptian access to European markets in the agricultural products result in a huge gap between the EU's imports from Egypt, which stood at 699,1 million euros and its exports to Egypt which were worth 1888,6 million euros in this area in 2011. DG Trade, European Commission, Egypt: EU Bilateral Trade and Trade with the World, 21 March 2012, http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113375.pdf

economic liberalisation would be followed by political liberalisation and increased democratisation in these countries.

The third pillar of the EMP on social, human and cultural aspects of cooperation, on the other hand, aimed at promoting understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies on both shores of the Mediterranean through mainly the Euro-Med Civil Forum. However, participation to these meetings was limited to those civil society actors who are registered with the governments in the region. Put differently, interaction between people around the Mediterranean was not inclusive of actors that were not in favour of the status quo in these countries. This system, therefore, did not work towards eradication of negative perceptions of Islam and the fear of Islamic parties coming to power in these countries. The EU has not even resorted to enforce Article 2 of its Free Trade Agreements which tied trade issues to greater respect for human rights and civil liberties.¹⁰ Therefore, although the EU could use conditionality to push for democratic reforms and did not need to take the consent of governments in the region for the projects it finances, in practice it did not opt for using these tools to empower actors other than those favoured by these governments.¹¹ Thus, the EU practice within the EMP has been geared towards preservation of order and stability in the Mediterranean rather than transformation, since the ideas or actors that might disturb the status quo have been overlooked or marginalized,¹² and the priorities or needs of the people in the southern Mediterranean were not paid due consideration.

The European Neighbourhood Policy has suffered from a similar theory-practice gap as well. The EU's neighbours in the Mediterranean were included in the ENP, since this was seen as complementing the EMP through the possibility of differentiation among these countries by addressing their specific needs and rewarding progress towards reform. The overall goal of the policy was declared to effectively "promote transformation and reform" in the EU's neighbourhood. Within the ENP, "joint ownership" of the process has been emphasised since the

10 Álvaro de Vasconcelos (ed.), *The Arab Democratic Wave: How the EU Can Seize the Moment*, Report No 9, (Paris, European Union Institute for Security Studies, March 2011),p. 42.

11 Federica Bicchì, "Dilemmas of Implementation: EU Democracy Assistance in the Mediterranean", *Democratization*, Vol. 17, No. 5, 2010, pp. 982-983.

12 Ali Bilgiç, "Security Through Trust-Building in the Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation: Two Perspectives for the Partnership", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2010, p. 459.

content of the action plans are determined by the European Commission and the partner country together. The possibility for these parties to “hold each other accountable for living up to their mutual commitments” was presented as another positive dimension of this policy.¹³ However, while political reform, democratization and human rights were theoretically meant to be pursued in the ENP, in practice this has not been the case. The EU did not push for solid democratization in the Mediterranean since this would empower the Islamists in these countries and lead to perceived negative consequences for stability and order in the region. The EU priorities of controlling irregular migration and securing the energy flow also made it necessary to cooperate with existing political regimes and to refrain from taking a tougher stance on human rights violations.¹⁴ Conditionality has been used to induce cooperation in counter-terrorism and migration. For instance, in May 2010 the EU has awarded Tunisia with an upgraded association agreement for its cooperation in these areas, despite the questionable 2009 elections and the law that criminalised contact between NGOs and foreigners (including the EU). Another example in this line is the start of negotiations with Libya for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) in 2008, a state which was far behind other countries in the region in terms of its institutionalization.¹⁵

In addition to these limitations which reveal the theory-practice gap between the EU’s goals and policy implementation both in the EMP and the ENP, evolution of its policies suggest that the EU has increasingly moved away from the goals of building a community or common security in the Mediterranean.¹⁶ The growing emphasis on bilateral and intergovernmental relationship undermined the multilateral dimension and reinforced the exclusion of actors who were not in favour of the status quo in these countries. This move away from community building, reaching out to people or civil society, aiming at change in these countries and working towards peace and security in the region has been confirmed by establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean,

13 Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission: A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy, COM(2007) 774 Final, Brussels, 05 December 2007, pp. 2-3.

14 Ali Bilgiç, “Security Through Trust-Building”, p. 463.

15 Charles Grant, *A New Neighbourhood Policy for the EU*, Center for European Reform, Policy Brief, March 2011, pp. 10-11.

16 The ENP shows that “borders and bordering” and the aspiration “to cushion the EU against negative spillover from the outer spheres” have become important for the EU. Pertti Joenniemi, “Towards a European Union of Post-Security?”, *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2007, p. 142.

which is regarded as the successor of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The Union for the Mediterranean (UFM) has intergovernmental cooperation at its center to work on specific technical projects. Energy and environment were chosen as the focus of these projects instead of promotion of democracy, human rights, rule of law and civil society in the Mediterranean.¹⁷ Nonetheless, even this emphasis on technical cooperation did not help in evading regional realities and this policy has been haunted by the Arab-Israeli conflict just like the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. High-level summits of the UFM have been consistently postponed after the Israeli offensive to Gaza in 2008/2009.

In light of the wave of change in the Middle East and North Africa, these mean that the EU has a negative record in the eyes of those who would probably come to power in these countries due to its cooperation with the previous regimes at the expense of democratization and human rights. Overall, the past record of the EU shows that it needs to win trust and work towards community-building between Europe and the southern Mediterranean by taking on board the needs and priorities of its southern partners and by adopting pluralism and inclusiveness to achieve these.

The EU's Response to the Wave of Change in the Middle East and Northern Africa: Are the Lessons Learnt?

The EU was taken by surprise during the people's mobilization across the region, like the rest of the international community. Given its previous approach, calls for the EU support to the wave of change in the region emphasised that attention should be focussed on the establishment of democratic processes and structures irrespective of whether the actors taking part in these belong to secular or Islamist backgrounds.¹⁸ Unfortunately, early reactions of its member states further tainted the EU's claim for being the carrier of democratic values and principles. The EU froze the assets of Zine El Abidine Bin Ali and Hosni Mubarak weeks after they had left their presidencies.¹⁹ France

17 Six key initiatives were identified: de-pollution of the Mediterranean; expansion of maritime and land highways; more intensive use of solar energy; development of regional research programmes through the Euro-Mediterranean University in Slovenia; civil protection; and the Mediterranean Business Development Initiative.

18 Álvaro de Vasconcelos (ed.), *The Arab Democratic Wave*, p. 44; Volker Perthes, "Europe and the Arab Spring", *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 53, No. 6, 2011, p. 80.

19 Rosa Balfour, "The Arab Spring, the Changing Mediterranean, and the EU: Tools as a Substitute for Strategy?", Policy Brief, European Policy Center, June 2011, p. 1.

initially offered support to existing regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, while Italy and Malta have been reluctant to criticise Gaddafi when he started to use force in Libya.²⁰ The crisis in Libya particularly revealed the big divergence of interests among its member states and the resulting difficulties of coordination and coherence within the EU. French and British activism for the enforcement of no-fly zone over Libya was in contrast with the German abstention in the United Nations Security Council vote which authorized the operation. In response to the flow of refugees from Libya, Italy resorted to issuing temporary residence permits which enabled free circulation in the Schengen area. This not only led to severe disagreements between France and Italy, but also to consideration of reinstating national border controls within the Schengen area of free movement within the EU.²¹

Eventually, the EU developed a common response to the events in the region with a new strategy “Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean” in March 2011 and a reviewed European Neighbourhood Policy in May 2011.²² Awareness of the need to address problems of political representation, human rights and economic and social disparities that led to the uprisings is clear in these documents. A stronger intention to support democratization and to alleviate socio-economic disparities can also be observed. However, the EU’s proposals do not correspond to a radical overhaul of its approach towards the Mediterranean. Opting for re-branding of its existing approach and instruments instead of a radical overhaul could partly be attributed to the ongoing administrative restructuring of the EU required by the Lisbon Treaty of 2009 and the financial crisis throughout Europe. But it also reflects the EU’s unwillingness to robustly take on board the needs and priorities of its southern partners and work towards building a Euro-Mediterranean community. Its promise of financial assistance, for instance, did not amount to a commitment for some sort of a “Marshall Plan” and it was short of relieving

20 Charles Grant, *A New Neighbourhood Policy*, p. 11.

21 Nicole Koenig, “The EU and the Libyan Crisis –In Quest of Coherence”, *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 4, 2011, pp. 21-22.

22 European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean*, COM(2011) 200 final, Brussels, 8 March 2011; European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood: A Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy*, COM(2011) 303, Brussels, 25 May 2011.

the burden of debt acquired by the previous regimes in these countries, which led to “a growing credibility deficit” on the part of the EU.²³

The EU promised improved cooperation with these countries in three areas (3 Ms) money, market and mobility on the basis of the principle “more for more”. Although this is not a new principle,²⁴ the aim seems to be emphasising incentives. In order to address the problem of high unemployment in these countries, the EU launched a new Small and Medium Size Enterprises Investment Scheme called SANAD (“support” in Arabic) and pledged to work towards increasing “investment security” for foreign investors.²⁵ Other initiatives include a Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility, a European Endowment for Democracy, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas and Mobility Partnerships, potential deficiencies of which will be outlined below.

Like many of these instruments, the possibility of establishing Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas existed as an opportunity before the wave of change in the region.²⁶ The EU suggested competition policy, public procurement, investment protection, sanitary and phytosanitary measures as the priority areas for regulatory convergence under these agreements.²⁷ However, increased trade liberalisation between the EU and these countries in the short term can exacerbate existing problems of economic and social disparities by further diminishing welfare provision capabilities of these states. The EU should focus on increasing the move of investment to these countries by eliminating

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- 23 Eduard Soler i Lecha, “The EU, Turkey, and the Arab Spring: From Parallel Approaches to a Joint Strategy?”, in Nathalie Tocci, Ömer Taşpınar et al. (eds), *Turkey and the Arab Spring: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy From a Transatlantic Perspective*, Mediterranean Paper Series, (German Marshall Fund of the United States, October 2011), p. 29.
- 24 For instance, the Commission’s 2007 Report states that ‘The ENP is a partnership for reform that offers ‘more for more’; the more deeply a partner engages with the Union, the more fully the Union can respond, politically, economically and through financial and technical cooperation’. Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission: A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy, p. 2.
- 25 The EU’s Response to the ‘Arab Spring’, MEMO/11/918, Brussels, 16 December 2011, p. 3. <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/11/918>
- 26 The EU currently aims to establish Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas with Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions on the EU Response to the Developments in the Southern Mediterranean, 3130th Foreign Affairs Council Meeting, Brussels, 1 December 2011, p. 3. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press/press-releases/search?command=d&id=&lang=en&doclang=EN&dockey=126499>
- 27 European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean, p. 9.

the above mentioned hub and spokes system that it has established. To this end, it should encourage the full implementation and extension of the Agadir Agreement which entered into force in July 2006 in order to establish a free trade area between Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco. Such an effort would constitute the first step towards the elimination of the hub and spokes system. Although a huge increase in the south-to-south trade is not expected since these countries mostly produce similar products, even this limited Agreement has led to an increase in trade flows between them.²⁸ While a gradual establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean common market with all four freedoms of movement for goods, capital, services and people would answer the needs of people in the region and act as a strong incentive for democratic consolidation, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas do not aim at achieving all these four freedoms, which decreases their appeal and capability as an effective tool.

The Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility and the European Endowment for Democracy directly aim at supporting political reform and democratization in these countries. The Civil Society Facility is meant to work towards advancing the civil society's advocacy capacity, ability to monitor political reform and participation in policy dialogues. The European Endowment for Democracy aims to provide grants for political parties and non-registered NGOs. Thus, the Endowment can be useful in improving the EU support to pluralism, inclusiveness and political reform, although it is designed as an autonomous body. If it is used to offer exclusive support to anti-Islamist parties or NGOs, however, the EU is likely to end up being seen once again as an external source of support against democracy in these countries. Since a process of convergence on a fixed European political model is not going to be feasible in some countries and will take time in others, the EU should pursue the broader goal of popular empowerment with a focus on human rights as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and equality before the law.²⁹ It should aim at empowering representative

28 8th Union for the Mediterranean Trade Ministerial Conference Conclusions, Brussels, 9 December 2009, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/09/547&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>; According to a 2005 study, the volume of trade between the EU and the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) could be 3.5 to four times larger if both regions were to reach the EU's level of integration. Uri Dadush and Michele Dunne, "American and European Responses to the Arab Spring: What's the Big Idea?", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 2011, p. 136.

29 Susi Dennison and Anthony Dworkin, *Europe and the Arab Revolutions: A New Vision For Democracy and Human Rights*, European Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Brief, ECFR/41 November 2011, p. 3.

actors and keeping open the channels of representation for democratic politics. In other words, the possibility to provide grants to political parties and non-registered NGOs should be used to leave behind the previous practice of working with intermediaries of the ruling regimes which lacked representativeness of the society.³⁰ Since Europe can facilitate the exchange of experience and know-how on democratic consolidation in the region through increasing interaction between people, it should start with accepting the representatives of these societies as legitimate counterparts, adapting itself to “the locally produced understandings of democracy” and meeting “these countries’ own assessment of their needs”.³¹

As for the promise of more mobility in the EU’s new approach, the security-oriented approach to migration is likely to continue its negative influence in the Mediterranean. While the EU has launched dialogues on migration, mobility and security with Morocco and Tunisia for concluding mobility partnerships,³² if it is going to stop conditioning facilitation of even the short term travel upon progress in migration management, including readmission agreements remains to be seen.³³ The promise of temporary labour migration schemes in these mobility partnerships is also subject to meeting the conditions for increased border controls and putting in place the system of return and readmission of migrants by these countries. An alternative to this security-oriented approach of the EU, which would be mutually beneficial for both Europe and the Mediterranean countries and re-couple migration and development, is to “condition these schemes to putting in place effective legal and institutional mechanisms to foster the (temporary or permanent) reintegration of labour migrants in countries of origin”.³⁴ Another problem is

30 François Burgat, “Europe and the Arab World: The Dilemma of Recognising Counterparts”, *International Politics*, Vol. 46, No. 5, 2009, pp. 626-627.

31 Ruth Hanau Santini, “The Arab Spring and Europaralysis in the Levant and the Gulf”, *Swiss Political Science Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2012, p. 123.

32 Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions on the EU Response to the Developments in the Southern Mediterranean, 3130th Foreign Affairs Council Meeting, p. 3.

33 European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Taking Stock of the European Neighbourhood Policy, COM(2010) 207, Brussels, 12 May 2010, p. 5.

34 Temporary tax exemptions for entrepreneur-returnees, skills portability programmes, facilitated portability of migrants’ social rights, support for the education of returnees’ children and vocational training programmes addressed to circular migrants are essential for effective circular migration schemes. Nathalie Tocci and Jean-Pierre Cassarino, “Rethinking Euro-Med Policies in the Light of the Arab Spring”, open Democracy, 25 March 2011, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/print/58677>

the fact that mobility partnerships are political declarations by the EU, which are not legally binding upon its member states. The EU member states' participation to this call and actual scope of these partnerships will naturally vary. Moreover, the value or effectiveness of existing three mobility partnerships with Moldova, Cape Verde and Georgia in terms of labour mobility initiatives and/or 'circular migration' projects have not been verified yet.³⁵ Under such circumstances, it is not clear how the EU intends to make good on its promises for "mutual accountability" that it re-emphasises in the review of its Neighbourhood Policy.³⁶

Due to these limitations on its promises for more market, mobility and money, the EU's 'more for more' principle and its less pronounced corollary, 'less for less' become more important in order to support democratization in the Mediterranean. As was presented in the previous section, application of conditionality in the past has not been geared towards encouraging political reform or democratization. The EU's priority of migration control omitted the security concerns and human rights of the people in the region. In recognition of this shortcoming, the EU set out the goal of "deep democracy" in its review of the Neighbourhood Policy. Free and fair elections, freedom of association, expression and assembly and a free press and media, the rule of law administered by an independent judiciary and right to a fair trial, fighting against corruption, security and law enforcement sector (including the police) and the establishment of democratic control over armed and security forces are identified as the benchmarks against which the EU will assess progress and adapt levels of support for "deep democracy".³⁷ In addition, the Council of the EU decided that the ENP action plans will be used more effectively "by focusing on a limited number of priorities with a clearer sequencing of actions, incorporating clearer objectives and more precise benchmarks."³⁸ In this new context, formally involving independent civil society organisations in

35 Sergio Carrera, *The EU's Dialogue on Migration, Mobility & Security with the Southern Mediterranean*, CEPS Paper in Liberty and Security in Europe, (Centre for European Policy Studies, June 2011), p. 4.

36 European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood*, p. 2.

37 *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

38 Council of The European Union, 3101st Council meeting, Foreign Affairs, Press Release, 11824/11 PRESSE 181 PR CO 42, Luxembourg, 20 June 2011, p. 10. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press/press-releases/search?command=d&cid=&lang=en&doclang=EN&dockey=122937>

partner countries in the definition of priorities, the setting of the reform agendas and the implementation processes may help.³⁹ Put differently, effective means or methods for implementing the “more for more” principle, encouraging political reform and addressing the needs of these countries rather than prioritising the EU’s interests should be established firmly.

In order for conditionality to work this time, methods and goals of using it should be consistent across the neighbourhood and legitimate in the eyes of these societies. Although the Arab-Israeli conflict was not the source of mobilization in the uprisings, the plight of Palestine is important for the people and existing situation leads to support for extremism or use of force in the region. Therefore, the region needs a new security paradigm where meeting the peoples’ demands for representation and other rights is a step in the right direction for preventing escalation of tension and use of force. This should be complemented with the resolution of the conflict which has been used as an additional alibi by the autocratic regimes not to pursue reform. Moreover, negative impact of the conflict on the EU’s multilateral initiatives, including the Union for the Mediterranean means that the resolution of the issue is in the interest of all parties. Although the EU reaffirmed its commitment to the UFM, increasing democratization in the region and existing stagnation of the UFM due to the Arab-Israeli conflict suggest that effective functioning of this framework even on the basis of variable geometry or differentiated cooperation of the willing will be difficult. Therefore, the EU role in a fair resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is crucial. This would also help rebuild the credibility of the EU in these countries.⁴⁰ In its review of the ENP, the EU acknowledges the negative influence of conflicts on peoples’ lives, feeding radicalisation and obstructing reform efforts. However, it is not promising that in this review the extended evaluation of the conflicts in the Southern Caucasus and the EU approach towards these is not matched by a similar analysis of the situation and the roles that the EU could play in the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁴¹

39 Sabine Fischer with Erwan Lannon, *The ENP Strategic Review: the EU and its Neighbourhood at a Crossroads*, ISS Analysis, May 2011, p. 4.

40 Volker Perthes, “Europe”, pp. 80-81.

41 European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood*, pp. 5-6.

To conclude, in response to the wave of change in the Middle East and North Africa, the EU has identified shortcomings in its previous approach towards the region and promised to work towards decreasing social-economic disparities and strengthening civil society organisations and political parties in these countries through specific programmes and initiatives. However, the awareness of the need to close its theory-practice gap does not significantly alter the EU's prospects to live up to its potential as a transformative power that supports democratic consolidation in the region. Flexibility in terms of creating more incentives and inclusiveness in terms of embracing the actors that are more representative of the people in the region continue to be the key to success in the EU's policies towards the region, while its inaction or existing approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict appears as another major stumbling-block on its prospects to be a transformative actor.

Conclusion

This article argued that despite the adoption of transformation in the Mediterranean as a goal, the EU's policies and their implementation have been geared towards preserving the status quo in the Mediterranean. While the EU prioritised its security concerns on terrorism, migration, economy and energy, it did not directly address or equally prioritise the needs of southern Mediterranean societies in its policies. As a result, the EU's previous engagement with the southern Mediterranean led to a gap between its declared goals and practice in transforming the region in line with its values such as democracy, human rights and rule of law and establishing peace. The EU acknowledges the problems in its previous approach towards the region in its review of the European Neighbourhood Policy and emphasises the need for decreasing social and economic disparities and strengthening civil society. However, the EU's proposals in this new context do not indicate a radical overhaul of its approach towards the region which would robustly take on board the needs and priorities of its southern partners and contribute to building a Euro-Mediterranean community. Continuing limitations to the EU promises for mobility partnerships and deep and comprehensive free trade areas include openness, inclusiveness and effective incentives. In addition, the persistent negative impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the EU's policies suggest that the potential for the EU to be a transformative power that supports democratic consolidation in the region is small.

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