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EUROPE AND THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS: A NEW VISION FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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SUMMARY

In the aftermath of this year's revolutions, the EU has rightly recommitted itself to the support of democracy and human rights in the Middle East and North Africa. However, although protesters across the southern Mediterranean share some of the EU's values, they do not see Europe as a political model and democracy in the region is likely to produce some results with which Europeans are not comfortable. This brief argues that, in response, the EU should focus above all on the development of legitimate and accountable governments in post-revolutionary countries in the Arab world. Rather than backing specific political groups in countries that are in transition, the EU should work to create the building blocks and background conditions for fair and inclusive politics.

The EU should also try to support human rights through transparent diplomacy and support for civil society. In countries such as Morocco that remain undemocratic, the EU should develop a more political approach that pushes harder for incremental reform in return for credible benefits, while continuing to engage on other EU interests. The use of violence against civilians in countries like Syria should be a red line for limiting cooperation, drawing condemnation and sanctions in severe cases. EU proposals on conditionality and a new European Endowment for Democracy will be most effective if they are focused on the support of accountable and legitimate government.

The Arab revolutions of 2011 have brought democracy and human rights back to the centre of European policy towards the southern Mediterranean. The uprisings showed that the populations of the region would no longer submit to be ruled by unaccountable regimes that did not treat their citizens with dignity. As a result, European leaders, who had become used to seeing stability and political reform in the Arab world as opposing principles, have been forced to rethink their approach. The European Union has committed itself to offer real and meaningful support for political reform through a revamped neighbourhood policy. But as the enthusiasm generated by the revolutions gives way to a more sober awareness of the complexities and risks involved, it is clear that many of the difficult questions about supporting democracy and human rights in this new context have yet to be answered.

The Arab uprisings show that, even at a time when global support for democracy seemed to be in retreat, the desire for accountable and representative government remains strong in a part of the world where its relevance was often doubted. The EU was right to recommit itself to a transformative agenda in the southern Mediterranean, using its influence to support reforms that increase political openness and participation. But it is not a simple or straightforward matter for Europe to support democracy and human rights in the contemporary world. To be effective, the EU must develop a strategy that takes full account of the inherent complications of supporting universal values in a region where Europe cannot act as an unchallenged standard-setter. Any effort to

back political freedom in the Arab world that is not rooted in a realistic understanding of the environment in which the EU operates is likely to prove unsuccessful and short-lived.

This policy brief aims to contribute to the process of defining a clearer vision of what the EU can hope to achieve in its support of democracy and human rights in the southern Mediterranean and how it should try to do this. It will argue that European leaders are right to call for a new strategy that pays greater attention to popular demands for accountable government than the largely uncritical engagement with authoritarian regimes that the EU followed in the years before 2011. Arab governments that do not respond to the aspirations of their people for greater inclusion and opportunity seem incapable of offering a stable path of development. In this sense, both the EU's values and its interest in fostering the modernisation of its neighbourhood now push it in the direction of supporting political reform and human rights.

Dilemmas of democratic transition

Even though the EU's recent, largely value-free policy towards its southern neighbourhood has been rendered obsolete, however, it cannot assume that the alternative is simply to revert to the approach it used in supporting democracy and human rights in the past. The upsurge of popular protest across the southern Mediterranean is an expression of values that the EU shares, but it also poses a series of tricky challenges for European policymakers. Above all, the uprisings showed a new passion for self-determination, driven by populations seeking to regain control of their countries for themselves. The leaders of the transitions underway in North Africa will therefore resist any attempt by outsiders to prescribe the direction they should follow. In none of the southern Mediterranean countries can the EU set the terms of political and economic development as it did in Central and Eastern Europe in the years after 1989.

Although there is a strong momentum towards greater popular control over public life, this is not the same as a settled commitment to democracy. The Arab revolutions were motivated by local concerns, mixing a demand for political accountability with anger at corruption and frustration at limited economic opportunities. The enthusiastic participation of Tunisians in the elections held in October was an encouraging sign that the wave of excitement about democracy in the region remains alive. But support for political pluralism across the region could quickly dissipate if it is not associated with better economic prospects for the mass of Arab populations and greater social justice. The EU cannot assume that the values of democracy and human rights have now triumphed across the Mediterranean.

The shift towards popular sovereignty in the EU's southern neighbourhood is also likely to produce some results with which Europeans may not be comfortable. Popularly elected legislatures can be expected to take a different view from Europe about the relationship between religion and the state,

and may pass measures in areas such as women's rights under family law or blasphemy with which most Europeans disagree. Thus democracy in the Arab world could appear to threaten other values that the EU believes in, such as human rights. A more open political environment could also exacerbate tribal or religious differences in Middle Eastern societies, especially if democracy is launched against a background of economic hardship and frustrated hopes. And there could also be tensions between the support of democracy and other European interests. Instead of authoritarian rulers who supported some European foreign-policy goals, governments that respond more to public opinion are likely to prove less obliging partners in some ways, as Egyptian initiatives to reopen the border with Gaza and to restore diplomatic relations with Iran have shown – though Tunisia's decision to become a party to the International Criminal Court is a reminder that there will be gains as well.

The Mediterranean in a post-Western world

In the face of these complex challenges, the EU has so far struggled to play a significant role in shaping the course of developments in the southern Mediterranean. All of its traditional instruments risk being ineffective in this changed environment. For example, European leaders have offered a closer partnership for those countries that embrace political reform through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). But it remains uncertain whether the EU's incentives will be attractive enough to influence the political calculations of local elites. Egypt's decision to reject a loan offered on favourable terms by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) earlier this year illustrated the sensitivity that exists about accepting aid with conditions from the West, especially when financing without strings is available from the Gulf. In any case, the EU is not in a position to provide massive financial assistance and EU member states may not be ready to offer the kind of concessions on trade and visa liberalisation in which the countries of the southern Mediterranean are interested.

The use of conditionality, which is an essential part of the EU's neighbourhood policy, is also more complicated in a world that no longer accepts Europe as a global arbiter of universal values. The EU rightly wants to avoid repeating its previous endorsement of authoritarian regimes such as President Ben Ali's in Tunisia as reformers on the basis of modernising programmes that did not contain any meaningful political component. The technocratic approach that the EU followed before the revolutions, aiming at a gradual convergence of partner countries on European regulatory standards, left it ill-equipped to make targeted interventions on political reform. Equally, though, it would be inappropriate and unrealistic to require North African and Middle Eastern countries to converge on a European-style liberal democratic political model as a condition for additional assistance – especially when the incentives on offer from the EU are so modest or remote.

Transitional countries such as Egypt and Tunisia are strongly resistant to the idea that the EU should sit in judgment on

the political choices made by their populations, now that they have thrown off dictators that European leaders were happy to engage with. EU officials report that complaints about conditionality are always the first subject to be raised in public meetings and press conferences in the region. In countries that have not yet committed to democracy and where the EU wants to encourage genuine reform, it faces the problem that some member states rely on co-operation with the current political authorities and elites, and are reluctant to alienate them through criticism or withholding benefits. As European leaders struggle to find the right language to make themselves heard in the region, they confront tough questions about the importance of consistency: they must decide what line to take with countries like Algeria or the Gulf states whose energy resources make them immune to European pressure and which show no real interest in expanding the political rights of their people.

Finally, the EU faces the new challenge of supporting democratic reform in an environment in which public officials and political candidates, including even reformers, may not want to associate themselves with the West. For example, the interim government in Egypt has refused the EU's offer of election monitors and, according to European officials, has not shown itself receptive to European advice on other aspects of political reform. The government recently conducted an investigation of NGOs receiving unauthorised foreign funding and has referred 39 for possible prosecution under a Mubarak-era law.¹ Secular liberal political parties warn that a close relationship with the EU would damage their electoral prospects and thus be counterproductive. In short, democracy has not led to demands for a closer partnership with the EU. And even where civil society groups remain interested in European support, the EU does not currently have a way of providing assistance quickly and flexibly to groups that have had to operate under the radar or are being newly established in the aftermath of revolution.

In all these ways, the challenges posed by the Arab uprisings are representative of the complexities of supporting democracy and human rights in a world in which the EU and the West more generally no longer enjoy global pre-eminence. The economic success of China and the economic crisis in the West have broken the association between liberal political systems and prosperity. As global power shifts towards Asia and Latin America, it would be anachronistic for the EU to appear to present itself as a privileged guardian of universal values. Emerging powers outside the West are able to rival Europe as trade partners or donors without seeking to impose a normative agenda, weakening the leverage that the EU can exert. In this more competitive environment, the EU must co-operate with undemocratic regimes on core European interests such as security, energy or commerce, without having the leverage to compel them to change their political systems.

¹ "Egypt: Government Moves to Restrict Rights and Democracy Groups", Human Rights Watch, 26 September 2011, available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/09/26/egypt-government-moves-restrict-rights-and-democracy-groups>.

A new vision of supporting democracy

In our earlier Policy Brief, *Towards an EU human rights strategy for a post-Western world*, we outlined a way for the EU to respond to this new international context.² First, we argued that the EU should engage in a battle of ideas – in other words, make a case for human rights and democracy that is rooted in local concerns rather than Western political models and that espouses the right of all societies to determine their own development in a fair and inclusive way. Second, we argued that the EU should focus in its engagement with other countries on key “pressure points” – achievable goals that could unlock further progress on human rights and create greater political space. Third, we suggested that the EU should reach out to new partners beyond its traditional alliances and its usual government-to-government engagement and seek common ground to support universal values in practice.

In the remainder of this brief, we show how the EU can respond to the Arab revolutions within this framework. The challenge for the EU is to develop a vision for the region that is robust enough to guide policy while avoiding the impression of trying to impose its own political model – anathema in the post-Western world. To achieve this, the EU should follow the logic of a battle of ideas to win local sympathy for its normative agenda, engaging with public concerns about dignity and self-determination, and not pushing for any specific formal political systems unless this corresponds to public demands. In other words, instead of approaching the transitions as a process of convergence on a fixed European political model (as the original conception of the European Neighbourhood Policy seemed to imply), Europe should throw its weight behind the broader goal of popular empowerment.

This focus on popular empowerment as the overarching goal of the EU's transformative strategy should not be interpreted as simply elevating democracy as a goal above human rights and the rule of law. The approach set out here relies on an understanding of legitimate and stable government that incorporates elements of all three values. For people to be governed through their consent, there must be sufficient participation and accountability for the population to determine its country's development; there must be respect for such human rights as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and equality before the law so that the spectrum of public views can be fairly represented; and there must be a meaningful rule of law to guarantee the stability and consistency of these arrangements. In this sense, the objective is not simple majoritarian control of public life but a more sustainable and human rights-based conception of legitimate government.

² Susi Dennison and Anthony Dworkin, “Towards an EU human rights strategy for a post-Western world”, European Council on Foreign Relations, September 2010, available at <http://ecfr.eu/page/-/documents/towards-an-eu-human-rights-strategy-for-a-post-western-world.txt.pdf> (hereafter, S. Dennison and A. Dworkin, “Towards an EU human rights strategy for a post-Western world”).

The central foundations of legitimate government that the EU should try to develop in its relationships can be broken down into *building blocks* and *background conditions*. In the first category would be the structural components of meaningful popular control of political decisions, including such principles as: accountability of government to the population; genuine popular participation in public decision-making; plurality of political options; basic political rights including freedom of expression and assembly; the absence of coercion through the use of torture; institutional checks and balances; inclusion of all social groups in collective political processes; the rule of law; and the absence of entrenched interests that are beyond popular control. The second category would include the social, economic and cultural factors that are likely to create a sustainable system of political openness, such as: a culture of transparency in public life; a reasonable degree of social justice and individual opportunity; a climate of tolerance for different opinions or religious doctrines; a sense of citizenship that extends to all parts of society; broad social consensus about the ground rules for public life; security forces that operate in the national interest; and the development of civil society and independent media, in line with the finding that media proliferation is strongly correlated with the avoidance of backsliding in new democracies.³

Towards a successful transition in Egypt

How would this conceptual strategy translate into practical policy? The implications are clearest in a transitional country such as Egypt. Europeans will be able to maximise traction with the Egyptian people if they make clear that their primary aim is to help put in place the minimum conditions of fair and inclusive political processes. The EU's priority should not be to promote the fortunes of any groups within Egyptian politics. Instead it should focus on building the basic integrity of the new democratic political system and ensuring the development of background conditions that are likely to support stable democratic governance. It is essential for the EU's credibility that it appear to respect and defer to the political decisions of local populations; what the EU can legitimately push for is that the political system genuinely represents these decisions.

Nine months after President Hosni Mubarak's departure, Egypt presents a worrying picture. The political scene has been transformed, and competitive parliamentary elections are scheduled for November. Yet public life is marked by division, suspicion and anger – a poor background for a successful transition to a plural political system. The Supreme Council of

the Armed Forces (SCAF) is running the country in an opaque and unaccountable manner. Around 12,000 people have been tried before military tribunals since February, journalists have been prosecuted or investigated for insulting the military, and the emergency law has been reactivated. With the timetable for presidential elections unclear, it is possible that military rule will continue for at least another year; no plans for the formation of a more representative government have been announced, which could lead to increasing public frustration. Military leaders have floated the idea that the army should retain a privileged position under the new constitution, so that it can function as a guardian of democracy rather than serving at the "discretion" of the president, and sought to include this proposal in a statement of fundamental guidelines for the constitutional assembly.⁴

Meanwhile, economic and social problems are worsening. The revolution caused a sharp contraction in the Egyptian economy and, if the transition to democracy leads to greater economic uncertainty for Egypt's people rather than increased opportunity and employment, it could worsen public dissatisfaction and division. Given demographic trends, experts say, the Egyptian economy will need to create 700,000 private sector jobs per year in the near future to make an impact on unemployment.⁵ The failure to agree any kind of consensus about the scope of liability for crimes and corruption under Mubarak's regime is inhibiting investment and provoking suspicion rather than social harmony. Sectarian tensions have also increased: Egyptian Copts accuse the armed forces of failing to guarantee security for their churches; violence against predominantly Coptic protesters at the Maspero demonstration in mid-October appeared to be tolerated by security forces; and state television has encouraged vigilantism.⁶

European leaders need to ensure that they make the most of the limited influence they can exert in this complicated situation. Whatever their sympathies, the EU should be careful not to take up the cause of liberal secular parties on issues that involve jockeying for position within Egyptian politics rather than core issues of democratic legitimacy. Although the growing political strength of the Muslim Brotherhood may be attracting concern in European ministries, it would be a mistake for the EU to appear to be opposed in any way to the Brotherhood's political success. Above all, it would be disastrous if the EU were to try to use the conditionality mechanisms in the revised ENP to steer Egypt in the direction of a European model of democracy or to secure its co-operation with European policy objectives.

³ This list overlaps with the elements of "deep democracy" listed in the EU's recent communication on the European Neighbourhood Policy, but goes further in that it tries to define government by consent rather than democracy; see "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood", Joint Communication by the High Representative of the Union For Foreign Affairs And Security Policy and the European Commission, COM(2011) 303, 25 May 2011, p. 3, available at http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com_11_303_en.pdf (hereafter, (hereafter, "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood", Joint Communication). For the finding about media proliferation and democratic backsliding, see Jan Teorell, *Determinants of Democratization: Explaining Regime Change in the World 1972–2006* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp. 67–70.

⁴ Mohamed Gharib Ebtessam Talab, "Military legal advisor demands special status for the army in the new constitution", *Al Masry Al Youm* (English edition), 26 May 2011, available at <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/452808>; Matt Bradley, "Egyptians Bristle at Military's Plan", *Wall Street Journal*, 3 November 2011, available at http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204621904577014132319073706.html?mod=googlenews_wsj.

⁵ "Egypt's Democratic Transition: Five Important Myths about the Economy and International Assistance", Legatum Institute and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 2011, p. 3, available at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Egypt_Democratic_Trans_UK16ppWEB.pdf.

⁶ For a first-hand account of the confrontation at Maspero, see Yasmine El Rashidi, "Massacre in Cairo", *NYRblog*, 16 October 2011, available at <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2011/oct/16/massacre-cairo/>.

Finding “pressure points”

Instead, the EU can make a more effective contribution by helping to create the environment for a political consensus about the transition to emerge locally. This approach would determine the “pressure points” on which the EU should focus. Because the SCAF and the interim government lack a democratic mandate, European leaders should not hesitate to criticise them when their actions stand in the way of a successful transition and fall short of core principles of political legitimacy. The EU should make clear that it regards restrictions on freedom of speech, attacks on civil society and a lack of transparency about political decisions as contrary to public aspirations for a democratic system. Countries such as the UK that have military ties with Egypt should use senior military officers to convey the message to their Egyptian counterparts that such measures will not help the SCAF’s reputation as custodians of the transition to democracy.

There are signs that the military leadership cares about its domestic reputation and its image as the guardian of the interests of the Egyptian people, which could make it responsive to carefully phrased diplomatic pressure. The EU should make it clear that it will not endorse any attempt by the SCAF to craft a constitution that places the army above democratically elected politicians. Even if some European leaders are sympathetic to the idea that the Egyptian army could be a useful restraining influence against any attempt by Muslim political parties to promote a religious agenda or take a more hostile stance towards Israel, they should still oppose the persistence of an unaccountable military. If the SCAF appears to be pulling back from its commitment to hand over power to a democratically elected president, the EU should make clear that this will threaten the continuation of additional European support under the “more for more” principle. Conditionality should only be invoked when, in extreme cases like this, Egypt is clearly moving away from core principles of political accountability.

Other forms of European engagement should also be directed at “pressure points” that relate to the minimum conditions for inclusive and stable popular control over public life. The EU should find ways to support the growth of independent media and the training of journalists to scrutinise public decision-making, if necessary through the creation of new instruments like a European Endowment for Democracy. It should look for ways of promoting greater agreement about the core principles of democratic government in the Arab world, perhaps through bringing together a group of eminent Arab thinkers and politicians to develop a set of “Cairo principles” about legitimate governance. It should also try to find ways to help deal with crimes and corruption from the old regime without producing divisive witch-hunts or economic paralysis. For example, the EU could work with an Egyptian organisation to bring to Cairo a group of former international leaders, including from the developing world, such as Vaclav Havel, Kofi Annan and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, to publicly explain the lessons from other cases.

Alongside these political initiatives to support the transition, the EU should also follow through on proposed measures to increase the tangible benefits of democracy to the Egyptian people by freeing up agricultural trade and mobility restrictions for Egyptians seeking to spend time in the EU. Currently, the EU exports more than three times the value of agricultural produce that it imports from Egypt, largely because of non-tariff regulations that limit Egyptian access to European markets.⁷ The EU should commit to bringing Egyptian standards and EU regulations into closer harmony and expand access for Egyptians (especially more highly skilled workers and students) to work or study in Europe on a temporary basis, perhaps combining this with a longer-term programme to raise the level of vocational education in Egypt.

These measures would show Egyptians that the EU is willing to go out of its way to support democracy in Egypt and would have a greater symbolic value than simple financial assistance, but they would also require the commitment of key member states that are at the moment reluctant to make such concessions. The expansion of Egyptian agricultural exports to Europe would mostly have an impact on agricultural producers within the EU including France, Spain, Italy and Germany, and visa liberalisation measures would affect France and Italy above all. Taking such measures would be politically difficult for these countries. But they should embrace a far-reaching vision of the importance and opportunities presented by democracy in North Africa and support them.

Another issue with symbolic force in Egypt is debt – since Egypt’s debts were incurred under an authoritarian leadership there is a social justice aspect to debt forgiveness that does not apply to financial aid. Even though European officials may see debt forgiveness as economically problematic – or insignificant compared to the overall size of the Egyptian economy – they should recognise the resonance of this issue as a way of backing Egypt’s nascent democracy. More fundamentally, given the importance of developments in North Africa for Europe, it is striking how few heads of state and government have been present on the ground in Egypt or Tunisia to show support for the transition to democracy. If more European leaders took the trouble to visit Cairo and deliver a carefully thought-out message of support for Egyptian popular aspirations, it would help raise the profile of the EU in Egypt’s turbulent political scene.

⁷ “Egypt: EU Bilateral Trade and Trade with the World”, DG Trade, European Commission, 8 June 2011, available at http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113375.pdf.

Tensions in supporting universal values

Developments in Egypt during the last year illustrate the way that, by aligning European influence with popular aspirations, the EU may find itself in uncomfortable positions. The liberal secular groups that were at the forefront of the uprising in February appear increasingly marginal. Instead, the Muslim Brotherhood seems poised to gain a strong foothold in the new parliament through its Freedom and Justice Party. The Brotherhood is publicly committed to the fundamentals of constitutional democracy but many Egyptians are worried that it has a hidden sectarian agenda. There is already little doubt that it would use its parliamentary position to try to reverse family laws that increased women's rights in areas such as divorce, custody of children and age of marriage – measures whose popular support is already compromised because they were passed with the strong support of President Mubarak's wife Suzanne.⁸ No women were included in the committee that drafted a set of constitutional amendments adopted earlier this year.

The foreign policy of a democratic Egypt will also make it a more complex partner for the EU to deal with than the authoritarian regime of President Mubarak. Opponents of the old regime saw its Middle East policy as that of a Western client state. But, as one Egyptian analyst puts it, the revolution has freed the country to adopt “the policies of a major regional power with a dignity and independence which commands respect and appreciation.”⁹ Post-revolutionary Egypt has already taken a more independent line by brokering a deal between the rival Palestinian factions of Hamas and Fatah, reopening the border crossing with Gaza and restoring diplomatic relations with Iran.

Tensions between Egypt and Israel have flared over Israel's killing of Egyptian policemen in the Sinai and the storming of the Israeli embassy in Cairo by protesters. A recent opinion poll suggested that 47 percent of Egyptians would like to amend the country's peace treaty with Israel and 23 percent would like to repeal it.¹⁰ Egyptian officials emphasise that a war with Israel remains unthinkable and that opposition to the Iranian nuclear programme is a “red line” for their country.¹¹ There are also signs that the removal of President Mubarak's unquestioning support for Israel has influenced Israeli actions in some ways that the EU would support – for instance, in deterring attacks on Gaza. Nevertheless, it seems certain overall that a democratic Egypt will be less aligned with Western foreign policies than previously, especially if the Muslim Brotherhood assumes a dominant position in the new political order.

⁸ Yasmine Fathi, “After the revolution: Egyptian women yet to win equality”, *Ahram Online*, 12 June 2011, available at <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/2/14071/Egypt/Society/After-the-revolution-Egyptian-women-yet-to-win-equ.aspx>.

⁹ Emad Gad, “The parameters of change in Egypt's foreign policy”, *Ahram Online*, 14 June 2011, available at <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/4/14233/Opinion/The-parameters-of-change-in-Egypt-s-foreign-policy.aspx>.

¹⁰ The poll was sponsored by *Newsweek/Daily Beast*: see Douglas Schoen and Randall Lane, “Egypt's Simmering Rage”, the *Daily Beast*, 26 July 2011, available at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/07/26/egypt-political-poll-muslim-brotherhood-influence-troubles-for-west.html> (hereafter, *Newsweek/Daily Beast* opinion poll).

¹¹ Author interview with a senior Egyptian foreign ministry official, 5 May 2011.

The EU will have to accept these tensions with a robust sense that the advent of legitimate government in the region remains an overriding European interest. In a post-Western world, it would be counterproductive to predicate European support for political transition on its promotion of the EU's short-term advantage. Now that a demand for accountable government is so firmly part of Egyptian public life, the European interest cannot be served by a return to an unrepresentative regime that overrode public aspirations. The denial of democratic participation is a violation of all citizens' rights, both women's and men's. Instead, in Egypt and across the region, the EU needs a twin-track strategy. Its core transformative agenda, as embodied in the revised ENP, should be focused on helping to build sustainable political systems that are legitimate and accountable to their citizens and include some core political rights, as discussed above. At the same time, it should continue to work to influence the policies of these countries on human rights, as well as in other policy areas, through transparent diplomacy and public engagement.

Searching for new partners

Rather than taking sides, the EU should try to build relationships with all political groups, including Muslim political parties that it has tended to shun in the past. There are already signs that the pressures of democratic politics are having an impact on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, with demands from younger members that the movement should adapt to the post-revolutionary period by introducing greater internal democracy and a “more open-minded and progressive approach”.¹² The EU should use its support to Egyptian civil society to help groups working on areas such as women's rights and encourage young Egyptians to become familiar with European society. The EU could facilitate the interchange of ideas between young Egyptians and Europeans by sponsoring a youth co-operation programme like the Horizon initiative between Turkey and Egypt whose meeting Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan addressed in Cairo in September.

At the same time, it is important to recognise the limits of European influence. For this reason, the EU should seek to co-ordinate its efforts with those of other countries that also have a stake in the Egyptian transition to democracy. In particular, it would be helpful for the United States – which has much closer ties to the Egyptian military – and the EU to deliver similar messages to the SCAF about the importance of creating the right conditions for democracy to take root. However, there is little support among Egypt's citizens for the US. Turkey, on the other hand, is seen by the Egyptian population in a sympathetic light; opinion polls show Egyptians believe it has demonstrated the greatest concern for Egypt's interests of any foreign country.¹³ Erdoğan's visit in September, and in particular his reference to the

¹² Author interview with Sondos Asem, 30 March 2011.

¹³ *Newsweek/Daily Beast* opinion poll.

importance for democracy of respecting the right of religious freedom, showed the potential overlap between Turkish and European concerns with the success of the transition.

Incremental reform – the case of Morocco

The case of Egypt illustrates how the EU should design its transformative agenda for the southern Mediterranean around the broad objective of supporting the development of legitimate, accountable and sustainable political systems. But the implementation of this strategy will necessarily be different in different contexts. In particular, cases where the EU hopes to work with an existing regime to support reform require a different kind of response than post-revolutionary transitions. Given the costs and uncertainties of revolutionary change, it would be valuable to have an example of incremental reform that is capable of genuinely meeting popular aspirations for accountable government – though the regional precedents of self-proclaimed reform from above are not encouraging. For the EU, meaningful evolutionary reform would have the attraction of enabling member states and EU institutions to maintain their co-operation with existing regimes across the range of European interests.

In its relations with potential reformers in post-revolutionary societies, the EU should focus on increasing political participation and governmental accountability. In particular, the EU should concentrate on persuading regimes to give their citizens a genuine say in the political development of their countries rather than measuring progress towards a fixed political destination. Benchmarking in ENP Action Plans should be linked to real steps towards political openness and accountability rather than hard-and-fast political indicators. Wherever possible, the EU should make the case with its interlocutors that meaningful reform could strengthen their position, while also using speeches and support to civil society as part of a battle of ideas to influence public aspirations towards an inclusive vision of public empowerment. By pushing on carefully judged “pressure points”, the EU would not jeopardise European engagement with the current regime or risk driving countries away from the European orbit. This should make it easier to attract the support of EU member states that have important bilateral relationships or geostrategic concerns.

Among southern Mediterranean countries, there is currently the greatest prospect of genuine evolutionary reform in Morocco. Moroccan elites valued their status as the “star performer” among North African countries on political reform and are now sensitive to the risk that they will be overtaken by their transitional neighbours.¹⁴ In response to the 20 February protest movement, King Mohammed VI appointed a commission on constitutional reform which

reported in mid-June. The commission proposed that in the future the prime minister be appointed from the party that wins parliamentary elections; the prime minister be given authority over the cabinet on day-to-day political questions; freedom of expression and gender equality be guaranteed; the judiciary be given greater independence and parliament greater powers; and the Berber language Amazigh be recognised as an official language.

Critics point out that the reforms do not ultimately reduce the power of the king. Moreover, the referendum in which 98 percent of the people of Morocco apparently endorsed the proposals was widely regarded as lacking credibility. In the words of the dissident royal Moulay Hicham: “If a progressive kind of democratization was the goal, and if – as I believe – a majority of Moroccans were ready to go along with this proposal, why turn a citizen referendum into a populist *beiya* (pledge of allegiance). The *modus operandi* belied the purported objective.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, the reforms do appear to offer the space for the development of a more independent politics, above all in parliament. The fact that public protests have diminished since the referendum suggests that the majority of Moroccan people are willing to give the proposed new system a chance to prove itself.

Under these circumstances, the best approach for the EU would be to use its engagement with the regime to reinforce the opening of political space, by encouraging respect for judicial independence, freedom of expression, and the continued tolerance of peaceful protests. At the same time, the EU should work with parliament to help it develop as a genuinely representative body. If the reforms acquire a self-fulfilling momentum, the EU should press the king to respect the growth of popular aspirations for further reform.

Business-like relations with recalcitrant regimes

In other countries in the region, however, there is still no large groundswell of overt popular discontent, presenting an even greater dilemma for the EU. In addition, it has limited leverage in countries such as Algeria. In such cases, the EU should pursue a business-like relationship that nevertheless stops short of the sort of uncritical support that European leaders practised in the southern neighbourhood in the past. As a minimum, the EU should refuse to give credit to the government for a process of political reform that has very little substance to it, and it should use increased engagement as a lever to open up avenues for dialogue on political reform.

The Algerian government currently feels very insecure. It finds itself in a transformed neighbourhood in which three authoritarian leaders have been overthrown and with a

¹⁴ Susi Dennison, Nicu Popescu and Jose Ignacio Torreblanca, “A chance to reform: How the EU can support democratic evolution in Morocco”, European Council on Foreign Relations, April 2011, available at http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR33_MOROCCO_BRIEF%281%29.pdf.

¹⁵ Stephen Smith, “Arab Spring: an interview with Moulay Hicham”, *Le Debat*, No. 166, Sept–Oct 2011, English translation available at http://moulayhichamfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Printemps%20Arabe%20Entretien%20avec%20Moulay%20Hicham_EnglishVersion_ForWeb.pdf.

population that is increasingly keen to take a more active role in securing its economic wellbeing rather than relying on government subsidies. As a response to this pressure, the state of emergency was lifted in February. Subsequently, however, new regulations have given the police many of the same powers to prevent demonstrations that it previously had. The government has also submitted a set of legislative reforms concerning electoral practice, political parties, NGOs and regulation of audiovisual media. But the established parties in the Algerian parliament are watering down those aspects of the reforms that affect them directly, including the quota for female candidates; the requirement for members of parliament to stand down three months before an election to restrict access to state resources for campaigning; and the ending of the right to switch parties once elected. Proposed legislation around civil society – which includes some quite regressive proposals, for example to tighten requirements for the accreditation of NGOs and for foreign funders to invest in them – is likely to pass with little challenge from the legislative assembly.

European leaders, many of whom represent countries that provide markets for Algeria's energy resources, should be clear in their ongoing contacts with the Algerian elite about their concerns about these aspects of the reform programme, rather than falling into the "endorsement trap" of being forced to recognise non-existent progress as a basis for continued engagement.¹⁶ At the same time, European leaders should seek to support civil society in Algeria, which is currently weak. They should voice concerns about the proposed increased restrictions on NGO activity and the financial support they receive, which could seriously hamper the international community's ability to support civil society. The EU should not endorse forthcoming legislative assembly elections, planned for spring 2012, if they do not meet international standards. It should also try to use the new political context in North Africa to emphasise that, if Algeria does not undertake political reform as part of a broader modernisation effort, it is in danger of being left behind.

A firm and constructive response to repression

While it is inevitable that the EU will pursue different approaches to different countries in a region as diverse as the southern Mediterranean is today, there must be some red lines, which, if crossed, make it impossible for the EU to persevere with a business-like relationship aimed at securing its direct interests. For example, when regimes massacre peaceful protesters, the EU must take a stand. However, it is important in assessing how the EU should respond in such cases to look at the interplay between symbolic and constructive steps. Clearly, a certain level of response is necessary simply as an expression of condemnation, to indicate that the EU will not look the other way when crimes

against humanity are taking place. At the same time, however, the EU should aim to respond in a way that takes account of what will do most to end the violence and secure a more legitimate and stable government for the country.

The case of Syria today exemplifies the complexities that can be involved in such situations. Syria represents a rare example in its neighbourhood of a country "which has successfully managed to build a secular state with a strong national identity transcending ethnic or religious affiliations".¹⁷ As pro-democracy protests were violently suppressed earlier this year, the EU moved slowly to take action against President Bashar Assad, fearing that his departure would lead to ethnic turmoil in the country and destabilising regional consequences. Because it had reacted much more strongly to analogous repression in Libya, the EU's halting initial response to the protests in Syria left it open to charges of double standards. Now, however, it is apparent that Assad has no intention of launching a reform process that is capable of meeting public aspirations and the EU has put in place forceful sanctions against his regime.

Although it is right that the EU should condemn repression of this kind, it should also frame its response in a way that contributes to a solution to the crisis. The deteriorating economic situation could lead Syria's commercial class to withdraw its support for Assad, but it will only do so if it believes his departure would lead to an inclusive political settlement in which its interests would be respected. The minority Alawites who occupy the higher ranks of the security forces are unlikely to desert the present regime if they fear they will be the subject of reprisals or discrimination under its successor. The EU should therefore do everything it can to support efforts to develop a unified opposition under the auspices of the Syrian National Council and to press it to give credible guarantees that it will pursue a fair and inclusive political settlement, rejecting the sectarianism that appears to be rising under Assad's military clampdown.¹⁸

It will also be important to work towards a solution to the Syrian crisis that has regional support. The EU should not push for military intervention, for which there is little support inside Syria and which would likely have explosive regional consequences. Instead, the EU should seek to build on the initiatives of Turkey, Qatar and other Gulf states, encourage the Arab League to follow up firmly if the Syrian government appears to flout the terms of their recent agreement, and try to draw Russia into playing a positive role in working for an agreed transition in which all parts of Syrian society feel confident of a fair and inclusive new political settlement. At the same time, it should stand firmly behind the principle that those responsible for international crimes should be held accountable.

¹⁶ On the "endorsement trap", see Dennison and Dworkin, *Towards an EU human rights strategy for a post-Western world*.

¹⁷ Marwa Daoudy, "Syria: Revolution and Repression", in *The Arab Spring: Implications for British Policy*, Conservative Middle East Council, 2011.

Reconstruction in a post-conflict state – the case of Libya

One of the most urgent and complex challenges for democracy building in the southern Mediterranean region is post-conflict Libya, which has huge implications for regional stability as well as for the future of the country itself. While the first priority for Libya is to establish a secure environment and bring the different armed groups that led the uprising together into a unified security force, it will also be important for the success of the transition that the country starts to put in place the political and institutional foundations for democratic government. The EU must recognise that Libyans will want to create their country's future for themselves. But European leaders who supported the rebel campaign should use their influence to push the interim leaders to take steps that are key priorities for building an accountable and inclusive political system. The EU can also offer advice and assistance where there is interest in receiving it.

At rallies in Benghazi marking the end of the Libyan conflict, the National Transitional Council's (NTC) leader, Mustafa Abdul Jalil, stressed the aim of developing a democratic, civic state, but also said that Sharia law should be the basic source of a new Libyan constitution and legal code.¹⁹ Many Libyan analysts are at pains to stress that this and other similar statements, which could mean that polygamy could be legal and the charging of interest could be banned, represent a moderate Islam. Nevertheless, they illustrate that the new Libya may present new challenges for Europe. In their dialogue with transitional leaders, European leaders should focus on supporting the development of a new constitution and legal code that enshrines basic human rights and the broad principles of a democratic state. While recognising that Libya must create its own future, European leaders should also use their current position of influence with the NTC to encourage them to avoid taking positions that infringe women's rights.

Libya is a country in which for the last 40 years there has been no functioning parliament, civil service or judiciary, or media able to challenge the government, and the police and security services have played an integral part in a system of abuse and patronage. In this context, the task of building the institutions necessary to create and protect a state in Libya based on the rule of law is huge. European leaders should emphasise the importance of taking steps in these areas and should offer practical support by offering to send rule of law missions and provide training of judges, legislators and journalists. There will also be a need for forms of transitional justice that ensure that those who have suffered horrific abuses under Muammar

Gaddafi's regime are heard but that also allow the country to move on. While accountability for crimes committed under Gaddafi is likely to attract most attention, it is also important for a developing rule of law that the NTC respond adequately to investigations into abuses by rebel groups during the eight-month armed conflict.²⁰ The international community should consistently raise the importance of investigating violations on all sides of the conflict and prosecuting perpetrators of war crimes where necessary.

Reconciling EU member states' interests and values

In the long term, the choice between pursuing Europe's interests and values in the southern Mediterranean is a false one: regimes that do not respond to citizens' demands for accountable and legitimate government are ultimately storing up problems for the future. Nevertheless, the EU must in the short term reconcile its interest in supporting popular empowerment with the other interests that individual member states have in the countries of the region. The trade links, historical ties, and security and energy relationships that member states have with particular southern Mediterranean countries affect how they view the EU's objectives in the region. For example, despite its poor human rights record, Algeria remains an essential source of natural gas for Spain, Italy and France, and a vital partner for France in the fight against the terrorist group Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. The UK has a tradition of military links with Jordan, and France has extensive commercial interests in Morocco that give it a strong financial incentive in continued stability.

The stereotype is that northern member states are less committed to the southern Mediterranean region than southern member states. But data on aid and trade shows that the picture is more complex. For example, the largest contributors of bilateral aid to Egypt are Germany (\$146 million per year) and France (\$93 million), followed some way behind by Spain (\$21 million) and the Netherlands (\$18m). (The Netherlands spends around 26 percent of its aid on government and civil society programmes, which could be seen to support an overall strategy of supporting political reform. Germany, France and Spain, on other hand, all spend under five percent of their aid on such programmes. Similarly, in 2009 the European Commission spent only around six percent of its \$204 million aid budget on government and civil society.) The biggest EU markets for Egypt's exports (mainly oil, cotton, textiles and clothes) are currently Italy, Spain, France and the UK; for Algeria's exports (mainly oil and chemicals), Spain, Netherlands and France; for Tunisia's exports, France, Italy and Germany.²¹

¹⁸ Nir Rosen, "Armed defenders of Syria's revolution", *Al Jazeera English*, 27 September 2011, available at <http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/features/2011/09/20110927113258426922.html>; Anthony Shadid, "Key Syrian City Takes on the Tone of a Civil War", the *New York Times*, 1 October 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/02/world/middleeast/homs-syria-spirals-down-toward-civil-war.html?pagewanted=all>.
¹⁹ Kim Gamel, "Libyan leader seeks to calm West on Sharia fears", *Associated Press*, 25 October 2011, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/fedarticle/9911890>.

²⁰ "Detention abuses staining the new Libya", Amnesty International, 13 October 2011, available at <http://www.amnesty.org/sites/impact.amnesty.org/files/PUBLIC/mde190362011en.pdf>; "Libya: Apparent Execution of 53 Gaddafi supporters", Human Rights Watch, news release, 24 October 2011, available at <http://www.hrw.org/middle-eastn-africa/libya>.

²¹ Figures quoted in this paragraph are calculated from DG Trade, European Commission statistics available at <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/statistics/>.

Pretending that these interests and ties do not exist will not make for an effective EU strategy on democracy and human rights. Rather, the EU must integrate its bilateral foreign policies into a collective approach that is strengthened rather than undermined by member states' direct links to the countries of the region. This process also needs to take account of the "repoliticised" world of foreign policy in the post-Arab Spring environment, in which heads of state and other sectoral ministers play a strong role in developing member states' positions towards partner countries. The objectives that the EU sets in its strategies for the region, both for its attempts to support the development of legitimate government and to uphold human rights, must take account of the full range of member states' interests. But once the strategy has been endorsed at a political level by all member states, the EU should consider whether states that have the strongest local ties could lead the implementation of the strategy, with one or more EU foreign ministers serving as co-ordinators in particular areas.

Repercussions at home

It is clear that the EU has a greater capacity to influence the development of other societies where its links are stronger and European statements carry greater force. But there is an important implication of this agenda that member states may not yet have taken on board. If we conceive of the EU's transformative agenda as a partnership between societies, it follows that the EU cannot expect to have a major impact without its own societies being affected as well. In the EU's southern neighbourhood, a deeper and long-term relationship with emerging democracies will require an expansion of trade links, mobility of students and workers, and personal contacts that will inevitably have repercussions at home. If the EU takes a purely defensive attitude, worrying about the risks of migration or competition for its own agricultural sector, this will limit the impact it can achieve in the region.

This problem requires different national responses in different capitals, because each context is different, and also because popular resistance to immigration is closely linked to rising nationalism in many EU member states. But although the circumstances vary from member state to member state, European governments need in general to better integrate minority communities in order to make clear the positive implications for Europe that freer movement between Europe and its neighbourhood could entail. In order to tackle the rise of populism and xenophobia within Europe, which is currently driving the debate on migration into Europe, governments and the media also need to react to misleading information and stereotypes about migration and make the case for the benefits and requirements of labour mobility.²²

²² For more discussion of this issue, see "Living Together – Combining diversity and freedom in 21st century Europe", Council of Europe Group of Eminent Persons, April 2011, available at <http://www.coe.int/t/portal/web/coe-portal/event-files/our-events/the-group-of-eminent-persons?dynLink=true&layoutId=581&dlgroupId=10226&fromArticleId=>

There is also a need for better education about the benefits to member states of opening their markets to North African countries. In 2010, EU agricultural exports to the region totalled around €4 billion and agricultural imports around €3 billion.²³ Many Europeans, particularly in southern member states, fear that greater openness would simply undercut European produce. As in the case of migration, there is a need for EU governments to engage with such fears rather than simply dismiss them. It should fund research on what the impact of increasing the trade relationship with this region would be and establish a taskforce of business people and policymakers to drive forward and inform the commitment that it made in the review of the ENP to develop free-trade agreements with the countries of the neighbourhood.²⁴

Rethinking the EU's instruments

The EU needs not only to rethink its strategy for supporting democracy and human rights in the southern Mediterranean but also to re-examine the instruments it uses. The Arab uprisings have shown the limitations of some earlier methods, including the difficulty of mobilising sufficient resources to have an impact in a fast-changing environment and the failure of existing benchmarks to influence political reform. The review of the ENP published in May included a number of specific proposals such as the creation of a European Endowment for Democracy (EED) and the greater use of conditionality.²⁵ The EU is also completing a review of its global human rights strategy that has implications for the development of human rights strategies, dialogues and guidelines.

The European Endowment for Democracy

The ENP review undertakes to "support the establishment of a European Endowment for Democracy to help political parties, non-registered NGOs and trade unions and other social partners".²⁶ This instrument, based on the US National Endowment for Democracy (NED), could represent an important financial component of a political strategy of popular empowerment: if structured in a way that is quick and flexible, and has the support not only of the EU institutions but also of member states, it has the potential to make a significant impact on the EU's efforts to reach out beyond established civil society interlocutors in pre-transition and transition societies. It could complement existing human rights-focused instruments such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), providing support for locally responsive initiatives that can make the most effective contribution to setting the conditions for accountable and inclusive political systems. The mandate

²³ Cumulative figures calculated from DG Trade, European Commission statistics available at <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/statistics/>.

²⁴ "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood", Joint Communication.

²⁵ "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood", Joint Communication.

²⁶ "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood", Joint Communication.

of the EED should be specifically designed to support the foundations of legitimate government that are laid out in this report.

The European External Action Service is currently working out the details of the EED, which is expected to focus initially on the neighbourhood. Early communications from the European Commission on the EED suggest that it will aim to provide financing with a light touch and reach out beyond established civil society to support new partners. In order to be effective in a post-Western world, the EED should also be:

- *responsive to the local political situation.* The EED should be designed so that its funding follows the key “pressure points” in each country in order to create a fair, inclusive and stable political system. For example, in regimes in transition, it should support initiatives that contribute to the development of a consensus on ground rules for the new politics, promoting dialogue on a framework for accountability, and supporting independent media.
- *focused on systemic issues.* The EED should seek to promote mechanisms for agreeing ground rules between parties rather than funding particular groups whose agenda the EU favours. In countries in transition, the EED should aim to involve all political groups in areas such as agenda building and developing political codes of conduct. In countries in which an authoritarian government remains in place, it may make sense to provide support for capacity building of political parties. In moderate reforming countries, the EED could support the development of independent parliaments. In countries with more repressive regimes where parties do not exist, the EED should invest in organisations that are campaigning for greater respect for the rule of law.
- *well-governed.* It is important that the EED is governed in a transparent way and is demonstrably beyond political influence. The NED achieved this by ensuring that its board, whose members sit for limited periods, included a mix of party activists, and members of Congress, foreign-policy specialists and representatives of labour, business and education communities. The EED should be independent of the EU institutions and the member states but include a similar mix of representatives from different groups and different member states.
- *backed by member states.* In order for the EED to contribute to sustainable and predictable funding streams for organisations working on the ground, it will be important that it is not entirely dependent on European Community funding, but rather pools member state contributions to democracy support. The larger the stake that member states have in the effective functioning of the EED, the more likely it is that it will form a strong, programmatic arm of the overall foreign-policy strategy, backed up by the EU’s diplomacy.

Conditionality in the neighbourhood

The ENP review also stated that: “Increased EU support to its neighbours is conditional. It will depend on progress in building and consolidating democracy and respect for the rule of law. The more and the faster a country progresses in its internal reforms, the more support it will get from the EU.”²⁷ The approach outlined in this brief is in line with this “more for more” strategy and it suggests a number of ways in which the neighbourhood strategy might be developed. The conditions that are set for deepening ties with the EU should be based on a close knowledge of the conditions in each country, the demands of local constituencies, and the priorities for opening political space. To build on and exploit these openings, the EU will need to develop a more fluid and political sense of what it can offer and demand in each relationship.

Although the EU has stronger levers for conditionality in the neighbourhood than anywhere else, it still faces a number of key challenges in implementing greater conditionality in this region. First, there is the problem of the scale of Europe’s incentive. The African Development Bank and some of the Gulf states are already investing heavily in the southern neighbourhood region and China is also taking an interest, reducing the EU’s leverage. Second, conditionality will not be applicable everywhere. It is likely to have greater potential as an incentive in situations in which a government is moving gradually towards democracy than in post-revolutionary societies (where the EED is a more pertinent tool for contributing to the process of building democracy).

The EU should therefore apply conditionality on a country-by-country basis as part of the Action Plans being agreed in the framework of the ENP, which provide an important mechanism for making the link between political, economic and development co-operation. For example, in Morocco, the EU should be able to use this tool to press King Mohammed VI to meet popular demands to devolve meaningful power to democratically accountable institutions without jeopardising his co-operation with EU member states on terrorism and illegal migration. However, this country-by-country approach creates a further problem for Europe’s ambition to be a normative actor. If the EU aims too low with some countries because its influence is limited, this makes it harder to push other countries harder.

This makes it crucial that, in addition to getting the ENP Action Plans right in each case, the EU also develops a convincing narrative about its overall approach. The EU needs to persuade people in the region that, while co-operating with all neighbouring countries in a business-like way (except when they cross red lines), it offers a clearly enhanced relationship to countries that are taking active steps to open political space and meet popular aspirations for reform. That means the EU needs to set conditions that are linked

²⁷ “A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood”, Joint Communication.

to governmental legitimacy and to be explicit about what it can offer in return for the conditions it sets. The EU's initial promise of money, markets and mobility has already lost credibility in the region, partly because it was limited but also because it lacked substance. Conditionality will not function unless the EU can be clearer on what it can offer in return for the conditions it sets. It needs to begin to offer specific initiatives: to reduce the cost of visas to transition countries in the southern neighbourhood to facilitate the exchange of students or, as in the case of Morocco, to unblock the stalled process of developing a renewed agricultural partnership.

Human rights strategies

This report has argued that the central objective of the transformative strategy that the EU follows in the southern neighbourhood should be the empowerment of citizens and the development of legitimate and accountable government. This goal incorporates some human rights (including women's rights as equal participants in all political processes) but there are other human rights (for instance, the rights of women in other areas, such as family law, or personal rights in the area of sexuality) that will not be central to this agenda. The best way for the EU to make sure these issues are not neglected is to use human rights strategies in particular countries to complement the central goals of legitimacy and accountability incorporated in the ENP Action Plans. While the two processes will rightly overlap (in areas such as freedom of expression and assembly or political equality between genders and faiths), human rights strategies would offer an opportunity to engage with governments and civil society on human rights issues that fall outside the agenda of popular empowerment and that could not appropriately be made the subject of ENP conditionality. In transition countries where the EU is concerned that the democratic process will tend to marginalise some human rights concerns, country-specific human rights strategies could emphasise the importance of EU work on these issues through transparent diplomatic processes and civil society support.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Arab pro-democracy uprisings, the EU has rightly committed itself to a new approach that gives greater attention to the support of democracy and human rights. To make this promise effective, it cannot simply revert to old approaches that it used to promote political reform in the past. In the new environment, the EU should seek to ground its support of political transformation in its southern neighbourhood in the aspirations of the people of the region. Working to promote governments that are stable, accountable and legitimate in the eyes of their citizens is the best way for the EU to respond to the opportunities and tensions presented by the southern Mediterranean as the impact of the revolutions of 2011 continues to reverberate around the region. A strategy that aims to work incrementally to support fair and inclusive political processes is the best foundation for the EU to integrate the range of its interests in the Arab world and craft a message that will resonate with local populations whose influence over their countries will only increase in the years ahead.

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