

Arab Spring: Hopes for Change and Challenges to the EU Foreign and Security Policy



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INTRODUCTION

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“Arab Spring: Hopes for Change and Challenges to the EU Foreign and Security Policy” was the fourth research project that the Centre for European and International Studies (CEIS) undertook together with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Kristian Vigenin, MEP.

Among 50 promising young specialists in the field of international relations, international economics, history and political science, we chose 20 to dive in analysis of a very current, dynamic and frankly difficult topic. The Arab Spring took many politicians and experts by surprise and researchers are faced with ever changing opinions, vague prognoses, difficult assessments and lack of reliable source data. Yet, our 20 young researchers did not fail to surprise: they showed initiative and courage to think on their own. They did their best in searching the truth while sifting contradictory data, in analyzing events from an unbiased point of view and in giving ideas to the EU and the world scene players on how to respond to the situation.

Here we proudly present some of the most important findings and conclusions of our newest group of promising young researchers.

Building Democratic societies

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Since the end of 2010 many countries in the Middle East and North Africa have been undergoing dramatic changes of political and social nature. The initial process of building democratic societies in this region represents a phenomenon that deserves to be studied.

The political and geographical scope of the so-called “Arab Spring” is significant, but we focus our attention mainly on four representative countries of the region. The aim is to identify the characteristics of transformation in countries that underwent a revolutionary change of regime by using as example Egypt and Tunisia and in countries where formal authority is willing to take evolutionary steps for democratization of society, such as Morocco and Jordan.

The main aspects of the analyses cover the structural characteristics of the democratic model - shared values, mechanisms for ensuring sovereignty of the people and the rule of law, rights and freedoms, economic and social prosperity.

Focusing on the demands that were stated during the protests and led to policy changes will allow us to see which human and civil rights are a priority for these communities.

The reasons that led to political changes in the Middle East and North Africa were economic, social and political. According to the declaration of protesters from the “Tahrir” square the aim of the protests was a change of political regime to guarantee all citizens freedom, dignity and social justice.

Moreover, this study aims to examine two particular “patterns” of democracy - “top to bottom” (Morocco and Jordan) and “bottom up” (Tunisia and Egypt). The study points out the main political actors which brought about the democratic change and their vision of democracy, but which might differ from the Eu-

ropean ideas and even from the vision of these subjects in the various countries studied.

Revolutionary movements in Tunisia and Egypt have completely secular nature. However as a result of many years of repression against the opposition the new Islamic parties (as they prefer to call themselves) are the most well organized and able to quickly mobilize support among the population. This ability brought them victory in elections in Tunisia and in Egypt, and Morocco. The role of Islamic parties in Morocco and Jordan has also increased notably. In both countries however Islamist parties - the Islamic Action Front (Jordan) and the Party for Justice and Development (Morocco) and the people recognize the authority and legitimacy of the royal family. Demands of protesters and reforms are not directed against the monarchy and the ruling monarchs and that gives the King a leading role in carrying out of reforms.

The active participation of citizens in public and political life is a key ingredient in the recipe for building a functioning democracy. Organizing the population in various forms of civil structures (NGOs, etc.) ensures the maintenance of the vitality of the democratic system, including shared values and effective working institutions and procedures.

Civil society in the Arab world is based on variety of social relations, clan, tribal, familial and religious ties. In the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, ethnic diversity and even confessional heterogeneity create tangible obstacles to achieve political consensus and cooperation. Legal basis and the government's tolerance towards civil society's structure are essential for the civil society's stability. In Egypt and Tunisia the legal framework allows strict filtering of NGOs provided opportunities for the government to interfere in civil societies in the same way as before the political changes of 2011. The implementation of such practices should be discontinued. In comparison, Jordan and Morocco provide more favorable laws for maintaining the plurality of civic associations.

In recent years, civil society in Arab world has overcome the existing barriers and has demonstrated growing maturity. The new regimes will have to prove their readiness to meet the needs of the civil society through the liberalization of laws and practices that will guarantee citizens' participation as a corrective power.

Lack of democracy allows for unregulated economy to thrive. It leads to unclear distribution of income and therefore to public discontent.

Corruption is one of the typical problems of countries in transition. Its appearance in societies where democracy is still a distant concept is significant. According to Corruption Perceptions Index 2011 most countries in the Arab region show above average results. The culture of nepotism, corruption and patronage is deeply prevalent in everyday life in these countries, and existing anti-corruption measures have little effect.

Corrupt oligarchic elite groups are widespread in the Arab world. Respect, influence and power available to these groups are larger than the ones organized crime enjoys.

In the Arab region, the ordinary citizen faces the basic problem of survival. Security of citizens and guarantee their right to life are in question under the heterogeneous government regimes and revolutionary sentiment among Arab societies.

Establishment of new, well-functioning structures begins with overcoming major problems - corruption and organized crime, the existence of gray and black economy. It is necessary that significant resources are devoted to education of future generations.

Establishment of rules, their observance and sanctions for non-compliance - this is the way to solve existing problems and establishing a good governance in Arab countries.

This analysis does not claim to be in depth research. It puts forward a lot of questions to which we have yet to find their answers. This is the challenge for any researcher of na-

tional, international and geopolitical processes. Undoubtedly, the analysis is constructed by witnesses to the processes. This is an interesting part of its character, since the soil on which it is based, is still fragile, especially in view of the fact that the Arab world has yet to develop democratic political systems and societies.

Economic stability and social prosperity: Challenges to the EU foreign policy

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The “Arab spring” evoked a major wave of civic riots in North Africa, whose roots could be found in the decades of discrepancy between the social economic development and the inability of the political system to meet society’s expectations for prosperity and equality of civil and political rights.

The developments in Middle East and North Africa in 2010 demonstrated that the EU foreign policy and the Union itself confronts one of the major challenges concerning the overall concept for the future role of the European union in this region and in particular how the bilateral relations with the Arab governments should be shaped from now on so that the EU can establish itself as constructive partner with transparent policy. It is quite obvious that the EU should be more active in the political processes in North African countries especially in the field of establishing sustainable economies and economic structures as a whole. If we take for granted that Europe has large traditions in developing political systems and democratic societies, the question whether Europe is stable enough to serve as a model for the Arabic states is raised. It is obvious that European political and social systems are incompatible with the harmony and the chaos of the Islamic governments. This is a collision between two entirely different worlds, which however does not necessarily provoke conflicts, but could lead to incomprehension of the nature of the other civilization.

In this respect, due to various reasons EU should not try to artificially catalyze the processes of change of those societies. The Arab revolutions demand that the EU put in practice a new approach resulting in better integration and

reforms. The economic development measures as well as the significant achievements in the social sector do not lead to a resolution of crucial problems such as the youth unemployment and competitiveness of the small and medium-sized enterprises in most of the North African countries. The other main obstacle for the economic development of most of the Arab countries is the political corruption and bureaucracy which provoked the young people to protest against the status quo. The economic progress of North African countries depends mostly on energy resources and their capacity. However, that tendency has positive as well as negative influence on the process of development of domestic economies and especially on establishing small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the main generator of establishing middle class in any society. The research showed that the social prosperity in those countries depends on several factors such as: creation of stable civil society, high level of education standards, provision of modern and competent health services and protection of human rights and freedoms. EU as one of the main political factors in the region should concentrate its foreign policy on several issues that will be beneficial for the creation of good relations with the economies of the Arab states. The first factor is the potential of the EU to provide assistance in the creation of stable democratic system and laying down the foundation of civil society, nongovernmental organizations and free media, which are seen as the main precondition for establishing democratic states. Similarly, the modernization of the society system requires undertaking of specific measures, which sometimes are very costly. To avoid that risk, it is necessary to have economic environment that establishes better conditions and opportunities for developing economic and trade relations with the European countries. The enhancement of economic cooperation itself will also be one of the main generators for strengthening the neighborhood policy of EU. In order to overcome the economic and demographic diversification in the Middle East

and North African regions investments should be made in appropriate infrastructure, development of the private sector, creation of new jobs in the agricultural and industry in order to achieve sustainable economic growth and competitiveness of the domestic economies. To create vibrant economic environment, the Arab states should take measures to increase the education quality in order to be in line with the requirements of the labor market. Building administrative capacity is also important element for providing better services in the public sector. However, EU's assistance to the Arab states needs to be balanced and proportional as well as committed to the results achieved. Only consistent, focused, but also friendly foreign policy of the EU could guarantee the establishment of long term relations between the Union and the governments in the region.

In conclusion, it must be noted that as a whole "the Arab spring" brought about both risks for the EU neighborhood policy and opportunities for economic cooperation and political partnership.

European neighborhood policy - a new attitude towards the “Southern neighbors”

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The events of the “Arab Spring” changed EU policy in the region of North Africa and the Middle East. The revolutions, which began in late 2010 and continue today were unexpected for the Union, and they influenced the overall EU policy in the region by bringing a new element in the differentiated EU approach to the countries participating in the Council of the Mediterranean. This approach is applied both in the cooperation between the EU and countries from the Council of the Mediterranean “, and to the new categories of participants in the dialogue with the Union.

So far, programs, tools and measures that EU used to maintain the relations with North Africa and Middle East countries were based mostly on the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). The ENP aimed to strengthen and reinforce the so-called “Barcelona process” at bilateral level, and since the establishment of the process each country has signed an Action Plan that reflects its specific needs.

In order to analyze EU policy towards its Southern neighbours, the research analyzes the political, economic, security, cultural, and social dimensions.

The political dimension of EU relations with countries in the Mediterranean region is expressed in the new attitude to these states by the Union. The “Arab Spring” led to the revision of the ENP regarding the Southern neighbors - a policy instrument with which the Union will have to meet the new challenges in the region.

The new EU approach - “Partnership for democracy and shared prosperity” is a step towards a fundamental change in relations between the Union and its partners that commit

to carrying out specific measurable reforms. This is a motivational approach, based on differentiation (the “more for more” rule). More precisely it means more EU assistance for various activities of the partners which implement the more reforms at a greater pace.

The existing partnership should be further supported by strengthened political dialogue. EU must accelerate the bilateral political dialogue at all levels as soon as local conditions allow, and the emphasis of this process must be placed on human rights and political accountability.

From the perspective of the trade and economic relations between the EU and the countries of North Africa and the Middle East, the “Arab Spring” process altered the established status quo. Here we must pay further attention to the economic dimension of the cooperation between EU and Mediterranean countries in the framework of the “Barcelona process”. But unfortunately, currently the expectations of building a common free trade area between the EU and North Africa and Middle East countries are still not implemented, and at that moment this is reported as a major weakness of the “Barcelona Process”. Since 2004 some initiatives in the European Neighborhood Policy existed that can be defined as resumption in the relations between the Union and the NA and ME countries particularly in the economic sphere. The improved partnership includes activities aimed at the creation of a competitive market and at such areas as social policy, healthcare, consumer protection, commercial law, technology, tourism and etc.

The other important dimension in the new EU attitude to the countries from the Mediterranean region is related to the security field. There are three major areas in this dimension concerning the European Union. These areas are energy security, migration issues and countering international terrorism. With regards to energy security, so far there have been no concerted efforts for establishment of coherent relations between the Union and its Southern neighbors

on energy issues. Instead the energy relations are developed on bilateral basis between EU Member States and Arab countries. Therefore, the efforts towards a common approach aimed at establishment of an Energy Union in the Mediterranean should be further strengthened. Migration issues are deeply related to the development policies. So far, despite the ongoing discussions, EU has failed to adopt a viable common strategy for combating illegal migration. The joint fight against terrorism is also encountering problems: EU and each partner state have adopted a bilateral action plan in this field but these plans have had limited results until now. To step up the fight against terrorism, the EU should adopt better monitoring on counter terrorism policies, improve dialogue with partners and have a more efficient strategy on tackling root causes for terrorism.

The “Arab spring” events also changed the attitude of the Union towards North Africa and Middle East countries in terms of the cultural and social interaction between the two regions. The revolutions were seen as an opportunity for strengthening these relations by providing more exchange programs for scholars and students, financing for social programs in the region, etc.

The European strategic response to the “Arab Spring” came on March 8, 2011 in the Joint message by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and by the European Commission, which announced the perspectives for partnership for democracy and shared prosperity in the Southern Mediterranean region. As regard to the new categories of participants in this dialogue, the document indicates that the Union’s long-term approach is to “take into account not only the requests for assistance received from partner governments, but also the demands of civil society.” This position was confirmed at a meeting of the Committee of the Regions on “Review of the European Neighborhood Policy”.

The “Arab spring” process changed significantly all sta-

tus quo relations between the European Union in his Southern partners in every dimension and area. The Union has to reconsider its attitude towards these countries through more consistent, coherent and beneficial interaction, aimed at increasing regional cooperation and economic development in the region of North Africa and Middle East.

The World – an Observer or a Participant?

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In 2011 the world has witnessed one of the biggest revolution waves in recent history. The states from the Arab region, until then categorized with political stability in terms of internal power and leadership, have been reshaped by thrive for change. These unpredicted and surprising events named Arab Spring affected not only the political framework of the region but also the configuration of world politics. The international community was also surprised and responded differently to it in every single Arab state where various international interests mix and interconnect with each other.

This paper is an attempt to analyze the ways and means the international community responded to the uprisings in the Arab world by identifying the world's foreign policy interests in each state and to give an answer why the international community reacted the way it did and how did this affect the foreign policy interests of the main world powers and the future development of the region.

The revolutionary process of the Arab spring did not start simultaneously. The outbreak of the events was in Tunisia where driven by the democratic aspirations of the civil society protests began against Tunisian leader Ben Ali. Even though the United States and the countries from the European Union have supported Ben Ali's regime in Tunisia in the past, the Western states proclaimed their favour for change in the region. In his yearly State of the Union speech president Obama expressed his hope that "the Tunisian example would be followed by other states in the region"¹.

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/26/state-of-the-union-transcript_n_814336.html

The events in Tunisia were quickly followed by massive civil protests in Egypt against leader Hosni Mubarak. These protests resonated across the world making the international community more involved, bearing in mind the strategic nature of Egypt for the peace in the Middle East. Nevertheless the world did not actively participate in the events in both countries - Tunisia and Egypt but merely observed them.

This was not the case in another country from the Arab spring uprising – Libya where leader Muamar Ghadafi has been ruling for more than 40 years. The Libyan case was on the agenda of the United Nations, whose resolutions 1970 and 1973 gave way for the active participation of the military with France leading the other Western states in the initiative. After several months of civil war and bombings over Libya, Ghadafi's regime fell. Even though the world stood united in its actions in Libya, the conflict showed where each country stood while fighting for its interests in the region.

The revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya captured the attention of the international community and world media. But in some of the states from the Arab region this was not the case. Protests in Yemen, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia were not in the focus of world politics and media because these three countries are areas where, due to their strategic location and resources, the strong interests of USA, Saudi Arabia and Iran collide and the outcome is yet to be decided.

A group of countries can be specified in the framework of the Arab spring: Morocco, Algeria, Sudan, Jordan, Iraq and Oman. These countries were affected by the events of the Arab spring but their leaders managed to contain the social uprisings through a combination of repressions and reforms. In these states, the international community took the role of an observer, waiting to see how events there would unfold. Partly because of the reforms but also because of the world's unwillingness to see drastic changes which would cause losing its influence in those states, the status quo there had been preserved, for now.

While most of the conflicts in the latter mentioned states are now in a state of political transition there is still one country that is part of the Arab spring uprisings where the status quo is not yet changed. The case of Syria is the latest challenge before the international community. Despite the similarity of the conflict there with the one in Libya, the world's reaction to the events in Syria is different. The state is an important factor in the Middle East because of its close ties with Hamas and Hezbollah and also Russia, which has a military base in Syria. The protests in the country against President Assad continue but the international community has not been able to find common grounds and tackle the problems there. After seeing how the events in Libya unfolded, some of the world powers are no prepared to take similar steps in Syria. Russia and China have vetoed all UN resolution projects that would lead to foreign involvement of any kind in the country and the events there are at a standstill.

A big part of international relations analysts were surprised that the Arab spring uprisings have transferred to Syria. The Syrian case became a diplomatic battleground for the world powers who see Syria as a cornerstone, vital for their interests and future political influence over the whole Arab region.

The Arab spring has reshaped the North African and Middle Eastern states, but the revolutionary process is not yet finished. The international community has reacted differently in every case of the uprisings, depending on their national interests. The balance of power in the region has not yet been established but it became clear that the Arab states could be categorized as battle arena of the world powers for future influence and control over the strategic resources and economic goods of the area.

