

Sub-theme 3

The contribution of European and national institutions to transitions in Northern Africa: towards the creation of a “nation support strategy”?

1. Introduction

a. The dynamic key factors of the upheavals in the Arab countries

There is today a large consensus around the deep and long-building trends that led to the stunning changes we have seen in the Arab world in the past two years.

The first is demographic. More than a half of the population in the Region is under 30, healthier and better educated than any generation before them, but facing a huge gap between their aspirations and the responses they can get from the reality around them, as a result of economic stagnation, another crucial long term trend. Among other important reasons to give rise to the situation were authoritarianism of the political regimes, along with corruption, and the ubiquitous role played by both new and old media, bringing the access to different realities and the comparison with the one in which they lived.

The current crisis in the Arab countries is not just the result of the sum of autonomous factors but grounded in the rise of complexity, interdependence and unpredictability.

b. The surprise effect of the Arab spring

At the beginning, the turmoil caught everyone by surprise.

The first question that really deserves to be answered is simply why and the reason for that lies in its consequences to design any consistent and effective Nation Support Strategy.

Why surprise tends to be our permanent condition and why are we unable to foresee the silent risks in our political analyses?

Maybe the answer is a very linear one and simply lies in the suppression of volatility from the field of observation, in the name of stability that provides policy makers with a predictable picture, even if an artificial one, upon which is easier to design any strategy.

However, artificially eradicating volatility in assessing a complex system such as a social and a political one, with its ups and downs, has negative effects, the most prominent one being the inability to prevent and deal with massive blowups, tending to produce undesirable outcomes and to bring long periods of instability. The confidence in stability – which time will prove was based on a naïve analysis - blinds the consideration of past variations that, despite their importance, were simply ignored.

Specifically In the case of the Arab Spring, the so-called “Islamist Dilemma” somehow paralyzed, for decades, any serious attempt from Europe or USA to influence the leaders of those countries to implement some reforms. The argument was that “smoothing” those political regimes risked bringing islamists to power.

c. Lessons learned to design and implement a nation support strategy

Leaving aside the attempt to engineer the world and to constrain reality into a framework that doesn't fit the dynamic of social and political systems is a key orientation to design any action strategy, should it be a political, financial, economic or social one.

As a result, it's mandatory to have a comprehensive and deep knowledge of the reality where the implementation of such a strategy is intended to take place, considering its risks and clearly defining a strong risk management approach, closely related to the achievement of results. One principle of paramount importance is that the risks inherent in engagement in problematic contexts are largely outweighed by the risks not to be involved.

Another important issue is of course coordination between many institutional actors and different policy spheres supporting progress towards greater coherence and better results.

In the case of the Southern Mediterranean Countries, and despite the differences between them, the effects of the uprisings were felt and continue to be felt in a wide range of dimensions, such as the political, the economic, the social and the security one, thus leading to the importance of adopting a holistic and systemic approach, oriented to a "transitional" situation. This shared starting point regarding the overall strategy should not exclude the need to have a country by country based approach, as well as regional cooperation through the existing instruments/forums (namely UFM and 5+5 Dialogue) as an additional catalyst for the development of projects in different areas, for an enhanced political dialogue and for a closer cooperation and a greater integration in the Region.

2. The political dimension

The political dimension is a crucial one to be addressed by any support strategy, as far as a minimum level of political stability is required to implement any structural reform.

In the case of the Southern Mediterranean countries, processes of political reform are undergoing and public expectations are high regarding namely the participation in public life, accountability, access to information, freedom of expression, eradication of corruption and access to justice.

In this context, some of the biggest challenges are to ensure a realistic level of ownership (recognizing that full implementation of the Paris principles takes time...) and that institutions are strong enough to implement the reforms adopted by the politicians. This requires a focus on institutional building, prior to the commencement of any reforming process.

In addition, the recourse to a wide range of non-institutional players - bottom up approach - can play an important role and contribute to a greater involvement of civil society which, as we know, is eager to participate in the course of public life.

But significant political reforms, especially those intending to build and consolidate democracy, establish the rule of law and the respect for human rights and civil liberties simply cannot produce effects overnight. So, continuous and patient support is a key orientation in implementing any cooperation program in this field.

Several actors from international organizations, national governments and NGO's are on the ground, leading cooperation programs at national and/or regional level, but the most prominent among them is undoubtedly the European Union. Its response to the changes in the Arab World was adopted in 2011 as a "A Partnership for democracy and shared prosperity", in the framework of European Neighbourhood Policy, with a large scope - human rights and democracy, inclusive economic development, trade and investment, migration, mobility and security - with an incentive-based approach- "more for more"- mobilizing different financial instruments and funding other international organizations, such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, to implement concrete projects. As mentioned above, at the

regional level, Union for the Mediterranean can play an important role, as a unique forum of 43 members.

Regarding the European Union, political support to the transformations in the Region is constantly voiced by its different institutions, underlining their commitment to developing partnerships with those Southern Mediterranean countries, based on a differentiation, mutual accountability and the adherence to universal values.

Some progress has been made in the implementation of reforms planned in the “Partnership for democracy and shared prosperity” concerning democratic participation and human rights protection. Besides the support to ensure free and fair elections, the independence of the judiciary, prison conditions and torture, fight against corruption, which results are still modest, the EU is using new channels for dialogue, provided by the improved dynamism of political parties and civil society.

In the new generation of Action Plans (country support wide scope cooperation agreements), the European Commission includes detailed provisions on democracy, human rights and good governance that clearly set the conditionality “more for more”.

Another important asset of the European Union is the European External Action Service (EEAS). Through its delegations on the ground, it’s easier to follow and monitor the implementation of cooperation programs, constantly assessing their adequacy and doing the needed political and diplomatic work on a daily basis.

Regarding the Southern Mediterranean countries, the European Union cooperation policy is a comprehensive one, taking into account the different dimensions requiring reforms, mobilizing actors and financial tools, trying to avoid duplications and overlapping with other players. Seen as reliable partner, the EU must be aware that it takes time, work and money to get results. A bilateral policy (country to country) will never be enough to carry out the needed efforts, even if they could complement EU programs or explore synergies. In this particular, coordination is also welcome, not only to avoid duplication, but to ensure the coherent approach.

3. The economic dimension

The ongoing initiatives for economic cooperation between Mediterranean EU MS and North African countries lights up a complex but well designed joint path, quite clear on how the burden should be shared, but leading to advantages and profits for both shores of the Mediterranean. Partnership and cooperation started well before 2011 spring, but results have not met the expectations yet. Some basic requirements are still needed:

- A more simple and friendly environment for enterprises: enabling business , for example by simplifying the procedures, reducing registration costs and delays, setting on line public services and, especially for SMEs, lowering the minimal capital requirement;
- A solid and dynamic banking and financing system, closely supporting companies presenting high growth potential and trustable business objectives and strategies. Banks should be able to offer tailor-made products especially to SMEs, while public authorities should favor the alignment of interests between banks and enterprises. Moreover, taxation systems should be revised, introducing, for example, stronger fiscal incentives for innovation and training investments;
- Education and training for entrepreneurship;
- A transportation network embracing the whole region, according with multimodal concept, able to keep permanently connected the Atlantic side with the Mediterranean coastline and the internal areas through few hub points,

- Simple but effective measures concerning the environment protection and the sustainability of economic development like promotion of cleaner production technologies, waste water treatment and waste recycling.

Acquiring the above mentioned conditions could help achieving the following objectives:

- The opening of the internal borders and the establishment of one free trade area including EU and North Africa;
- The strengthening of partnerships and networks between EU MS and North African countries, thus facilitating information and know-how sharing and, therefore, the possibility of better grasping market opportunities, promoting cooperation between business, R&D and high education sectors. This could also create the conditions for further development of industrial clusters;
- The diversification of industrial fabric, especially in Algeria and Libya (major regional hydrocarbon exporters), leading to the expansion of the internal market and the improvement of investment opportunities;
- The economic integration of macro-areas through the identification and the development of complementarities among the North African economies, allowing a higher competitiveness level;
- The implementation of market access strategy through the Internet for import/export activities;
- The promotion of mechanisms able to encourage technology transfer and to attract investments in the field of energy efficiency, renewable energy and the related infrastructures.

4. The security dimension

The “Arab Spring” has brought new security dynamics and an unstable transition to new political regimes for which there’s no effective strategic framework to deal with.

The whole Mediterranean, and in particular North Africa, is an immediate challenge for European security. With regard to the Maghreb, conflict and instability remains significant calling for further constructive dialogue and security cooperation. Tunisia remains volatile and to be closely monitored. Libya needs to be encouraged to strengthen its institutions and ease political, economic and territorial tensions. In Morocco and Algeria some degree of uncertainty remains.

The EU has tried to create a Euro-Mediterranean area of peace, security and prosperity through several multi-sector cooperation initiatives within an enlarged security concept. There’s still a need for more South-South cooperation, for which UMA may be a useful forum. Yet, coordination of North-South and South-South efforts should be encouraged.

a. The current scenario

When considering security cooperation in the Mediterranean, several issues arise:

- The Mediterranean heterogeneity and differences between the north/south and east/west are the most prominent obstacle for successful cooperation;
- The military asymmetry between the north and the south. Europe’s armed forces are strong compared to North Africa countries, which don’t have a developed armaments industry, adequate logistics or strategic systems.

- The existing armed forces' disproportion and the stress on radical Islam, contribute to a turbulent, heterogeneous, non-integrated Mediterranean;
- Unstable relations in a context of interdependence between the two Mediterranean shores, urging for a deeper process of institutionalization and confidence-building measures;
 - Latent conflicts and tensions like in the Western Sahara or the cold Moroccan-Algerian relations now coexist with new ones stemming from the "Arab Spring": Syria, Libya, and transitions in Egypt or Tunisia. Instability in the Sahel, the Mali war, the Mauritania and Libyan crisis have encouraged illicit activities related to the trafficking of weapons, persons or drugs, affecting the regional security situation;
 - The different national security and defense views amongst the North Africa nations contribute to a mutual confidence gap, precluding regional security integration;
 - The lack of north-south confidence makes the deployment of European military forces (e.g. EUROMARFOR and Spain-Italian Amphibian Forces-SIAF) to be negatively perceived;
 - Apparently, non-Mediterranean European countries interest in the region matters is not significant;
 - The absence of southern regional organizations and the ineffectiveness of organizations that could contribute for improving dialogue amongst Arab countries.;
 - Weaken institutions following the "Arab Spring" in the field of security and information Services.

b. Perspectives

- Encourage global North-South or South-South regional initiatives that promote cohesion, stability, and economic development. Security should be achieved through a joint understanding on the economic, political and social parameters of development among the countries in the region.
- Increase cooperation to strengthen security institutions in southern countries by adopting practical measures: establish a proper oversight and monitoring of the security sector (e.g. for Tunisia, a presidential committee for security sector reform might be created); an independent ombudsman, access by and collaboration with UN specific agencies; ensure oversight training for MPs; cleanse the ministry of Interior and Public Prosecutor's Office of anti-reforms high rank officials while preserving medium-ranks unless they are involved in torture, murder, extra-judicial killings and other major crimes; restructure and downsize the Ministry of Interior; change the promotion criteria in the Interior Ministry and Information services; draft a new police Law and approve a freedom of information law.
- The northern countries defense agenda should not be exclusively threat driven focusing on the Southern neighbors and should center on a commitment to political and economical transitions in North Africa and on improving mutual knowledge and confidence.
- Current Euro-Mediterranean institutions should be revisited based on the renewed political will of all stakeholders, with a special emphasis on the demands and needs of local actors.
- The successful example of the EU in the field of political and economic cooperation, conflict prevention and rejection of violence, due to its diplomatic,

cultural, media, political and economic applications may contribute to a roadmap for the transitional periods.

- Need to rebuild a common shared strategy for the Mediterranean, avoiding the so-called "dialogue fatigue" and along the principles of cooperative security.
- Foster Synergies and strengthen Institutional Capacities for Mediation in the Mediterranean. An example of this cooperation is the recently created Spanish-Moroccan Mediation Initiative for the Region, to respond to crises at an early stage with greater effect, harnessing the potential of mediation in inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, at a national, regional and global level. It can also create synergies with other powerful initiatives in this field as, on the one hand the Alliance of Civilizations, generalizing education in conflict prevention and resolution to include all age groups, or on the other hand the Vienna Centre for Inter-religious dialogue, under the auspices of HM King of Saudi Arabia and the co-sponsorship of Austria and Spain.
- Through the synergy of military and civilian forces, the region must progress and carry out a joint "soft security" exercise of peace-keeping, crisis management and humanitarian operations. It may be useful to forge a consensus on civil security activities, taking into account that "hard security" cooperation in operations will require military efforts and capabilities that not all countries would be able to grant.
- The fight against terrorism should be an important objective of a security and defense strategy for the region. The Arab Spring has created the conditions for renewed opportunities for terrorist groups, calling for greater cooperation amongst the Mediterranean countries and requiring increased budgetary efforts. Closer cooperation and information sharing would be needed, which would be affected by the growing southern instability and the emergence of regimes not capable of controlling this threat or ready to collaborate in this field.
- It might be useful to allow the southern neighbors to be partly associated to European security frameworks as a confidence-building measure.
- The EU and NATO Mediterranean Dialogues regarding security issues are a useful instrument to decrease arms competition or reduce it to the defense needs of each country.
- Assured mutual security should be a guiding cooperation principle. However, there's a need for less volatile and unstable transition processes in North Africa.

5. The social / civil society dimension

The current North Africa countries situation is mainly due to social structural issues and regime inability to manage them and conduct change. Some of the risks and challenges are associated with economic imbalances, deepened by the post-Arab Spring weakening of the state; rapid urbanisation; population growth, high unemployment and illiteracy rates; technological development leading to people's easier and quicker access to information and to subsequent government accountability; and the religious factor, in which Islam has to be accommodated.

As change was mainly carried out by the civil society, it should be stressed as an important element of the Arab revolutions and a driver of change for the post-Arab Springs. Thus, supporting the emerging democracies in the establishment of adequate institutions is of paramount importance. A democratic political culture requires a strong and thriving civil society and an independent media, to ensure that all citizens are well informed about the actions and performance of their governing political bodies.

An emerging strong civil society promotes civic engagement; good practices; political participation and structured policy-making; tolerance; fighting against corruption; empowerment of the women; freedom of the media; respect for human rights; a larger role for trade unions and associations; and greater governmental inclusiveness, accountability, transparency and improved governance.

In this context, the EU is already sustaining public administration reform and the fight against corruption, and has called for reinforced support to civil society organizations, including through a “*Civil Society Neighbourhood Facility*”, with a view to develop their capacity and increased ability to monitor reform and participate effectively in policy dialogues. The creation of a “*Euro-Mediterranean Social Dialogue Forum*”, to include social partners as trade unions and employers, has also been encouraged. Bilateral cooperation may comprise the above mentioned areas which contribute to reinforce civil society.

Focus may also be put in supporting organizations that help young people and women, and promote human rights, social inclusion, and the development of an independent media contributing to democracy and good governance, thus enhancing political and social dialogue and the system of checks and balances at the local, regional and national levels.

Fighting gender discrimination and promoting women’s rights will facilitate their political empowerment and help strengthen civil society and institutions.

New opportunities for exchanges and people-to-people contacts may also be emphasized between the two Mediterranean shores, especially among the youth, at the university, vocational education and training levels. Education and training partnerships for elites (public management, finance, military, new technologies including information management and social networks...) can also be fostered with the involvement of the EU private sector and national development agencies.

Cooperation on the information society technologies and instruments such as mobile phones, the internet and the new social media should be enhanced in order to assist civil society organisations and the citizens in the promotion of a public opinion, freedom of expression and democratisation.

Other social aspects like urban issues may be addressed through an integrated approach that addresses global services (transport, water, energy, health, and education), infrastructure planning, and environmental friendly measures.

6. Conclusions / Recommendations

a. Political dimension

- The eradication of volatility in assessing a complex system such as a social and a political one has negative effects, the most important being the inability to prevent and deal with massive blowups.
- A comprehensive and deep knowledge of the reality concerned by a nation support strategy is required, together with the definition of a strong risk management approach.
- Political dimension is a crucial one, as far as a minimum level of political stability is required to implement any structural reform.
- A greater involvement of civil society is needed to improve ownership and put additional pressure on the implementation of political reforms.
- The European Union should be aware that it takes time, work and money to get results in the Region.

- Coordination among different cooperation policies is needed to avoid threatening a coherent approach to the reforms to be carried out in the countries of Southern Mediterranean.

b. Economic dimension

- The economic development of the south shore of the Mediterranean has proven to be instrumental in supporting stabilization in the Region.
- The establishment of a free trade area between European Union and the Mediterranean countries can have a key role in promoting economic mutual benefits.
- A more simple and friendly environment for enterprises is needed for enabling business, especially for SMEs.
- A dynamic banking and financial system are required to carry out the support of the companies presenting growth potential and trustable business objectives and strategies.
- A transportation network (multimodal concept) embracing the whole Region is crucial to ensure the connections both between the two shores of the Mediterranean and with the Atlantic.
- Information and know-how sharing are important for better grasping market opportunities and for cooperation between business, R&D and education.

c. Security dimension

- Promote global regional initiatives North-South or South-South in order to support stability, cohesion, and economic development in the area.
- Increase cooperation to strengthen security institutions in the southern countries.
- The northern Mediterranean defense agenda should be oriented to the development and promotion of stability through a clear commitment to political and economical transitions in the south.
- A renewed shared strategy for the Mediterranean should avoid the so-called "dialogue fatigue".
- Institutional Capacities for Mediation in the Mediterranean should be strengthened and explore mutual synergies.
- Use military and civilian instruments to carry out a large scope security concept including the joint "soft security" dimension.
- The fight against terrorism should be an important objective for a security and defense strategy for the region.
- Associate the European security and defense frameworks to the southern countries as a confidence-building measure between the two shores of the Mediterranean.
- The EU and NATO security dialogue with Mediterranean countries may be a useful instrument to decrease the arms competition in the region.
- Guaranteed mutual security should be a guiding principle for mutual cooperation.

d. Social dimension

- Supporting a strong civil society is of paramount importance for a post-Arab Springs nation support strategy.

- A strong civil society promotes political participation; tolerance and human rights; freedom of the media; fighting against corruption; and greater governmental inclusiveness, accountability, transparency and improved governance.
- Multilateral and bilateral cooperation with North Africa countries should include initiatives that reinforce these aspects, notably:
 - ✓ The creation of a “*Euro-Mediterranean Social Dialogue Forum*”, to include social partners as trade unions and employers;
 - ✓ Support for organizations that help young people and women, promote human rights, social inclusion, and the development of an independent media;
 - ✓ Fighting gender discrimination and promoting women’s rights;
 - ✓ Exchanges and people-to-people contacts especially among the youth, at the university, vocational education and training levels, as well as education and training partnerships for elites;
 - ✓ Assist civil society organisations and the citizens on the information society technologies and instruments for the promotion of an effective public opinion, freedom of expression and democratisation.