

July 2012

## About this Series

Op-Med is an ongoing series of opinion pieces on topical issues in Mediterranean politics from a transatlantic perspective. The series brings together European, North American, and southern Mediterranean experts through the German Marshall Fund–Istituto Affari Internazionali strategic partnership. The series examines key questions surrounding the political, societal, and economic evolution of specific Mediterranean countries as well as the broader regional and international dynamics at play in the Mediterranean region as a whole.

## Democracy Building since the Arab Spring: In Need of “Diversification”

by Daniela Huber

Since December 2010, people power revolutions have swept across European Union (EU) partner countries in the Mediterranean neighborhood. The Arab Spring disproved the idea of “Arab exceptionalism” and reenergized the West’s democracy-promotion agenda. The EU launched the SPRING program (Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth) and its revised European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) focusing on three incentives: money, markets, and mobility.

These are only the first steps in support of democratic reform. But in their present form, they are designed for the Mediterranean region as a whole and do not take into account the diverse pathways that the Arab Spring has taken in the partner countries, as well as the different challenges they are facing now. To contrast two extremes, a socially homogeneous country like Tunisia, which seems to be embarked on transition to democracy and holds an economic frontrunner position, can benefit from a much more ambitious democracy-building program than Libya, which has gone through a civil war and needs to engage in state-building first. In order to seize the moment and promote democracy

successfully, the EU needs to factor in the diverse needs of each partner country and respond with tailor-made strategies.

### Diverse Pathways of the Arab Spring

Autocratic regimes have responded in various ways to the protest movements. Three pathways of the Arab Spring can roughly be discerned: regime change, regime adaption, and repression followed by civil war. The most consistent regime change has taken place in Tunisia with former President Ben Ali ousted, elections for a constitutional assembly held, and civic freedoms strengthened. In Egypt, in contrast, regime change has been partly blocked, since the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has effectively assumed power, which it should now partially transfer to the newly elected President Mohammed Morsi. Civic freedoms in Egypt remain limited and in June, the freely elected parliament was dissolved. At the same time, the strength of continuing protest in Egypt remains remarkable.

Most political authorities have escaped regime change through a mix of concessions and repression. On one side of the spectrum is Morocco,

which has opted more for concessions and passed a new constitution transferring powers to the prime minister and parliament, except in the area of security. Similar reforms have been promised by Jordan's King Abdullah who so far has not followed through. In Algeria, protests were violently suppressed. Despite the lifting of the emergency law and the ban on the establishment of new parties, civic and political freedoms remain strictly limited and power still rests in the hands of President Bouteflika's ruling coalition and the security forces.

Libya and Syria are the third group of states. Both were among the most repressive autocracies before the Arab Spring, and their people reacted with civil war. Since the internationally enforced regime change in Libya, politics have been dominated by the National Transitional Council and some civic freedoms such as freedom of the press or assembly have improved.

This short overview can hardly do justice to the complex trajectories of the Arab Spring, but it serves to show that the reaction of the ruling elites to the protest movements differ substantially. The EU and the United States can manipulate the incentive structure of these political actors through a coordinated conditionality strategy that takes the diverse trajectories into account. For progressive states that are embarking on transition, concrete benchmarks and rewards need to be set up to support and encourage reform. In countries where regimes have reacted with minor concessions and repression, listening to the protest movements and civil society is key to giving more power to their voice. The EU and United States can remind political elites of their demands, and if the response is violence, this should be answered with negative conditionality such as aid cuts.

### Diverse Challenges in Arab Spring Countries

Besides the different pathways of the Arab Spring, which necessitate a diversified conditionality strategy, these countries also face different structural challenges regarding potential transitions to democracy, which require a diversified strategy of capacity building. Four areas are crucial in this respect: past and present conflicts, statehood, economic conditions, and political pluralism.

Firstly, many countries in the region suffer(ed) from internal conflicts like Algeria, Lebanon, Libya, and now Syria, or are prone to conflicts due to domestic fissures as in

Jordan. A strategy of democracy promotion needs to take societal divisions into account, so that democratization does not sharpen, but alleviates them. Thus, before proceeding with elections, it is advisable for all factions to reach an agreement on the rules of the game. Early elections, as research has shown, can sharpen internal conflict.<sup>1</sup> Also, building up civil society is important in order to bridge internal cleavages.

Before proceeding with elections, it is advisable for all factions to reach an agreement on the rules of the game. Early elections can sharpen internal conflict.

Secondly, many states in the region are struggling with statehood issues. Libya needs to engage in state-building; the Palestinians are seeking to achieve internationally recognized statehood; and Lebanon has limited statehood in some areas. This brings up a long-standing debate on the sequencing of state building and democratization. In an influential article, Thomas Carothers has argued that as soon as minimal functional capacity exists, democratization should come in.<sup>2</sup> Another important issue regarding state capacity in the region is corruption. According to Transparency International, all countries suffer from medium-high (Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco) or high levels of corruption (Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Libya). Also in this case, a key strategy of U.S. and EU democracy-building should be to foster civil society to hold institutions accountable.

Thirdly, regarding economic structures, some states such as Algeria or Libya own concentrated sources of national

1 B. Reilly, "Elections in Post-Conflict Scenarios: Constraints and Dangers," *International Peacekeeping* 9, No. 2 (2002): 118-139; R. Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*, Cambridge University Press, 2004; L. Diamond, "Promoting Democracy in Post-Conflict and Failed States. Lessons and Challenges," *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 2, No. 2 (2006): 93-116.

2 T. Carothers, "The Sequencing Fallacy," *Journal of Democracy* 18, No. 1 (January 2007): 18-20.

## Op-Med

wealth through oil and gas. Such revenues have usually inhibited democratization, notably because external actors are more dependent on such states and exhibit less pressure on them. The Arab Spring nations also share many economic similarities. A trigger of the Arab Spring has been high youth unemployment and socio-economic inequalities that can be found in all partner states. Especially in transition states, where economic development is an important factor for successful democratic consolidation, international actors should foster economic development. As Western democracies are facing economic crises now, it is questionable how much they will be willing to commit in this respect. A way out of the dilemma could be — as suggested by Shadi Hamid from the Brookings Institution — to coordinate economic responses in a multilateral endowment for democracy in the Arab world.

Fourthly, media, civil society, and political associations suffered to various degrees from years of autocracy in all Mediterranean partner states. Since these actors are essential for building up sustainable democracies, democracy assistance needs to focus more on them to foster political pluralism. The EU's new Civil Society Facility and a European Endowment for Democracy represent important steps in the right direction, but their planned funding is too small. The United States is now concentrating support for civil society on Tunisia and Egypt through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), as well as Tunisia and Libya through USAID transition initiatives. However, all Arab Spring states would profit from increased support for civil society. Diversification in this area does not only mean to take the specific civil "landscape" of each country into consideration, but also to involve all local NGOs — including Islamic ones.

### The Need for a "Diversification" Strategy

Everyone speaks of the Arab Spring today, but it might be more helpful to think of it as several Arab Springs. In light of the different pathways and challenges that the countries in the Mediterranean neighborhood are facing, the EU and the United States need to diversify their strategies in respect to conditionality, capacity building, and civil society. Ultimately, democracy building needs to be pursued in a learning-by-doing strategy, which closely listens to the protest movements and civil societies in the countries concerned.

### About the Author

Daniela Huber is a researcher at the IAI working on Mediterranean issues and transatlantic relations. She is currently completing her Ph.D. at the department of international relations in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and holds an M.A. degree in international relations from the Free University of Berlin. She has worked for the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Tel Aviv and Berlin and as a Carlo Schmid Fellow at the United Nations in Copenhagen.

### About GMF

The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) is a non-partisan American public policy and grantmaking institution dedicated to promoting better understanding and cooperation between North America and Europe on transatlantic and global issues. GMF does this by supporting individuals and institutions working in the transatlantic sphere, by convening leaders and members of the policy and business communities, by contributing research and analysis on transatlantic topics, and by providing exchange opportunities to foster renewed commitment to the transatlantic relationship. In addition, GMF supports a number of initiatives to strengthen democracies. Founded in 1972 through a gift from Germany as a permanent memorial to Marshall Plan assistance, GMF maintains a strong presence on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to its headquarters in Washington, DC, GMF has seven offices in Europe: Berlin, Paris, Brussels, Belgrade, Ankara, Bucharest, and Warsaw. GMF also has smaller representations in Bratislava, Turin, and Stockholm.

### About IAI

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), founded by Altiero Spinelli in 1965, does research in the fields of foreign policy, political economics, and international security. A non-profit organization, the IAI aims to disseminate knowledge through research studies, conferences, and publications. To that end, it cooperates with other research institutes, universities, and foundations in Italy and abroad and is a member of various international networks. More specifically, the main research sectors are European institutions and policies, Italian foreign policy, trends in the global economy and internationalization processes in Italy, the Mediterranean and the Middle East, defense economy and policy, and transatlantic relations. The IAI puts out an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*Affari Internazionali*), a series of research papers (*Quaderni IAI*) and an Italian foreign policy yearbook (*La Politica Estera dell'Italia*).