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The Arab World in Transition: Prospects and Challenges for a Revitalized Relationship between Europe and North Africa

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Introduction

The uprisings in the Middle East have taken the European Union and its member states completely by surprise. What started in Tunisia with protests following on the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor in the small town of Sidi Bouzid, has led to demonstrations across the region that have demanded political, social and economic reforms.

This paper focuses on North Africa, and looks at the events that have been shaking the political landscape of the Middle East ever since. On the basis of an assessment of the underlying causes of the uprisings and of the political reaction to what has been happening, in the region and in Europe, it suggests ways in which Euro-Mediterranean relations might be revised, and makes proposals for a new approach to this partnership.

During the last decade Euro-Mediterranean relations have been characterized by a process of increasing *depoliticization* on the one hand and *securitization* on the other. Political reform and human rights issues have been sidelined, while matters such as combating terrorism and containing migration have taken over the agenda. The final step in this process was the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), a fragile edifice dominated by governments, which assigned only a marginal role to civil society. As a result of the war in Gaza and the exacerbated Arab-Israeli conflict even this endeavour came to a grinding halt and the support it had received from Mediterranean states (not to mention northern and central European countries) declined.

The uprisings across the region brought into play a new force that had previously been suppressed, marginalized or ignored: the people. Contrary to the expectations of many observers, it was not the religious groups, which took to the streets. A broad coalition from different parts of society challenged the prevailing political systems and socio-economic orders. The ability of the political elites in the region to react to these protests differed significantly from case to case. The autocratic regimes in particular proved unable to respond positively to the demands, and thus had to rely on their security apparatus to stay in power. In other countries the political leaders were more flexible and promised to introduce far-reaching reforms. This raised hopes of a genuine transformation of the political systems, which would lead to greater participation and representation.

Hence, while there are clearly similarities between the demands being made in countries across the region, what has actually taken place on the ground has been rather different. In Tunisia and Egypt the regimes were ousted after they had lost the backing of the armed forces, which sided with the demonstrators. In Libya sections of the armed forces have joined the rebels, while other sections have stayed loyal to the regime. This has led to armed conflict. In order to de-escalate the internecine strife, the UN has given a mandate for international military intervention. Despite the ongoing and peaceful demonstrations, the regimes in Yemen and Syria have paid only lip service to the demands for reform and change. In Bahrain GCC armed forces have intervened in order to help the King to quell the demonstrations. In Morocco, Jordan and Oman, on the other hand, the rulers have promised political reforms in order to accede to popular demands.

Observers from within and from outside the region have outdone each other in inventing a host of new expressions to describe what has been going on. They range from the rather negative word 'wildfire' to 'Arab Spring', 'falling dominoes', 'Arabellion' or simply '1-11'. Whatever term one decides to use, there is general agreement about the epoch-making nature of the events unfolding in the Middle East.

Yet establishing a new political system or reforming a malfunctioning one is not an easy task. Other transformation countries have demonstrated that there is a risk of failing to meet the expectations of the protesters, and there is also a danger that the old guard is stronger than expected. Moreover, one should not forget that in the 1960s the military coups in many Arab countries were initially greeted with much enthusiasm, though they soon relapsed into political stagnation and autocratic styles of government.

For this reason the task of translating the political achievements of the protest movement into a new political order is a daunting challenge. Arab societies will have to bear most of the burden of themselves, though the international community in general and the EU and its member states in particular can lend their support to these efforts by helping to consolidate the transformation processes in North Africa and the Middle East. For the EU this means that once again it will have to refocus and overhaul its policy towards the region.

From Barcelona to Paris and Back. Revising the Process of Depoliticization in Euro-Mediterranean Relations

In the early stages of the revolutions in particular the Europeans were in obvious disarray. In order not to threaten their close political and economic ties with the North African autocracies in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, some European member states were very reluctant to lend political support to the mass protests. In general, people were more concerned about the role that Islamic movements might play, and about the large waves of refugees and asylum seekers that were to be expected as a result of the conflicts and reduced border controls. In the case of Tunisia this even led to the infamous offer from the then French minister of foreign affairs, Michèle Alliot-Marie, to support Tunisian dictator Zine el Abidine Ben Ali by helping his police to deal with the protesters. With regard to Egypt, people were initially concerned about the geopolitical implications of a new regime in Cairo, and especially its relationship with Israel and its ability to balance Iran's regional ambitions. When the uprising in Libya started, Europeans were much more forthcoming in rhetorical terms. Thus they unanimously called for the resignation of Muammar Gaddafi. However, when it came to meeting the demands of the Libyan opposition, which wanted a no-fly zone over Libya in order to protect itself from attacks by Gaddafi's air force, the Europeans hesitated. It once again became apparent that there is no such thing as a coordinated and coherent European reaction to an evolving crisis, even if it is in the immediate neighbourhood.

This low-key approach was also mirrored in the academic, media and public discourse about the events in North Africa. It was widely believed that Arab countries were unlikely to introduce reforms because they were in the firm grip of their political leaders, and on account of the apparent lethargy of the population. For this reason no one expected these revolutionary movements to emerge or to succeed before they actually appeared.

However, when it comes to the Europeans, the uprisings and revolutions also cast doubt on their long-term approach to the Arab Mediterranean countries. It became apparent that European policymakers had confused stagnation and the status quo with stability, and for this reason had preferred to cooperate with autocratic regimes instead of supporting those who wanted reforms and change. Štefan Füle, the Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, summed this up in a self-critical manner: "We must show humility about the past. Europe was not vocal enough in defending human rights and local democratic forces in the region. (...) Too many of us fell prey to the assumption that authoritarian regimes were a guarantee of stability in the region (...)"

Such preferences were also in stark contrast to the normative goals stipulated in the Barcelona Declaration, the founding document of the Barcelona Process. This was launched in 1995 in order to establish the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). The initiative was buoyed up by the hopes generated by the Oslo Process and the belief that the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was imminent on the one hand, and the economic and political transformation the EU had witnessed in its eastern neighbourhood on the other. Yet the EMP did not achieve very much when it came to supporting and initiating political transformation processes in the southern Mediterranean states. The assumption that after the end of the

East-West conflict the spread of democracy and liberalism was unstoppable, and that the “end of history” was also going to be reached in North Africa and the Middle East proved to be an error. Whilst the regimes in the region accepted economic liberalization and export orientation as a recipe for growth, they proved to be largely impervious to the kind of democratization processes that had occurred in many East European, African, and Latin American countries as part of the so-called “third wave of democratization.”

With the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which it adopted in 2003-2004, the EU tried to realign its policies in order to create a “ring of friends” consisting of “well-governed states” on its eastern and southern borders. As a result of the detailed Association Agreements and Action Plans that have been negotiated with the countries in question, the ENP has provided the EU with a much more specific and flexible instrument with which it can support reforms that its partners are trying to introduce. In its initial form the ENP contained a clear-cut (though flexible) normative component.

However, in the first decade of the 21st century the importance of democracy and human rights declined as far as the Europeans were concerned, and the EU did not use the ENP in the way it had originally intended. After 11 September 2001, and especially after the terrorist attacks in Madrid on 11 March 2004, cooperation in the fight against terrorism moved to the top of the agenda. It is true that democratization was considered to be a possible element in a long-term strategy designed to combat terrorism, but the fear that Islamist parties could come to power in North Africa and the Middle East soon dominated European thinking to the exclusion of all else. Strong showings by Islamist parties in elections in Egypt and Lebanon heightened such anxieties. The international refusal to recognize the Hamas-led government that emerged from the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections eventually led to a situation where the Western rhetoric about democratization lost all credibility. Since then the region’s despots have adroitly portrayed themselves as the sole alternative to Islamization.

As a result of the rising number of migrants and refugees trying to reach Europe via the Mediterranean, the question of how one deals with migration has been put on the joint cooperation agenda. The EU’s “Global Approach to Migration” is a multitrack and, at least in theory, balanced strategy for resolving and regulating the problem of migration. However, with regard to the states of North Africa, it is primarily concerned with limiting migration, border security, and returning illegal immigrants to their countries of origin. The issue of how some North African regimes have treated refugees and illegal immigrants has not been very high on the EU’s agenda.

Furthermore, the regional frameworks for democratization and political reform deteriorated as a result of the failure of the Oslo process, the advent of the second Intifada, and the wars in Iraq, Lebanon and the Gaza Strip.

Over the course of the past decade and against a background of counter-terrorism, migration limitation and regional crises and wars there has been a noticeable trend towards securitization in relations between northern and southern Mediterranean states. This has led to greater centralization and government dominance when it comes to setting the agenda and excluding questions of political reform.

Thus the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2008, which reinforced both the predominant position of governments in general and the marginalization of civil society, is in line with the uncritical political character which Euro-Mediterranean relations have acquired over the years.

The UfM was established as an intergovernmental organization headed by a co-presidency consisting of one northern and one southern member state – and given guidance at (bi)annual summits by the heads of state and government and foreign ministers – in order to ensure that both sides developed an equal sense of ownership with regard to the institution and its projects. The UfM Secretariat – which began to operate rather belatedly in March 2010 without having achieved anything since – was supposed to foster the institutional structure and increase its ability to take action. This, in turn, was intended to upgrade and revive Trans-Mediterranean relations.

The high hopes associated with the UfM were dashed a long time before the start of the turmoil in the Arab world. However, as a result of the changes taking place in the region its attractiveness has been reduced even further. Emblematic of the UfM's paralysis was the resignation of Ahmad Masa'deh, its Secretary General, in January 2011, and the fact that the vacancy has still not been filled.

Against this background, there seems to be a need for a revision of the EU's policy towards North Africa, and various proposals and concept papers have been submitted by a number of political groups on the national and European levels.

Of the numerous ideas that are currently doing the rounds, the Joint Communication "Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean" drafted by the European Commission and Baroness Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, is probably the most elaborate proposal. It offers support for political transformation, including the establishment of democratic institutions; promises a greater degree of decentralization so as to include civil society; and sets its economic sights on sustainable growth and development. Moreover, taking into account the diversity of what is happening in the countries of the region, it emphasizes the principles of differentiation, bilateralism and positive conditionality ('more for more') and turns the ongoing intergovernmentalization and depoliticization of the EMP on its head.

This shows that the EU is on the right track as it updates its strategies, policies and instruments. However, it is worth restating the key principles that need to be borne in mind in order to strike a healthy and indeed honest balance between the political pretensions of the Euro-Mediterranean relationship and the realistic possibilities of such a partnership.

- Strike a new balance between bilateralism and multilateralism. The Commission's proposal for a new Partnership describes in some detail the importance of bilateralism and differentiation for the EU's policy towards the region. In view of the increasing diversity in the Mediterranean, it is essential to take into account the characteristics and needs of the various partners. Europeans should adhere to these principles in order to focus on those partners who are willing and able to proceed with reforms.

- Develop policies specific to subregions. Multilateralism and regional cooperation (and integration) should be applied in a more selective way with regard to participating actors and subject areas. The Western Mediterranean, the Adriatic and the Eastern Mediterranean are geographical subregions with specific characteristics and problems. For this reason the EU ought to acknowledge the fact that in North Africa there are unique opportunities and challenges. Geographical differentiation will make it possible to address subregional issues and to promote cooperation among its Mediterranean partners.

- React consistently to human rights violations. Positive conditionality and the 'more for more' principle indicate that the EU is trying to focus on specific issues and to reward those who introduce reforms. However, the EU will also have to find ways of dealing with actors who reject the need for reform, ride roughshod over human rights, and use violence to suppress dissent. Europeans need to reach agreement about the political and economic sanctions they are willing to impose, and about when they are willing to use armed force. None of these options are easy ones, and they are all rather risky. Libya is a case in point.

- Expand the concept of joint ownership. Joint ownership has rightly become a key principle in the EU external cooperation programmes that form part of the ENP or the UfM. Participation in the planning and decision-making process increases the legitimacy of these programmes and ensures that they actually meet the needs and priorities of the various partners. However, the implementation of this principle should assign a reduced role to governments and give civil society and the private sector a say in the consultative process. This would be a good idea not only in a normative sense, but because it would be a practical way of procuring added value, since sub-state actors will be providing the expertise and innovation skills needed to cope with the challenges of increasingly complex societies.

- Accept the fact that religious movements have a place in the region's political culture. In the past the EU clearly had certain preferences when it came to cooperation in the region. As a result of political, economic and cultural affinities, and haunted by the spectre of political Islam, Europeans favoured liberal and secular movements and took little or no notice of whether they were representative of society as a whole. This practice has been referred to as 'picking winners,' and it ignored important developments in the Arab world. Europeans will have to accept the fact that people in the Middle East are going to make their own political choices, and that Islam is part of the region's political culture.

- Do not make promises that you cannot keep. Whenever a political upheaval such as the one we are witnessing in the Middle East today occurs, there is a danger that well-meaning spectators will get carried away by the euphoric atmosphere and raise expectations that they are later unable or perhaps unwilling to fulfil. This in turn may create a sense of relative deprivation and disappointment in the countries concerned which will not only negatively impact Europe's reputation, but may also undermine the political changes themselves. The fact that European policy towards the region has a history of not delivering on promises should encourage decision-makers not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

- Ensure that cooperation programmes benefit society as a whole. Even though the EU's external cooperation programmes have emphasized this principle for a long time, the regional elites have often benefited most, and trickle-down effects have been negligible. Large-scale infrastructure projects with a long-term impact are no doubt important, but perhaps the EU should focus on projects which have a direct effect on people's lives, e.g. tariff- and quota-free access to the European market for agricultural products, liberalized migration schemes, and cooperation in the area of education and vocational training.

- Focus on projects that create added value for both sides. The sustainability of cooperation depends on the generation of added value for the participants. In the past, political actors tended to select cooperation projects on the basis of their strategic needs. The basic idea of the UfM, which considers itself to be a Union of projects, tried to change this, but due to its institutional and political weakness it never actually made much headway. Nonetheless, this idea should be pursued in the future. In order to expand the basis of the partnership and to increase the added value, it would be a good idea to promote greater involvement by the private sector. This seems advisable in view of the huge investments that are needed for the modernization of Middle East economies and for the creation of jobs in the region.

- Provide adequate financial resources. Approximately €12 billion in funding have been earmarked for the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument for 2007-2013. As a result of current developments, the Commission and the European Parliament have proposed ways of providing additional resources for the southern states. Even though the challenges facing the EU and its partners in North Africa are not simply a financial issue, Europeans must ask themselves if this level of funding adequately reflects the strategic importance of its southern neighbourhood. A substantial increase in the resources available within the new Financial Framework of the ENP seems to be a foregone conclusion.

- Emphasize intra-European commitment and coordination. Some EU member states have traditional links with the region and are pursuing their own agendas, while other member states have refrained from developing a regional policy at all. They tend to be rather lukewarm about European initiatives. Europeans will have to accept the fact that they have responsibilities in their immediate neighbourhood, and that this is not the time to pursue selfish interests in the region. Euro-Mediterranean relations need to be revitalized, and this calls for commitment and a cooperative spirit from all EU member states.

- Avoid overburdening regional civil society actors. The nascent democracies in Tunisia and Egypt have received a great deal of international attention, and there is a real risk that local parties and NGOs will be swamped with external actors offering to provide assistance, projects and ideas. In order not to overburden them, the EU should establish a forum for ideas in which European and other NGOs and funding institutions can coordinate their activities before getting in touch with partners in the region.

- Coordinate activities with other external actors. In order to create synergies or at least to avoid unnecessary disagreements, the EU should engage in a dialogue with other actors such as the US, Turkey and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). With its strategic influence and military might, the US continues to play a crucial role in the region; and Turkey has a growing regional reputation and is often regarded as a transformation role model by Arab societies. And, last but not least, the GCC countries have become important economic actors in the Mediterranean. Cooperation and coordination with the US, Turkey and the GCC is also indispensable with regard to the following point.

- Seek a more active role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the political debates in Israel there have been persistent demands that the window of opportunity created by the changes in the Arab world should be used to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The EU should support such views and an internationally coordinated policy of engagement towards the Israeli government that takes into account Israel's security concerns and at the same time encourages it to make use of this historic opportunity. The Middle East Quartet should be the forum for this initiative. In this context Europeans should also note that there is a risk that the conflict will worsen. As a result of demographic developments and the support being given to the settlements, a two-state solution is becoming increasingly unlikely. The window of opportunity may well disappear when the Palestinians, as envisaged, ask the UN Security Council to give its blessing to their statehood in September 2011.

- The time has not yet come to write off the UfM. The numerous deficits and shortcomings of the UfM have been discussed in some detail in the political and academic debates on the subject. Under these circumstances it seems even less likely that the UfM will be in a position to do what it set out to do, and its future looks more uncertain than ever. Despite all the disappointments, it is in the interests of neither the Europeans nor the member states to write off the UfM as a bad job. Some of the UfM projects, e.g. cooperation in the development of renewable energy, marine de-pollution, support for SMEs, and city partnerships make sense for all the parties concerned and should not be abandoned simply because the UfM has been a political failure. Moreover, in the medium term a multilateral forum that assembles the heads of state and government may turn out to be a worthwhile institution where issues of common concern, e.g. regional security matters (one of the proposals) can be discussed. However, in order to avoid giving this forum more than it can chew, the principle of subregional differentiation, which was alluded to above, should also be applied to the UfM.

Supporting Political Transformation and Building Bridges between North African and European Societies

A major challenge, and one that is going to have to be tackled in the near future, is the question of providing support for the nascent democratic institutions in Tunisia and Egypt and assistance for the transformation processes in other countries of the region. Political parties, trade unions, organizations of various kinds, special interest groups, independent media, journalists, etc. are indispensable actors in a democratic system. It is especially important to ensure that the social interest groups, which took part in the demonstrations, are now adequately represented and integrated into the new political party system. In Tunisia, for instance, the number of registered parties has increased from thirteen in January 2011 to over fifty only four months later.

In Tunisia, Egypt, and in other countries, constitutional reforms are either in progress or have already been decided on. New electoral and party laws are being drafted, and the reform of the judicial and security sectors, the abolition of emergency powers, the reinforcement of the rule of law and civil liberties are on the political agenda. In all this it is essential to ensure that the different sections of society are appropriately represented. Moreover, in Tunisia and Egypt new parliamentary elections have been scheduled for 2011. Organizing and preparing for these elections and monitoring the way in which they are implemented will be another milestone in the consolidation of the new political systems. The fact that the elections are going to be held in the very near future constitutes a challenge to the new parties in particular. They will have to finalize their election manifestos and establish procedures designed to ensure intra-party democracy and to enable them to run their election campaigns.

Europeans have a great deal of experience in this area, and the Commission and the member states can offer to help their partners in the region and to underpin the reform process by providing training schemes, technical support and funding. Right at the top of the agenda are the constitutional reforms, the elections, and the issue of civil liberties such as freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of speech.

Coordination and a conscious attempt to avoid overburdening regional partners are of major importance in the context of cooperation with political groups and NGOs. The nascent democracies in Tunisia and Egypt in particular have received a great deal of international attention. Although direct links and cooperation between European political parties, trade unions and organizations and their counterparts in the region are no doubt beneficial, there is a real risk that partners in North Africa will be swamped with external actors offering to provide assistance, projects and ideas. In order not to overburden them, the EU should establish a forum for ideas in which European and other NGOs and funding institutions can coordinate their activities before getting in touch with partners in the region.

Europeans should also step up support for civil society institutions and the networks that were established as part of the Barcelona Process, e.g. the Euro-Mediterranean Studies Commission (EuroMeSCo) and the Anna Lindh Foundation. They have notable partners in

the region and a reputation for political independence. It may well be a good idea to add new institutions such as the Civil Society Forum, which has received support from HR Baroness Ashton, since it would institutionalize the role of civil society in multilateral political processes that go beyond the bilateral structure of the ENP.

Moreover, the EU should maintain close ties with civil society representatives when it plans ENP projects, and make the inclusion and empowerment of civil society an important feature of ENP implementation.

In this context the EU will also have to reconsider its attitude towards civil society groups that have a religious background. Muslim groups of this kind have underpinned important political and economic transformation processes in North Africa over the past two or three years, and often adopt a progressive political stance that is combined with a traditional cultural position. This attracts a great deal of popular support. The EU has repeatedly stated that it intends to do more to engage these groups. Not a great deal has happened in this area, partly because the EU, in the context of the struggle against terrorism, has tended to see political Islam as a security problem and not as a political movement. This is problematical for the EU from a normative perspective, and because it is at variance with the European position that stakeholders should all participate in the political process. Furthermore, such a position implicitly re-introduces the notion of a “clash of civilizations” into European policymaking, and this is neither to the point nor helpful.

Apart from the obvious political effect, which is to assist the protagonists of the transformation process, the idea of encouraging and supporting interaction between European and Mediterranean civil societies can also help to decentralize Euro-Mediterranean relations. By underpinning relations with a social network, it may be possible to create a sustainable partnership capable of withstanding turmoil on the intergovernmental level. In this context one should focus on political parties, trade unions, and various organizations and corporate entities, and in particular the educational sector. Cooperation on the research and tertiary education level already exists. It should be introduced on other levels, and in areas such as primary and secondary education, and educational sector governance. School partnerships, exchange programmes for both teaching and administrative staff and pupils would not only help to generate greater expertise, but also support the creation of social networks.

Strong civil societies are not only of importance as actors in the transition to democracy. When they have to cope with globalization and modernization, societies must be willing to adapt in order to seize opportunities and deal with risk. This cannot be done in a top-down process only, and needs to be understood as a task for society as a whole. For this reason ‘agents of change’ such as entrepreneurs, civil society, political, religious and other social groups should be encouraged to develop their ideas and to make a contribution to innovation and social development. When all is said and done, giving people a say in determining the future of their country is what the protests were all about.

Developing a Shared Vision of Civic Empowerment and Sustainable Co-development for North Africa and Europe

In addition to the political demands that have been voiced by the demonstrators, some of the major concerns, which have prompted people to take to the streets, are economic grievances and marginalization. The high level of unemployment among young people in the countries of the region and the unequal distribution of wealth that has been generated as a result of high economic growth rates have led to dissatisfaction with the various political systems. However, the protests and the ensuing reforms have created expectations in terms of economic participation and social justice that will be difficult to fulfil. The European Commission estimates that in the North African countries the number of new jobs that will have to be created in order to meet the demand for employment is a third or even two-thirds higher than in the last five years. The economic situation remains a potential source of political instability and social unrest.

Since it is an economic heavyweight in the immediate vicinity, the EU is in a position to make a substantial contribution to sustainable economic development in the area. Notwithstanding the immediate economic assistance, which has been granted to support the consolidation of the new and reformed political systems, this is not about transferring money from the EU to North Africa. It is about acting together, trying to identify common interests, and seizing the opportunities that present themselves. Moreover, Europeans should support and encourage regional cooperation in North Africa, and help a region that is rich in natural and human resources to develop its specific potential. For this reason European cooperation programmes should be revised to incorporate sub-regional differentiation. They should attempt to include the private sector, and they should be based on the principles of interdependence and civic empowerment.

Migration, Labour Market and Demographic Challenges

The demographic picture in the majority of European states is leading to a growing lack of trained and educated young people on the labour market, and this is beginning to pose a threat to the welfare and pension systems, whereas in many Mediterranean countries there are more than enough young people who cannot find local employment opportunities. Highly trained people in particular cannot find jobs that are commensurate with their skills and qualifications. Even though the pressure on the region's labour markets has eased somewhat over the last decade, unemployment was a major contributing factor in the protests across the region, and it will probably continue to grow in the immediate future.

There is an obvious potential for a win-win kind of cooperation when it comes to dealing with the demographic challenges. European and Mediterranean countries need to take into account the political and socio-economic circumstances and focus on establishing a mutually beneficial scheme designed to facilitate circular migration between their regions. The European Commission has made a number of proposals to this end, though as yet only a few of them have been put into practice, e.g. the "Blue Card" initiative for highly skilled migrants. The debate about a revision of the ENP once again highlights the potential of migration. However, it is up to the member states to translate these good ideas into political action.

A number of European states have concluded bilateral agreements on circular migration schemes, which have turned out to be a success. Yet in most cases EU member states see these schemes as a way of dealing with their seasonal labour shortages. A jointly managed migration scheme should be of especial interest to highly skilled workers who are willing to leave their countries of origin in order to obtain well-paid employment elsewhere and to gain the kind of experience which will increase their employability. It is especially important to have a transparent legal framework. This would have to include regulations relating to permanent resident status and dual citizenship, social insurance schemes for close relatives who have elected to stay at home, and other relevant legal and social matters.

When such employees return to their countries of origin, the EU and its local counterparts should provide the kind of financial assistance, which will enable them to start their own businesses. They would then be generating employment opportunities and making a contribution to economic growth and prosperity. A legal environment, which facilitates the activities of small and medium-sized enterprises, is almost or just as important as the provision of financial assistance.

On the part of the Europeans this presupposes that governments and societies are willing to engage in a serious dialogue on how to develop a common migration policy that takes into account the demographic challenges. A common European framework would increase the overall transparency and help the Europeans and their southern partners to deal with the administrative challenges that are part and parcel of such a scheme. Moreover, an approach that conceives of immigrants as human beings with cultural, social and legal interests and not merely as cogs in a wheel would make Europe far more attractive for skilled workers.

Apart from the economic advantages, circular migration might also prove to be a sustainable concept, which the EU could use to engage civil societies in North Africa. Moreover, it would be the kind of project that actually generates the sort of added value that can be sensed directly by both people and societies.

Food Supply Security, Water Scarcity and Agricultural Products

In many North African countries agriculture is one of the largest sectors of the economy. On account of their competitive advantages in this labour-intensive segment, and as a result of support and encouragement from both the international financial institutions and the EU, these states have tried to generate export-driven economic growth by focusing on agricultural products and foodstuffs. This strategy has been no more than a partial success, since the main potential recipient of agricultural products, the European Union, has failed to open its market, in clear contravention of earlier promises and undertakings. Thus as far as the EU is concerned a very obvious step would be to open its market for agricultural products from North African countries. This would be tantamount to giving them a major economic boost.

At the same time the issue of agriculture and trade needs to be put in the broader perspective of food security. There are some products where North African countries are important producers and exporters, but in terms of their total food production and

consumption, many of them are net importers of food. They depend in particular on the import of cereals. This on the one hand has something to do with the natural conditions in the region, e.g. the lack of arable land and water. On the other hand it is the result of growing urbanization, rural poverty and underdevelopment, and changes in the kind of crops that are cultivated, e.g. because the focus is now on exports. Moreover, the changes in crop cultivation have increased the need for irrigation systems, which simply exacerbates the existing water scarcity in the region. Climate change, rising temperatures and droughts are expected to aggravate this problem.

Thus North African countries have come face to face with the problem of striking a balance between the need to ensure their food security, economic interests related to the export of agricultural products, and the dictates of environmental sustainability.

In order to deal with this dilemma there is a need for action in a number of different areas. On the one hand, political changes are necessary so that the private sector can play a greater role in agriculture, agrarian reform, and rural development. On the other hand, it is imperative to improve agricultural productivity. This pertains in particular to the efficient use of water and arable land. For instance, regional governments ought to develop a pricing mechanism that takes into account the cost of water. The EU member states and EU development cooperation agencies could offer to help their southern neighbours to develop rural areas and to employ more sophisticated irrigation systems that reduce water wastage.

The needs of environmental sustainability and food supply security do not mean that agricultural exports have to come to a grinding halt. However, these challenges should be borne in mind in the agricultural production process, and taken into account when one defines legal frameworks and economic development strategies. For instance, an assessment of the impact of trade in agricultural products should include the net balance of the “virtual water” that is part of such exports and imports, i.e. the water that has been used in the production process.

Since issues such as food supply security and water scarcity are challenges that apply to the whole region, it would appear that regional cooperation in these areas would make eminent sense. In order to identify best practices and other issues down the road, research projects on climate change, resource scarcity, and the counter-measures to be adopted should be initiated and carried out by researchers and institutions from Europe and North Africa. The management of water reserves and natural resources, food production, civil protection and the socio-economic impact, e.g. migration induced by climate change, seem to be some of the issues of common concern. Moreover, the support given to the states in question to enable them to develop national strategies to counter the effects and mitigate the short, medium, and long-term consequences of climate change should be a substantial element in these activities. The urgency of the matter has been underlined by the findings of various multinational studies, especially the reports issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The Mediterranean and North Africa must be regarded as a region that is very vulnerable to the impact of climate change.

Energy Security and Sustainable Co-development

The need to reconcile energy security with the dictates of environmental sustainability is another key challenge that North Africa and Europe have in common. In addition to the ecological issues involved, reliable access to affordable energy supplies is a major social factor and a prerequisite for economic growth and development.

Demographic and economic changes point to the fact that energy dependence in Europe and in the Mediterranean area will become more acute in the years ahead. There is only a finite amount of fossil fuel and its use exacerbates the effects of climate change. Moreover, there will probably be greater competition for hydrocarbons, and prices will no doubt rise. Last but not least, the high risks associated with nuclear power suggest that this technology is not an acceptable alternative when it comes to resolving the conflicting claims of energy security and climate change.

Energy issues have for a long time been an important element in Euro-Mediterranean relations, and electricity generation from renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, and environmental security should be the centrepiece of cooperation within the Mediterranean area and in North Africa. The technology for generating electricity from wind and solar power systems is readily available. The natural conditions for such renewable energy installations are ideal. Moreover, since the energy sector is the place where private, economic and political interests meet, it is generally considered to be a very promising and dynamic area.

The Mediterranean Solar Plan (MSP), the Desertec Industrial Initiative and the Transgreen project are three initiatives that have received a lot of attention in this context. MSP is an intergovernmental project that was launched within the UfM framework, though as a result of the paralysis that beset the UfM after the Gaza War, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan and the EU continued to work on it without reference to the UfM. MSP aims to develop a “sustainable energy future in the Mediterranean region”. To this end it is trying to “increase the use of solar energy and other renewable energy sources for power generation, improve energy efficiency and savings, and develop electricity grid interconnections.” The MSP participants want to install a 20-gigawatt (GW) renewable energy capacity on the southern shores of the Mediterranean by 2020, of which 5 GW is going to be exported to Europe.

The Desertec Industrial Initiative was founded by a group of companies under the leadership of German reinsurance giant Munich Re. It has forecast an estimated investment of €400 billion and intends to build thirty Concentrated Solar Power (CSP) plants in the Sahara by 2050. Like MSP, Desertec expects to establish a 20 GW renewable energy capacity (with the emphasis on solar energy) and to export some of it to Europe by 2020. By the year 2050 Desertec wants to be able to supply 15 percent of the EU’s energy needs. The Transgreen project, which is headed by French energy giant EDF, is hoping to establish a consortium consisting of power companies, network operators and manufacturers of high-tension

equipment. Transgreen aims to set up a Trans-Mediterranean supergrid consisting of high-voltage direct current cables and capable of exporting 5 GW to Europe by 2020, i.e. the same amount of energy MSP is hoping to export. There is considerable potential for cooperation between Desertec and Transgreen, since the former is focusing on power plant infrastructure in North Africa, whereas the latter is concentrating on energy transmission systems.

These projects have a lot to offer for all concerned. There is a rapidly growing demand for energy in North Africa, and the cost of energy is also rising in the European economies. Morocco and Tunisia are dependent on energy imports, and thus have a strategic interest in alternative sources of energy. Libya and Algeria can channel their large oil and gas reserves into the export market if they are able to fall back on alternative sources of energy. In North Africa, cooperation with regard to renewable energy sources promises an influx of foreign investment, technology and skills, new and upmarket employment opportunities, and the revenues accruing from energy exports to Europe. Moreover, reliable supplies of energy are also an important factor in the strategies, which are trying to diversify the regional economies and attract new industries. As far as the Europeans are concerned, MSP, Desertec and Transgreen will help them to diversify their energy sources, to fulfil their ambitious ecological goals, to reduce CO₂ emissions, and to save increasingly scarce resources.

In addition to these economic and environmental aspects, a regional project that creates benefits for all the participants will also set a positive example for regional cooperation. This is something that is urgently needed in order to improve the political atmosphere in North Africa.

The technical feasibility of the projects is not in fact the biggest problem that will have to be dealt with when one thinks of the looming political challenges. However, political backing is absolutely essential. Experience has shown in Europe and other parts of the world that sustained support of this kind is needed if renewable technologies are to become a major source of energy supplies.

The shift from fossil fuel to renewable energy requires considerable financial resources and contains an element of economic risk. If the private sector is going to make the necessary investments, there will have to be a clear political framework, which will ensure that the right kind of grid is in place, that its investments are safe, and that the regulatory part of the equation is transparent and reliable. Moreover, since renewable energy, even under favourable circumstances such as those that exist in North Africa, is not financially sustainable in the short run, there needs to be the political will to ensure that this kind of investment can be based on long-term financial planning.

In North Africa, with the exception of Morocco, there are no more than a few lobbyists who can mobilize support for these projects. It goes without saying that the support of local entrepreneurs is essential, since they will have to put them on the political agenda and explain why they should be implemented.

However, in Europe structural conservatism and influential interest groups have held up the introduction and dissemination of new technologies, have supported high barriers to entry, and have made it rather difficult to formulate a common energy policy on the EU level. Moreover, there are doubts about whether or not projects such as Desertec can actually be implemented. Concern has been voiced that the immense infrastructural changes in North Africa and Europe may turn out to be impracticable in political terms.

In the Maghreb area the rivalry between Morocco and Algeria, the West Sahara conflict and other political troubles have prevented the emergence of the kind of greater regional cooperation that would facilitate the implementation of Desertec, Transgreen and MSP as regional projects.

And, last but not least, in North Africa there is certain mistrust of these initiatives, which are perceived to be of European origin, and there are doubts about the extent to which they can create real added value for states in the area. In other words, will these projects actually create badly needed jobs and help to reduce the pressure on the local labour markets and make a contribution to economic development? Moreover, there is scepticism about the extent to which locally generated energy will be made available to local consumers at an affordable price. Conversely, some Europeans are uneasy about what they believe is energy dependence on an unstable region.

Desertec, Transgreen and MSP are carefully crafted projects that actually fit together rather well, which is why they should receive the appropriate kind of support. All three initiatives are planning to install a regulatory and legal framework and an institutional and economic environment that will allow investors to calculate the long-term cost of developing and constructing the requisite infrastructure.

Furthermore, a number of general and certain specific measures can be adopted to support these projects and to create a more favourable political atmosphere.

A few successful and high-profile pilot projects will go a long way to enhancing the popularity of the initiatives, and to make people throughout the region more willing to cooperate. Such projects should also be used to dispel anxieties that the initiatives are primarily for the benefit of the Europeans. On the one hand including a number of local companies can allay fears of this kind, and on the other hand it would be a good idea to tone down the subject of electricity exports to Europe and to concentrate instead on greenhouse gas emission permits.

Hitherto the main research and development activities have been in the hands of European companies. However, states in North Africa would no doubt think that it was a good idea if cooperation with MSP, Desertec and Transgreen were to include joint research and development programmes, vocational training, and the provision of traineeships for employees from the energy sector. This would ensure that the transfer of knowledge and technology forms an integral part of cooperation in the energy sector. A project such as the

'Desertec University Network' could be taken as an example of how this might be done. Such research projects could also deal with two issues that have been alluded to above: the management of natural resources, and finding ways of mitigating the consequences of climate change. Topics such as desalination and energy efficiency are certainly worth bearing in mind.

Yet it is even more important to ensure that energy cooperation is accompanied by the creation of permanent employment opportunities for skilled workers in the region who can contribute to the generation of wealth and economic growth. This does not have to be confined to the energy sector. Once the power plant infrastructure is in place, North Africa might well become an attractive location for energy intensive industries, and this would have a positive effect on the employment situation. Moreover, locally generated energy could also be used for desalination plants, and this would help the region to deal with the problem of water shortages.

In Europe Desertec has been welcomed as a very dynamic and possibly faster way of achieving results than MSP with its rather political background. However, some criticism has been levelled at Desertec because it is a project dominated by large companies. Similar concerns have been voiced about Transgreen. Thus it is essential to make sure that SMEs also have a part to play in these projects. It would emphasize the element of sustainability and make it easier for Europeans to contribute to the requisite financial framework with loans and perhaps feed-in remuneration for renewable energy that is generated outside (though consumed within) Europe.

Moreover, since investments made by governments and the private sector will pay off only in the long term, countries in the region and investors are hoping that Europeans are actually going to buy the electricity generated in North Africa. The industry and the electricity producing countries would welcome a political commitment by the EU to purchase the energy that is going to be generated in North Africa. This would be rather reassuring for those who are willing to take a long-term view on the project. The kind of 'take or pay' contract that is often concluded in the natural gas sector might be a model worth emulating in this context.

Morocco and the Arab Spring

Against the background of political change across North Africa and the Middle East, demonstrations have taken place also in Morocco and a protest movement, called February 20 Movement, has been formed. Proving responsive to the Moroccan public's demands and in order to invigorate the country's tradition of political reforms, King Mohammed VI announced a major constitutional overhaul. In his announcement, the monarch presented the Moroccan audience with a series of concrete initiatives, such as the recognition of Berber as an integral part of the Moroccan identity and incorporating it within the constitution. The King also announced the application of the concept of "Advanced Regionalization," which aims at strengthening the powers of the regions endowing them with more autonomy from the central administration, the judiciary branch will be elevated to the status of independent branch thus improving checks and balances, as well as, accountability before the law. The rebalancing of power that is instigated, will also affect the Moroccan parliament, whose representatives will emerge as a result of free elections, will see their prerogatives enlarged. Unlike other Arab systems, Morocco is moving towards constitutionalizing civil liberties and citizens' rights. A commission under the chairmanship of Abdelatif Menouni, composed of eighteen public figures including lawyers, political activists, technocrats as well as representatives from ethnic and human rights groups, has been tasked to collect ideas and demands from the various different social stakeholders such as political parties, trade unions and associations, youth organisations and intellectuals. The various auditions will provide the raw material for the commission to allow it to formulate a series of recommendations for the constitutional reform that will be adopted by referendum.

Morocco has always been perceived as a model of modernity and openness in the Arab world. With his speech, King Mohammed VI aims at giving a new impulse to the streak of social and economic reforms that have already been implemented under his reign. This particularity of the Moroccan reform process, explains in part why the popular movements have been significantly more peaceful in this country. The king's announcements also distinguished Morocco from many other countries in the region where the political leadership has been much less open to the public's demands and either reacted with lukewarm promises or has taken a more repressive approach.

There is a general agreement that the reforms outlined by the king are pointing in the right direction, both national and international observers have welcomed the initiative. Some observers still outline the tasks ahead, such as, fighting corruption, implementing socio-economic reforms and allowing more freedom to the press. The current hearing process incorporating different components of the civil society (e.g. youth movements, political parties and associations) is a ground-breaking evolution generating an open public debate and must therefore be credited on its own right. It is to be hoped that the Menouni Commission's conclusion will live up to the high expectations this process has raised. After the referendum about the Commission's proposal, the main challenge will be to transparently and swiftly implement the proposed reforms.

The Moroccan-European Partnership

Good bilateral relations with the EU are an important strategic goal of Moroccan foreign policy. For the EU on the other hand, Morocco is an important partner in North Africa. In Moroccan foreign policy, France takes a privileged position in virtually all aspects of bilateral cooperation. Its relations to Spain are not without friction, since the Spanish exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, geographically placed in Africa, are being claimed by Morocco. Besides the UfM, Morocco takes part in other multilateral forums, like the 5+5 Dialogue and the "Mediterranean Forum". Most important is, however, the cooperation with the EU through the ENP.

The high regard the EU has for Morocco becomes clear not least through the fact that Morocco gained a *Statut Avancé* within the ENP as the only Maghreb nation to date, in October 2008. This close connection to Europe is supposed to be securing the country's economic and societal development in the medium term. From the EU's side, it shows the recognition and appreciation of a policy of consequently turning to the EU.

The Advanced Status Framework basically contains measures for intensifying political and economic relations between Morocco and the EU:

A stronger dialogue is supposed to take place on the political level. Furthermore, Morocco will be included in the planning process of individual topics concerning European policy. Against this background, the EU-Morocco summit, that has taken place on March 7, 2010, in Grenada, is notably for two reasons: First, it was the first summit based on the Advanced Status; second, it was also the first summit meeting with a Mediterranean partner since the Lisbon Treaty came into force.

Also, the Advanced Status aims at a better connection of Morocco to the European single market. This is supposed to happen through a step-by-step adoption of the *Acquis Communautaire* on important topics of economic policy as well as a broadened free trade agreement. This free trade agreement will cover - besides a liberalization of the trading of goods in the agricultural sector that is so important for Morocco - easements for the trans-border commerce of services, capital, and - with restrictions - persons. The agreement is a logical step for Morocco's economic policy, as 60% of the country's foreign trade is with the EU. A further decrease of tariffs, however, also means a significant burden for the Moroccan budget and might result in a short-term loss of jobs in the industrial sector. On the other hand, the agreement provides easier conditions for investors through the free access to the European market, and broadened financial support from the EU also means economic possibilities for Morocco. There is no other country that benefits from the ENP financially as much as Morocco, anyhow. Another important aspect of the foreign economic relations of Morocco with Europe are the remittances from Moroccans who live abroad in Europe.

Moreover, Morocco wants to make tourism one of its most important economic sectors as part of the *plan azur*. Europeans will be the most important target group here. As a first step, in the course of the air travel agreement with the EU the engagement of European airlines (TUI, Easyjet, Ryanair) on the Moroccan market has increased.

Morocco is the country that has reacted to MSP and Desertec the most positive. Presently Morocco has to import 97% of its fossil energy carriers and 15% of its electricity. Due to growing demand, import-dependency even slightly increased over the last couple of years. Coal is currently still dominant in Morocco's energy mix, and building a nuclear plant is also being discussed. But the use of renewable energy is increasingly important, too. Morocco's potential regarding wind and solar power could cover a major share of the country's energy demand and could even allow the change from being an importer of power to becoming an exporter. Morocco wants to cover 20% of its national energy demand from renewable energy sources by 2020.

The EU and Morocco have a *Memorandum of Understanding* about increased energy cooperation since 2007, and Morocco is part of an informal working group of nations on the MSP. Morocco's power network is already synchronized to the Central-European UCTE network, its energy market partially liberalized, and its 1997 power bridge to Spain is currently being expanded.

So far, the Advanced Status Agreement has first and foremost political symbolic meaning. For the EU and Morocco this means that they have a solid basis to build on however, they must make the effort to fill this agreement with political and economic substance.

In this context, migration and easier access to visas for Moroccans is an important point for Morocco that should be addressed positively by the EU and not used as leverage for Moroccan cooperation with the relocation of refugees and the fight against illegal migration. The concept of circular migration as discussed above offers gains for both parties. Moreover, this would also comply with the idea of a better network of civil societies.

Europe and the West-Sahara Conflict

On the conflict about the West Sahara the EU has always supported the process of negotiations and the efforts of the UN Secretary-General and his Special Envoy to find a mutually accepted political solution to the regional dispute over the Sahara issue.

The EU recognized that the continuation of the Status Quo is not acceptable in the long term and called parties to enter into substantial and intensive negotiations, bearing in mind that the realism and the spirit of compromise by the parties are essential to achieve progress in the negotiations.

In addition to their support for the UN efforts, Europeans should put their focus on the relationship between Algeria and Morocco. Not only the conflict about the West Sahara divides Rabat and Algiers, but also there are numerous other disputes, not least on the drawing of the Moroccan-Algerian border. The dispute between Algeria and Morocco limits regional cooperation, led to a stagnation of the Arab Maghreb Union, and also shapes the states' behaviour vis-à-vis third countries and international organizations. Hence, Europeans should seek to support the opening of bilateral channels of communication between these two states and also use the instruments and institutions of the UfM and the ENP to contribute to a political and economic rapprochement between Algiers and Rabat.

Conclusions

The historic winds of change are sweeping over the Middle East and North Africa. Increasingly self-confident citizens are calling for political and economic reform, good governance, the rule of law, meritocracy and social inclusion. The emergence of the people as a decisive factor in the political systems creates unprecedented opportunities for civic empowerment and social development. And in political terms the region is developing in a number of different ways: new political systems are in the making in Tunisia and Egypt; Morocco, Jordan and Oman are proposing far-reaching political reforms; in Syria, Yemen and Libya, however, the rulers have resorted to the use of force in an attempt to suppress the uprising.

The European Union and its citizens and member states should not miss this historic opportunity to welcome and lend their support to popular demands for political and economic participation, democracy and justice in their neighbourhood. This is not only a moral obligation. It is also in Europe's best interests. However, its response should mirror the diversified nature of the political landscape.

The Europeans must make it clear to repressive governments that they will have to pay a heavy political and economic price for their blatant disregard of the will of the people. Such political leaders can no longer be seen as legitimate partners. Whilst the EU should of course attempt to gain the support of the international community for its convictions, it should also continue to do what it can to provide for the humanitarian needs of the local population, of the refugees and of the victims of these conflicts in general.

In keeping with its 'more for more' principle, Europe should concentrate on providing support for governments, which are going to introduce meaningful reforms, and for the nascent democracies. These countries are in urgent need of help. Reforming malfunctioning political systems or setting up new ones is a difficult and onerous task that involves a great deal of risk and uncertainty.

It is clear, of course, that the societies concerned will have to bear the brunt of the political transformation process themselves, and that every country will choose its own particular path. For this reason European assistance should be construed as something that will help the EU's southern neighbours to help themselves.

Tunisia and Egypt need robust support for their new political systems, democratic institutions, organizations, and political parties. Moreover, they are also in dire need of economic assistance, for the political unrest has disrupted important segments of the national economies such as the tourism industry.

The EU should encourage reform-oriented governments and lend support to their attempts to translate their promises into concrete political changes that are in line with what people actually want. In particular there is a need for a more effective system of checks and balances, and greater respect for civil liberties and the freedom of the press. The time of cosmetic reforms has gone for good and there is now a need for real and meaningful political change.

This will be quite a sea change as far as European policymakers are concerned, especially since in the past they tended to focus on stability and maintaining good relations with the regional governments despite their negative human rights records. Although the EU initially tried to adopt a low-key approach, it has now embarked on a revision of its earlier policies in order to emphasize concepts such as good governance, the inclusion of civil society, and positive conditionality. This comes across quite clearly in the Joint Communication “Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean.” In this context it might also be for a good idea if the Europeans re-examined other aspects of their policy on the Middle East, e.g. Iraq, Iran, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and relations with Turkey and the GCC countries.

However, Europe’s role should not be restricted to providing support for the transformation of political institutions and political practices. The demands being made by people in North Africa transcend purely political matters and include economic and social issues. They are particularly concerned about the lack of employment opportunities and the absence of an economic perspective. This poses a serious challenge to all of the countries in North Africa and is a major source of potential conflict.

In order to meet these challenges Europe and North Africa ought in fact to enunciate a joint vision for sustainable co-development. And this should not be construed as a European scheme designed to provide support for the North African economies, but as a programme that can generate common benefits and help the region to develop its full potential.

Projects that can help to create permanent employment opportunities for skilled workers in the region and to improve local capacities capable of generating wealth are of particular importance in this context. Thus it would not be very difficult for the EU to grant reformist countries in North Africa better access to the Single European Market, which would enable them to make full use of their competitive advantages. This is especially true when it comes to agricultural products. The adoption of better agricultural methods and a more effective use of water and arable land are areas in which cooperation could flourish. Moreover, the Europeans could also promote the process of economic diversification by helping to develop a local capital goods industry.

The introduction of jointly managed circular migration schemes for students, businessmen and skilled workers could turn out to be of some importance. In order to have a positive effect on the employment situation in North Africa, migrants should be both empowered and encouraged to develop their business ideas when they return to their countries of origin. This would also be one way of dealing with the demographic challenges to the north and to the south of the Mediterranean, and it could forge links between societies and cultures.

If one takes a rather more long-term perspective, one would certainly welcome a shared vision of sustainable energy security. Joint projects such as the Mediterranean Solar Plan or the Desertec private sector initiative are blueprints for a partnership dedicated to the generation of power from alternative sources. They would help people in Europe and North Africa to improve their energy security. And they would go a long way towards creating urgently needed skilled employment opportunities in North Africa and promoting regional cooperation.