



IN THE AFTERMATH OF ARAB SPRING REVOLUTIONS: EU COOPERATION, POLICIES AND DIALOGUE WITH TUNISIA AND EGYPT

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Abstract

The following paper seeks to outline how the EU (re)acts to changes in its North African Neighbourhood, particularly with regard to Arab Spring upheavals. The substantial influence the revolutions of the Arab Spring have had, not only on Middle Eastern and North African countries, but also on their relations - in a political and economic sense - raises the question of possible reactions shown by different and differently affected parties involved. In view of the European Union's strategic behaviour when aiming at safeguarding economic stability along with human rights in the MENA region, democracy as a key factor may result indispensable. While, in the light of Arab Spring upheavals, democratization is claimed to have largely succeeded in Tunisia, Egypt is believed to be falling short of meeting EU expectations when it comes to stable democracy. EU response strategies as well as the adaptation of its political, social and economic cooperation with Tunisia and Egypt by means of a revised Neighbourhood Policy will be outlined and critically examined from different perspectives, taking into account the Union's assessment and conditionality of a progress made in democratization.

BACKGROUNDS OF EU-MENA COOPERATION AND POLICIES

The cooperation between Europe and the MENA region dates back to the 1970s and 1980s. As a first step towards trade agreements, the European Community started concluding cooperation agreements (CAs) with Mediterranean partners in the 1960s (Al-Khouri, 2008, 10). In 1977, Egypt as an "early starter" was granted custom free access of its industrial products to the European market by means of a cooperation economic and financial agreement. Accessing the WTO, the cooperation agreement with Egypt was to be amplified towards a free trade agreement, or association agreement, which came to pass in the course of the Barcelona process (Mohamadiéh, 2006, 10).

There were, however, other profound reasons rooted in sociopolitical history that required cooperation agreements (CAs) to be replaced by association agreements (AAs), aiming more at trade liberalization. One reason was the attempt to contribute towards Arab-Israeli peace (Al-Khouri, 2008, 10).

The Barcelona Process, also known as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), played a significant role within the framework of EU-MENA trade liberalization. Growth, economic reform, and foreign direct investments (FDIs) were to be driven forward. The agreements, however, did not include liberalization for the agricultural sector or free movement of persons (Mohamadiéh, 2006, 9-11). Euro-Med AAs foresaw the establishment of free trade over a transitional period of up to twelve years, complying with WTO requirements and setting standards on sector-wise cooperation, intellectual property rights, public procurement, competition and monopolies, as well as state aid, political dialogue on democracy and human rights and migration. Signed AAs were to be ratified by



EU member national parliaments (Al-Khouri, 2008, 11). The AA with Tunisia entered into force in 1998, the AA with Egypt in 2004, forming legal bases for relations with the EU (Michou, 2016, 8).

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) became - along with its bilateral action plans - an important complement to Euro-Med policies (Al-Khouri, 2008, 12). Michou (2016, 9), political analyst of EU-MENA policies, describes the ENP as a framework for instruments and incentives, aiming at trade liberalization, market participation, as well as targeted technical and financial assistance. According to the analyst, action plans serve as non-legally binding documents forming a basis for political, social and economic cooperation (Michou, 2016, 8). As a complement to the AA, a EU/Egypt Action Plan came into force in 2007, intended to adjust Egyptian legislation to EU requirements and promote trade, investment and growth, according to the Country Strategy Paper on Egypt, 2007-2013, drafted under the European Neighborhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI). A EU/Tunisia Action Plan was approved in 2005 (EC, 2014).

Arab spring revolutions in Tunisia started in 2010, with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi on December 17th, followed by protests against unemployment and corruption. A starting point for Arab Spring upheavals in Egypt was January 1st of 2011, with a suspected al-Quaida suicide bombing outside a Coptic church causing the death of 21 victims and clashes between Christians, Muslims and the police (Blight et. al., 2012). The European Union has reacted to Arab Spring revolutions by means of adapting its cooperation and instruments. ENP and action plans were reviewed, and budget increased – but cooperation became more tied to democratization and human rights. On the other hand, a “More-for-More” reward system might limit a country’s own flexibility and decision-making power (Rindaldi, 2012). Trade and investment liberalization in the sense of the negotiated Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) may not meet development needs or even hinder democratization (Mohamadih, 2012). As expressed by the ECDPM Dossier, adequate EU responses still have to be defined in order to cooperate in a way that can be beneficial for all:

"The EU is still to define a coherent set of policies towards North Africa – one that successfully combines geopolitical interests with a thorough understanding of the complex local dynamics and demands."

These and other discrepancies and challenges will be discussed in the following chapters.

ARAB SPRING REVOLUTIONS IN EGYPT AND TUNISIA

As noted above, the starting point for Arab spring revolutions is known to be the self-immolation of street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi in the provincial Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid on December 17th of 2010, whose scales had been confiscated due to his refusal to pay a bribe, and who had felt tormented and humiliated by a policewoman. Bouazizi had been active in the opposition against Tunisian dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali – a movement, that started to seek the attention of international media. He died on January 4th of 2011 in a hospital, suffering from third-degree burns, when protests against unemployment and corruption were fully underway (Lagemann, 2016). On January 14th, after 24 months of dictatorship, Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia – which, on a broader scale, encouraged Egyptian protestors to demonstrate against the rather dictatorial reign of president Hosni Mubarak on January 16th. The initiated protests against Mubarak reached their climax on January 25th of 2011, the so-called “day of wrath”, with the occupation of the Tahrir Square in Cairo, and led to Mubarak’s announcement on February 1st, in which he declared not to run for a new presidential term. On February 11th, after 30 years in power, Hosni Mubarak eventually resigned from presidency. Legal proceedings against Mubarak were initiated on August 3rd of 2011 in Cairo and eventually led to the former president being sentenced to life imprisonment on June 2nd of 2012. On November 28th of 2011, the first round of Egyptian parliamentary elections



was held. The year 2012 entailed another set of historically embedded challenges: on June 18th, the sustained rule of Egypt's Military Council limited presidential competencies, and, on June 30th, Muslim Brother Mohammed Mursi was inaugurated as the country's president (Forum Politische Bildung, 2012).

Meanwhile in Tunisia, a tendency towards democratization had become tangible. In January 2011, prime minister Mohammed Ghannouchi had formed a new government, which was then taken over by Fouad Mebazaa. On October 23rd of the same year, first free elections were held. A first meeting of the Constituent Assembly of Tunisia took place on November 22nd. On December 12th, Moncef Marzouki was elected president of Tunisia. (Forum Politische Bildung, 2012).

An integral part of Arab Spring protests also lay in the potential of conflict between Muslim and Christian populations, which then led to upheavals against religiously motivated violence.

EU REACTIONS AND STRATEGIC CHANGE DURING AND AFTER THE ARAB SPRING REVOLUTIONS

Jünemann (2012, 96) describes the EU's reaction to Arab Spring revolutions as "too little too late". For a long time, European cooperation with its North African neighbours was tailored to their autocratic regimes, which were considered to be rather stable. EU cooperation with autocratic regimes implied, to a certain extent, accepting those governing structures and stabilizing them, which – in spite of being proclaimed by the Union as necessary for sustaining security and economic relations – contradicted the democratic approach designated for its neighbouring countries.

The only considerable opposition to these autocratic regimes was thought to consist of radical Islamist groupings – civil population was not expected to pose a serious threat to the continued existence of autocratic power. Nevertheless, in times of the EU rather giving preference to stable economic relations and avoiding conflicts in the MENA region, it was local civil society who rose up and demanded democratization to succeed. The Arab Spring as a political turning point was not expected by the EU nor did it react in a timely manner. Democracy as a key factor, nevertheless, was picked up in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the Union's rhetoric performance in the context of demanding and establishing democratic structures provided for a certain level of credibility not only in Europe, but also gave rise to expectations in North African countries (Jünemann, 2012, 97).

Intending to create and benefit from stable and interest-oriented cooperation with its North African neighbours while eventually demanding the establishment of democratic structures, as well as an enforcement of human rights and the rule of law, led to a certain dilemma of values and their prioritization. Despite the Union's normative power reflected in democracy promotion, EU politics seemed to be strongly driven by interests and ENP policies also sought stability - to a certain extent for voters, who did not welcome opposing regimes that implied civil war, military intervention and higher expenditures for development aid (Kirchherr, 2012, 1).

First, Arab Spring revolutions along with the local population's demand for democracy were met with great acclaim by the European Parliament and EU Commissioner Štefan Füle, who was in charge of the Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy from 2010 to 2014 (Jünemann, 2012, 97). In May 2011, the European Commission published a Response Strategy to the Arab Spring, entitled "A new response to a changing Neighbourhood", in which it approved four new ENP decisions and foresaw higher financial support, market access as well as amendments concerning mobility. €1.24 billion were added to the original 2007-2013 ENP budget along with a budget increase to €18 billion for the period 2014-2020 (Kirchherr, 2012, 2). Growth and institution building were to be fostered by the SPRING programme (Support for Partnership, Reform and



Inclusive Growth), the EC's first new ENP decision. While the Union assured that an adaption of the SPRING programme to each country's specific needs was due, it first announced an overall amount of €350 million for the period 2011-2012 to foster the whole region of Southern neighbours. More country-specific appeared to be the second decision, in which the EC foresaw the support of poorer areas in Tunisia. In the context of this project, a budget of €20 million was allocated for employment and job creation, the improvement of living conditions for inhabitants of urban areas and access to microfinance. As a third decision, an overall budget of €66 million was to be provided for the Erasmus Mundus programme for Southern Mediterranean students and academic staff - in other words - the enhancement of mobility and knowledge exchange. The fourth decision, entitled "Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility" was to aim at driving forward civil society's role in the context of reform promotion. Public accountability in the MENA region was to be safeguarded. For the period 2011-2012 and similarly for 2012-2013, €22 million were budgeted to equally support regional and country projects initiated by non-state actors (European Commission, 2011).

Familiar with the new ENP's focus on certain areas of promotion, namely, democracy, growth, job creation, microfinance and higher education, Füle finally observed a prospect for democratization - not only due to local Arab Spring protests in the desire for democracy, but also because of the EU's strategy of reaction and further advancement of factors vital for a stable democracy in the future:

"These decisions prove our strong commitment to our neighbouring partners. Through job creation, improved living conditions, university partnerships and promoting a stronger voice for civil society, this support demonstrates Europe's full engagement in ensuring the desired transition to democracy in the region." (European Commission, 2011)

Nevertheless, after some time of (non)progress regarding the implementation of the new response strategy, Füle had to confess that the ENP "has clear room for further improvement" (Kirchherr, 2012, 2).

An initial delay of reaction was shown by Catherine Ashton, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy for the period 2009-2014, Vice President of the European Commission from 2010 to 2014 and head of the European External Action Service (EEAS), which was founded in 2009. Ashton's statement concerning new ENP strategies was covered in self-praise of European tactics, but failed to address the challenges the revolution instilled and the local demands that had to be faced:

"The European Union was the first to offer a serious response to the Arab Spring. This new set of decisions is the result of the new and ambitious European Neighbourhood Policy launched in May and it confirms that the EU has made it one of its main priorities to support 'deep' and sustainable democracy, but also economic recovery, in North Africa and the Middle East." (European Commission, 2011)

When looking at country-specific reactions to Arab Spring revolutions, Spain, Italy and France had been relying most on their strong ties with the formerly autocratic North African countries and therefore had difficulties assessing the new revolutionary situation and its hazards. Michèle Alliot-Marie, French Minister for Foreign Affairs from 2010 to 2011, decided to offer support to Ben Ali in order to suppress Arab Spring protests in Tunisia, a move that was highly contrary to the Union's call for democratization. At that time, Ben Ali was already about to go into exile (Jünemann, 2012, 97). Alliot-Marie proposed sending security forces to reinforce the Tunisian regime, which clearly stood out as a measure aimed at reestablishing security of relations (Ghafar, 2017, 3).

The EU as a whole, nevertheless, quickly recognized Tunisia's tendency towards a democratic transition and launched comprehensive support. In the aftermath of the first intense year of Arab Spring revolutions in Tunisia, the EU almost doubled its financial aid to the country for the period 2011-2013, from €240 million to €445 million. Supposedly due to the country's democratic "compliance", Tunisia's cooperation with Europe was rewarded by its involvement towards a



Privileged Partnership Action Plan 2013–2017. This new Action Plan is mainly financed through the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), specifying on sectors and operations (Ghafar, 2017, 3-4).

After the fall of Mubarak's regime in February 2011, the EU first expected an opening for democratization and decided to support the movement with €20 million for civil society groups in Egypt. The Union intended to strengthen a democratic transition through financial aid packages and promised an €132 million aid package for socio-economic programs. The EU went further and offered to supervise parliamentary and presidential elections in Egypt. Egyptian authorities dismissed the EU's political initiatives. Not being able to assume a guaranteed democratic change, the EU-Egypt cooperation was quickly reverted back to maintaining political stability. When Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi became president in June 2014, essential freedoms of Egypt's civil society were restricted in the name of state security, and the EU largely failed to intervene. Former French president François Hollande, as well as other European leaders even appeared to be enthusiastic about el-Sissi. On occasion, by means of presumingly advantageous arms deals, France seemed to reward el-Sissi's regime for safeguarding stability in Egypt. German and Italian leaders proudly emphasized their "strategic partnership" with Egypt, which was perceived as successful in fighting Islamic terrorism and paved the way for trade deals and energy contracts. These trade deals, again, as it had been the case under the Mubarak regime, rather contributed to the strategy of maintaining stability and security than to democracy and human rights promotion (Ghafar, 2017, 5).

The EU as well as the political leaders in the MENA region had underestimated the scope of Arab Spring revolutions and the ideological, intellectual and political upheavals they instigated. According to Kirchherr (2012, 2), as evidenced by past, a "tranquilizer" for civil society and local governments provided by the EU was to consist of financial support. The overall ENP budget foreseen for the period 2007-2013 comprised €11.818 billion – more precisely, only €1.8 per capita and year for Egypt and €7 per capita and year for Tunisia. Therefore, it cannot be gainsaid that during the Arab Spring revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, the EU as an international organization performed basically no political or military intervention and solely provided for border control and limited humanitarian as well as almost no development aid (Jünemann, 2012, 97). The start-up period of the revised ENP in the aftermath of the initial Arab Spring revolutions, along with its four key decisions and programmes, was rather long and cooperation with regional entities had and still has to warm up.

When steps towards democracy are made not only via EU initiatives, but also by neighbouring countries themselves, as it partly was the case in post-Arab-Spring Tunisia, a simultaneous pursuance of interest-oriented stability along with democracy, human rights and values promoted by the rule of law can become possible. The currently envisaged Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) would be an example for pursuing interests through market access and value preservation via institutional democratic reforms at the same time (Kirchherr, 2012, 2).

The EU's enhancement of democratic structures in the MENA region is not only to be met by setting incentives to prevail its neighbouring countries to introduce measures of democratization, but also by the Union's involvement as a direct, on-site actor. According to Rinaldi (2012), the EU seeks to respond to Arab Spring upheavals by exercising exclusive competences regarding local trade and investment and safeguarding economic integration. A holistic approach in that sense has yet to be furthered.



TARGET GROUPS OF EU SUPPORT AND COOPERATION WITH THE MENA REGION, AND PROMOTION OF MOBILITY PROGRAMMES (ERASMUS MUNDUS)

As furtherly outlined in the previous section, four decisions on key areas of support were defined within the EC's "New response to a changing Neighbourhood". Therefore, recipients of financial support as well as targets of reciprocal cooperation were planned to be states and local governments of the MENA region (promotion of growth foreseen by the SPRING programme), inhabitants of poorer areas in Tunisia (unemployed citizens, employees, small enterprises), students and academic staff (Erasmus Mundus programme) and members of civil society who sought to protest against current regimes and conditions, as well as public institutions (the aim was to ensure public accountability), NGOs and other non-state actors in charge of regional and country projects (Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility) (European Commission, 2011). The latter two areas of support will be described below.

Four fields of action were defined for Erasmus Mundus, the cooperation and mobility programme with Third Countries in the field of higher education: Action 1: Joint Programmes including scholarships with master courses as Action 1 A and joint doctorates as Action 1 B; Action 2: Partnerships with Third Country Higher Education Institutions and scholarships for mobility; and Action 3: Promotion of European higher education. Targeted institutions, groups and individuals comprise higher education institutions (Actions 1 and 2) and related organizations (Action 3), as well as individual students, researchers and university staff (Action 1 & 2) (EACEA, 2017). At the global level, from 2004-2013, 13,957 master's students participated in the Erasmus Mundus Programme, encompassing 87 master's students from Tunisia and 219 from Egypt, 1,005 doctorates including 2 Tunisian and 6 Egyptian doctorates, and 2,449 scholars, including 13 Tunisian and 14 Egyptian scholarship participants. The number of total selected participants of Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees (EMJMD) for the period 2016/2017 reached 1,347, and comprised EM Partner Country Master Students, EM Programme Country Master Students and EM Geographical Windows Students. The latter accounted for 423, including 45 Middle Eastern students. From 116 total selected doctorates for the period 2016/2017, two participants were from Tunisia, and one from Egypt.¹

For the post-Arab Spring North African region, in particular (Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia), Erasmus Mundus Al-Idrisi I and II was conceived as an institution-based network of mobility and was to involve nineteen North African and European partner universities, six associate universities, three associate institutions, as well as the Ministries of Higher Education in the region. The programme comprised Action 1 A and B. Al-Idrisi serves as an example for the attempt of equal participation of all parties involved in the conception of knowledge exchange. Due to the programme's strong focus on regional needs, the North African partners directly got to decide on relevant subjects and areas. Providing equal access to higher education and improved training to socio-economically disadvantaged students thereby served as one of the core ideas (OFA, 2015). The following thematic areas have been identified as essential to meet regional needs and were defined as priority fields of Al-Idrisi II: Agricultural Sciences, Art and Design, Business Studies and Management, Engineering, Technology, Environment and Renewable Energies, Soil and Water Sciences, Archaeology, Languages and Intercultural Communication, Mathematics, informatics, Health and Life Sciences, Natural Sciences, Sustainable Development and Communication and Information Sciences².

¹ Retrieved at http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/index_en.php

² Erasmus Mundus – Al-Idrisi II. The Project. Retrieved at <http://www.al-idrisi.eu/index.php/en/al-idrisi/the-project.html>



Three target groups for grantees and five different types of mobility flows for students and staff were defined in order to precisely address each group's individual needs and priorities: Target Group 1 is directed at students and academic staff registered in one of the partner universities, while Target Group 2 is designed for students enrolled at higher education institutions in the partner countries that do not belong to the group of partner universities, as well as for professionals in public administration or public and private enterprises who have obtained an university degree in one of the partnering countries. Target Group 3 is oriented at socially or politically disadvantaged groups, such as refugees, indigenous groups or students who suffered from unjustified university expulsion. The Types of Mobility for Target Groups 1 and 2 comprise Master, Doctorate, Post-Doctorate, Academic and Administrative Staff, as well as Undergraduate in the case of Target Group 1. Target Group 3 is designed for undergraduate and master levels. Apart from educational expenses, the EC's funding of the programme also was to comprise a monthly subsistence allowance, travel and insurance costs and possible tuition fees. The monthly allowance accounts for €1,000 per month for undergraduates, €1,500 per month for doctorates, €1,800 for post-doctorates and €2,500 for academic and administrative staff. An allowance for master's students did not seem to be available for the 3rd call (application deadline: 12th of January 2016). A subsidy to travel expenses was to range from €250 for under 500km of travel distance up to €2,500 for a distance of more than 10,000km. The duration of the educational programme could vary, depending on the mobility type, from six months to 36 months (OFA, 2015).

MEDASTAR (Mediterranean Area for Science, Technology and Research) is a specific Erasmus Mundus project between Europe, Egypt and Lebanon for a cooperation in fields of science, technology and research. It classifies as an Action 2 programme, and therefore promotes partnerships with third country higher education institutions and scholarships for mobility. Enhancing regional participation, on a regular basis, Egypt and Lebanon publish national reports on the state and development of education³. Country-specific needs for higher education are to be met while promoting equal opportunities, democracy, rule of law and human rights, as foreseen in the general "New response to a changing Neighbourhood" of the European Commission.

The new ENP's fourth decision, designed as a Civil Society Facility programme, sought to involve non-state actors, such as trade unions, employer associations and other social groups, in political decision-making and implementation. Before applying the CSF within the new ENP, its aim was to provide financial support for development - primordially in member states. National and local civic initiatives and capacity-building were to be promoted and the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) strengthened⁴. The Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility was envisaged as a project from 2011 to 2013, aspiring to support civil society actors' role in times and situations of reforms and democratic change, as well as holding governments to account. Nevertheless, an increased contribution towards the fulfillment of European Neighbourhood Policy objectives was strongly requested by the Union. The participating Southern Mediterranean neighbouring countries were Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia. A budget of €11 million was allocated for supporting civil society in these countries, applying a project approach of direct centralized management. The Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility formed an integral part of the EU's Communication on "A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean" as a response to new Southern Mediterranean "challenges". The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) Regulation provided a framework for the implementation of the new CSF neighbourhood project. Various National Indicative Programmes for the period 2011-2013 included civil society development as a sub-

³ Retrieved at www.medastar.eu

⁴ European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. Civil Society. Retrieved at https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/policy-highlights/civil-society_en



priority. The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the Development Cooperation Instrument on Non-State Actors and Local Authorities (NSA-LA) granted a right of initiative to non-state actors (European Commission, 2011).

TUNISIA - A PROCLAIMED TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY AND ITS LOOPHOLES

On paper, the new Tunisian constitution had led to the development of a democratic and pluralistic system, in which new institutions were created and free presidential and parliamentary elections could be held. The new coalition government provided for the maintenance of a civil state shaped by law and citizens.⁵ In the "post-revolutionary" years of 2012 and 2013, it was, among others, the tensions between the secular opposition represented by the National Salvation Front (NSF) alliance and the Islamic government taken over by the party El-Nahda that, despite the new structures, caused social discontent and unrest. In August 2012, for example, the cabinet's decision to restrict women's rights led to protests in Tunis, participated by thousands (Matta et al., 2016, 3). The murder of Chokri Belaïd, leader of Tunisia's Unified Democratic Nationalist party, on February 6th of 2013, provoked protests outside the interior ministry, which furtherly got out of hand on April 9th during commemoration ceremonies.⁶ Chokri Belaïd had played an important role within the opposition of the Islamist government and had been an indefatigable critical of Islamist radicalism (El Fassi and Medinilla Aldana, 2016).

The second half of the year 2013 was expected to put a temporary end to the political crisis. Political inclusivity was enhanced. In October 2013, the El-Nahda party approved the formation of a provisional government of technocrats in charge of organizing new elections in 2014. In December 2013, the main civil society institutions and major political parties agreed on a plan to finalize the process of democratic transition, which comprised the nomination of a new non-partisan government. In January 2014, a new constitution, as well as the creation of a non-partisan technocratic government under Mehdi Jomaa were endorsed by the parliament. The parliamentary elections in October 2014 were won by Tunisia's main secular party Nidaa Tunis, followed by the El-Nahda party. An "official" finalization of the democratic transition was claimed to take place in December 2014 with Beji Caid Essebsi from Nidaa Tunis winning the presidential elections against former president Moncef Marzouki (Matta et al., 2016, 3-4).

International relations had been one of Tunisia's top priorities in the 2011-2015 period, when looking at capital flows and economic support. In this period, the country received an overall amount of almost US\$7 billion from major international financial institutions, development banks and other international partners, which accounted for 15% of GDP until 2015 (Meddeb, 2017,165). In 2013, Tunisia was placed under the top third of recipient countries of foreign assistance. From 2014 to 2015, U.S. bilateral assistance had doubled (Kubinec, 2016). The European Parliament envisaged to double its support to €400 million per year and deepen its strategic dialogue with Tunisia by means of a "Marshall Plan" for Tunisia as well as an EU-Tunisia Joint Parliamentary Committee – which would enhance the political dialogue on democracy, the rule of law and other

⁵ Zeit Online: Tunesien erlebt schlimmste Unruhen seit Sidi Bouzid. Retrieved at <http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2016-01/tunesien-unruhen-demonstrationen-arabischer-fruehling>

⁶ The Guardian: Tunisian opposition leader shot dead Retrieved at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/06/tunisian-politician-shot-dead>



subjects of mutual interest. Moreover, the fight against terrorism was to be furthered and special support provided to the House of the People's Representatives (HPR) to tackle regional problems.⁷

In 2016, the World Bank chose Tunisia as a candidate for its new concept of country partnerships, granting a loan of up to US\$5 billion for boosting economic growth, job creation, and the reduction of inequalities between coastal centers and less developed regions of the country. The same year, Tunisia received a Fund Facility of US\$2.8 billion as an IMF support of economic reforms. Project finance transactions signed by Tunisia in the context of the Strategic Development Plan 2016-2020 reached a value of US\$4.3 billion. The country itself received US\$14 billion from participating states and financial institutions, which accounted for 35% of GDP. On a global level, the EU and its member states remain Tunisia's most important economic partners. Until 2020, the Union has allocated a budget of US\$860 million for Tunisia, along with the European Investment Bank granting a loan of US\$3.1 billion (Meddeb, 2017, 165-166).

The economic development during the years of major Arab Spring revolutions was shaped by decreasing growth rates. The central bank adopted an expansionary monetary policy to stimulate economic growth. Between May and September 2011, the central bank's key interest rate was reduced by 100 basis points. Other measures to boost economic growth were lowering the reserve requirement ratio of commercial banks from 12% to 2% and granting US\$2.6 billion to commercial banks to safeguard liquidity. Fiscal policies effectuated by the government comprised a 4.7% increase on civil servants' wages in 2011 and the granting of additional benefits to security forces. The consequence was an increase of the wage bill as a GDP-share from 10.7% to 12.4% for the period 2010-2013. Before Arab Spring revolutions were initiated, transfers and subsidies had reached 3.6% of GDP - in 2013, they had risen to 7.6%. With 27%, youth unemployment had been high in 2010 and, along with regional inequalities and corruption, had been some of the main triggers for social unrest. In spite of the new constitution giving room for a Good Governance and Anti-Corruption Commission in 2014, corruption had not yet been eradicated. In 2016, a Transparency International poll confirmed that Tunisia was still perceived as a corrupt state by civil society – 64% of Tunisians observed an increase in corruption compared to 2015 (Samer et al., 2016, 4).

Corruption was strongly linked to favouritism toward the powerful elite – a problem that dates back to times of former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Not only civil society, but also Tunisian firms confirmed that corruption persists – 36% of managers called corruption a "major constraint" to doing business, with 32% describing the need to give "gifts" when competing for government contracts. Thereby, it is important to mention that Tunisia's largest companies are state-owned. In spite of Tunisian parliament establishing an anti-corruption agency designed to prosecute both public officials and private operators, only minor cases are taken to court. Instead of uncovering cases of corruption, a proposed "economic reconciliation" law was to provide amnesty for public officials and state employees involved in financial corruption and misuse of public funds. A fundamental lack of transparency can be identified in campaign-financing. Only the party Afek Tounes released information about its sources of finance for the 2014 elections, while accusations of foreign funding and corruption circulate in relation to other major parties (Kubinec, 2016). Furthermore, corruption and elitism were tangible in the light of leasing state land to private operators, who held ties with the former autocratic regime, as well as the illegal establishment of oil and phosphate companies. The efforts made by inhabitants of Jemna, in the south of the country, to cooperatively develop the region, employ locals (120 jobs for young adults were created) and reinvest in community facilities, were dismissed by Tunisia's prime minister Youssef Chahed. Especially workers from lower social strata suffered from insufficient representation by

⁷ Agence Tunis Afrique Presse. MEPs call for Marshall Plan for Tunisia. Retrieved at <https://www.tap.info.tn/en/Portal-Politics/8047145-meps-call-for-marshall-plan-for-tunisia>



organizations like the Tunisian General Labour Union, Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT) – which was also entangled in conflicts with the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts, Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat (UTICA), in matters like tax evasion and the need of a tax reform in order to overcome the budget deficit and fight political instability (Meddeb, 2017, 167-168).

For these and other reasons, in spite of Tunisia being lauded as the country that, from a political perspective, had successfully trodden the path towards democratization, five years after the main Arab Spring revolutions, corruption and the lack of transparency, as well as regional inequalities, unemployment and the difficult economic situation kept inciting social tensions, which resulted in violent demonstrations in the towns of Kasserine, Tunis, Jendouba, Bizerta and Ferina. The protests began in Kasserine in January 2016 with the death of 28-year-old unemployed Ridha Yahyaoui. The demands expressed in the revived series of protests were the same as they had been in 2011, and comprised measures against unemployment, as well as the establishment of political fairness and improved social and economic opportunities. Economic growth in Tunisia had remained relatively low for the period 2011-2015, at an average of 1.5%, while unemployment had increased from 13% in 2010 to 15.3% in 2015 with two out of five young Tunisians being unemployed. Unemployment among academics had reached 32%. As a reaction to the new wave of protests, the Tunisian government promised the creation of 5.000 new jobs and the allocation of €60 million for the construction of 1.000 subsidized apartments in the particularly impoverished region of Kasserine (El Fassi and Medinilla Aldana, 2016).

Meddeb (2017, 165) claims that democracy, in its basic sense, has been misused for an interpretation of the concept that lacks the safeguarding of social justice and inclusivity, which, according to the author, has been the main objective inherent in Arab Spring revolutions. Unless targeted precisely, foreign aid is likely to solely strengthen the governing coalition without obliging it to real reform. With an increase of "social movements" from 4.960 in 2015 to 8.661 in 2016 and ongoing strikes in the health and railway sector, educational system, civil service, etc., civil society continues to express its discontent with the way "democracy" was and is displayed by the government.

POLITICAL CONDITIONALITY AS AN EU STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING DEMOCRATIZATION

To theoretically evaluate the EU's strategy of (non)cooperation with its North African and Middle Eastern Neighbours, the application of political conditionality is to be outlined more precisely.

What became particularly tangible within the EU's increased demand for democratization and human rights in the aftermath of Arab Spring revolutions was the strategic concept of political conditionality it applied. Being a rather common mechanism within the EU's strategic framework when it comes to cooperation in the context of Neighbourhood Policy, political conditionality stands for the active setting of conditions in order to achieve a desired outcome – mostly regarding compliance with EU principles of legitimacy. Only the fulfillment of those conditions may lead to receiving benefits such as financial support. The Union's use of political conditionality dates back to the 1990s. Democracy, rule of law and human rights protection first came to be conditions for admitting Central and Eastern European countries in 1993. Shortly thereafter, the political condition of "good neighbourliness" was added by the Essen European Council and strongly linked to peaceful conflict resolution (Baracani, 2009,134).

The conditionality practiced by the EU is primarily positive – and therefore following a pattern of granting and withholding "rewards", but not imposing extra punishment. As Schimmelfennig and Scholtz (2007, 5-6) outline, the EU as the party having to come up with the financial resources to "pay" the reward envisaged to provide support and establish a more profound cooperation with the



other party, decides on whether a country is "worth" receiving these payments or not. If the costs implied in supporting a neighbouring country are too high, the Union is likely to attach its "rewards" to further conditions or even decide against "investing". Non-compliant countries or states that fail to abide by the EU's conditions and criteria thus suffer from "non-receiving" or "staying behind" in the competition for EU funds. "Punishment enough", one might say.

What becomes inherent in the values promoted by the EU is the focus on a country's "own responsibility". Conceptualized by the words "More-for More", the European Commission seeks to call upon MENA-countries to show more commitment towards establishing democratic structures. The EU thereby seems to expect its Neighbours to initiate a "liberation" and democratization process similar to how democracy was and is safeguarded within the EU, following a rather generalist approach. According to Rinaldi (2012), it is the traditional oligarchic structures that are to be abolished in MENA-countries.

Baracani (2009,133) describes the political conditionality applied by the EU as an important factor for democratization - firstly, because shortcomings of democratization were tackled by setting concrete political priorities that had to be in the forefront, and secondly, because those priorities were determinate – in other words - linked to specific, clearly defined objectives. The determinacy of priorities - and conditions, in a broader sense – constitutes what is to be done. It delineates concrete measures and allows a process of democratization to be assessed and supervised (Baracani, 2009,133). Also Schimmelfennig and Scholtz (2007, 6) express the positive relation between the political conditionality brought into action by the EU – especially the size and credibility of the conditions it stipulated – and the level of democracy in the Union's neighbouring countries. In spite of not imposing punishment per se, the EU's threat to withhold "rewards" in case of conditions not being fulfilled has always been tangible in relations with the Union's neighbours and therefore enhanced the factor of credibility. This "fear of threats" subsequently leads to asymmetrical interdependence, whereby the rather self-sufficient EU gets to decide what benefits to grant or withhold from a neighbouring state that, in the course of time and intensification of cooperation, becomes more and more dependent.

LOCAL RECEPTION OF EU POLICIES AND TENTATIVE POLICY SUGGESTIONS

In their consultation in the course of the 2015 ENP review conducted by the EC and the EEAS, North African neighboring states expressed their demand for an enhanced relaunch of ENP cooperation. Contradictions and limitations, such that democracy and human rights, defined as targeted to all partners, are subject to certain conditions and eventually do not involve all partners, lead to fundamental questioning of the EU's strategy. The Union should - not only from an idealistic point of view - live up to the values it promotes and further its demand for democracy, rule of law and human rights in a non-exclusive way. Exclusivity is strongly linked to authoritarianism, which, in the long run, does not safeguard stability and security, but may lead to dissatisfaction, resistance and instability. Despite the EU's failure of addressing a vital part of the vast variety of regional challenges, the Union is perceived as an important actor for creating, shaping and maintaining economic, political, and security ties. According to the German Institute for the Study of Labor, trade volume between the EU and the MENA region could be increased 3.5 to 4 times, but would be bound to higher levels of integration between the regions. (Ghfar, 2017, 6-8).

It is important for external actors and institutions to bear in mind that Arab Spring upheavals and demands are not concluded, and unrest still allows for the possibility to intensify. Since Tunisia's proclaimed democracy was rewarded with more profound cooperation, while Egypt stayed behind in receiving support, it is to be stated that cooperation with Egypt should be deepened instead of



withholding “rewards” until unilaterally set EU conditions are fulfilled. Privileging countries, which successfully underwent democratic transitions, as it was claimed to be the case with Tunisia, can jeopardize other countries’ belief in the EU as a loyal “partner” in the truest sense of the word.

Present and future unemployment can be tackled by furthering education and investments in infrastructure, which would not only contribute towards industry creation, but also provide for growth (Ghafar, 2017, 8). In the light of investment stimulation, supporting SMUs can enable young professionals to apply acquired skills and – in a broader sense - lead to innovation and regional economic integration. The ANIMA project launched by the EC serves as an example for stimulating foreign direct investment flows. By furthering the implementation of economic free zones like the negotiated DCFTA under the equal strategic involvement of local parties in the process of decision-making, exports can be stimulated. In this context, mobility programmes would enhance the exchange of implementation-related know-how as well as mutual understanding.

SUMMARY

This paper provides an analysis of cooperation development between the EU and its North African Neighbours, examining policy adaptations in the aftermath of Arab Spring revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. After giving an overview of how EU-MENA relations evolved in the course of time, as well as presenting key events of Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, EU responsive strategies to these revolutions – hence the revision of the Union’s Neighbourhood Policy - are examined, along with an identification of target groups and specific programmes to address demands at the regional, as well as international level. In addition, the proclaimed success of Tunisia’s democratic transition is put into question, providing a closer analysis of the economic development in Tunisia subsequent to Arab Spring reforms and challenges. Gaining a more profound understanding of the EU setting conditions for economic, social and political cooperation, tentative policy suggestions towards a mutually beneficial approach are concluded.

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