EU Centre in Singapore

Euro-Mediterranean relations and the Arab Spring

Summary

This background paper begins with a reflection on Euro-Mediterranean relations from the 1970s to the launch of the Union for the Mediterranean initiative in 2008. Many analysts believe that the recent events in the Middle East / North Africa (popularly referred to as the Arab Spring) is a test for the future of Euro-Mediterranean relations. Some scholars have even gone as far as to suggest that the unfolding of these events, in which the EU was caught unprepared, reflect a failure of the EU's neighbourhood policy in promoting democracy and human rights. As the countries in Middle East and North Africa undergo difficult transitions toward democracy, it is time that the EU reflects on its policy and rethinks its approach in engaging that region. The paper concludes with some reflections on the EU's longer term concerns and interests in the region, and consequences of the Arab Spring on the EU-Mediterranean partnership.

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Cover photo: Catherine Ashton, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (centre), on a visit to Damascus, Syria, in March 2010, with Vassilis Bontosoglou, Head of the Delegation of the EU in Syria (1st from left). (Credit © European Union, 2011)

Euro-Mediterranean relations and the Arab Spring

1. Introduction

Europe and the southern/eastern Mediterranean region are historically and geographically connected. A growing number of citizens and immigrants in the European Union (EU) trace their origins to these countries (Moussis 2009). The EU has a long-standing relationship with many of these countries to the south and east of the Mediterranean Sea. This background brief provides a broad overview of the EU's approach towards its Southern and Eastern Mediterranean neighbours and considers some of the implications that developments unfolding in the region could have on the EU's policy going forward.

After the public self-immolation of the Tunisian street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi on 17 December 2010, unrest spread from Tunisia to Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria, and there have been also pockets of unrest in Bahrain and various Gulf states. Popular protests in Tunisia and Egypt have unexpectedly overthrown the long-standing regimes of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and President Hosni Mubarak, but in Syria, Yemen, the protests are ongoing with no signs of abating, with the likelihood of more bloodshed.

The EU is currently struggling to respond to these historic yet complex developments. The dilemma underlying current EU policies towards these countries was recently expressed by President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, who said that 'it was a difficult choice between defending our values such as human rights and our interests, such as stability in the Middle East'. To provide a better insight into this quandary, this paper will investigate the extent and areas in which the Arab Spring will have an impact on the EU's relations with its neighbours in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region.

Since its earlier days as the European Economic Community (EEC), the EU has tried to find a common platform to engage the countries in this region - from the 1972 Global Mediterranean Policy to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership of the 1990s and the ambitious Union for the Mediterranean proposed by French President Nicholas Sarkozy in 2007. The configuration of countries making up the so-called 'Mediterranean partners' of the EU, has also changed over the years. The EEC's Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) for instance, was open to all states around the Mediterranean.[1] However, in the 1980s, several of the states that were in the Global Mediterranean Policy – Greece, Portugal and Spain – joined the European Community. The configuration of EU's Mediterranean partners shifted again when the EU launched the new Euro-Mediterranean partnership (also known as the Barcelona Process) in 1995. The Balkan countries (making up the former Yugoslavia) that used to be considered as part of the Mediterranean were now referred to as Eastern European countries and the relationship with them moved to be part of the broader European Neighbourhood Policy. The Barcelona Process also included countries from North Africa and the Middle East but not Libya, which was then under United Nations (UN) sanctions, and hence not invited by the EU to participate in the Barcelona Process.

With the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), membership broadened to include Libya,

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[1] The GMP covered the following states: Albania, Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and Yugoslavia.

some of the Balkan countries and Albania and Mauritania, which had already requested for partnership under the Barcelona Process. What constitutes the 'Mediterranean region' has therefore seemed to be defined by the EU according to its shifting interests and priorities (Cardwell 2011: 224-230).

The paper comprises three sections. The first section traces the EU's (with its earlier incarnation as the EEC) relations with the various countries on the southern and eastern Mediterranean from the 1970s. Security, Israeli-Arab relations, energy and development have always been the factors shaping the 'tenet' of the relationship. The EU's approach to these countries has shifted over the years, from the enthusiastic pursuit of inter-regional dialogue in the 1970s to a more nuanced mix of bilateralism and regionalism in recent years. The EU's policy has also wavered between a more idealistic desire to promote democracy and human rights in the region, particularly in the first decade of the post-Cold War era, to a pragmatic pursuit of economic interests and its broader concern for political stability in the region.

The second section briefly discusses some of the causes of the Arab Spring, and attempts to answer the issue of whether the EU has played any role in the changes taking place in the countries ranging from Tunisia, Egypt to Syria and Yemen. The perception that the EU was caught unprepared for the wave of protests in several of these countries that are partners in the EU-Mediterranean partnership gave rise to questions about possible shortcomings on the part of the EU in its engagement of the region.

The consequences of the Arab Spring on the future of EU-Mediterranean relations are addressed in the third section. This section discusses the EU's search for a way forward to support democratic reform in the southern

and eastern Mediterranean region, while at the same time being mindful of the complexities arising from the Israel-Palestine conflict, the role of political Islam and the sensitive issue of migration flows to the EU. The Lisbon Treaty which aims to make the EU a more coherent and effective global actor has come into force generating further expectation of the EU with its European External Action Service (EEAS) to respond more coherently to developments in this neighbourhood. The paper concludes with the observation that it remains to be seen if the new 'Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity' proposed by the EU will ensure the best outcome for the EU and its Southern/Eastern Mediterranean neighbours.

The research for this background brief has been supplemented by interviews with journalists, researchers and policy makers.

2. EU-Mediterranean relations before the Arab Spring

In 1958, when the Treaty of Rome came into force, six European countries – West Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – founding members of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) became the European Economic Community (EEC). The establishment of the EEC, which created a customs union among these states, posed, among some questions, how to maintain mutually beneficial economic relations with their neighbours to the south of the Mediterranean. The discussion of relations with the southern neighbours became more pressing with the impending accession of the United Kingdom (UK) to the EEC. The UK had maintained a much more liberal policy with regard to imports from the non-European Mediterranean countries before it applied to become a member of the EEC. Joining the EEC meant that the UK would have to adopt the

common external tariff which was much higher than its own. Many exporters, including non-European Mediterranean countries would lose the easier and cheaper access to the UK market. Hence the question arose as to whether the EEC should impose a common tariff for all its neighbouring Southern Mediterranean countries or negotiate different tariffs for the different countries in the region on a bilateral basis.

The Global Mediterranean Policy

The first institution which suggested a unitary approach to the Mediterranean countries was the European Parliament. It was in the Rossi Report (1972)[2] that the idea of 'regional promotion policy' was proposed.

The EEC regional strategy towards its southern Mediterranean neighbours started with the GMP between 1972 and 1991. With the GMP, the EEC signalled that it saw the Mediterranean as a sufficiently homogenous region to warrant a common approach. The GMP consisted of a series of almost identical bilateral agreements between the EEC and the various Mediterranean countries but without an overarching multilateral framework (Bicchi 2011: 8). These bilateral agreements mainly focused on trade, financial and technical issues. The GMP granted the EEC's Mediterranean partners free access to the European common market for their industrial products. However, this did not lead to any significant increase in trade because of the mismatch between the economies of scale approach of the GMP and the import-substitution strategy of the EEC's Mediterranean partners. In other words, the GMP offered a new approach that created economic interdependence, while the Mediterranean partners (especially the Arab countries) were trying to pursue what they believed was economic independence through an import substitution strategy. While the GMP did not seem to be of much economic significance, it had the unintended consequence of contributing to a shift in the European approach towards the Israeli-Arab conflict in which the EEC acknowledged the Palestinians' right to self-government and the right of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to be involved in any peace initiatives.

This period of active engagement in the 1970s was followed by a period of neglect in the 1980s because of the EEC's southern enlargement – Greece became an EEC member in 1981 and Spain and Portugal in 1986. Because there were similarities between their economies and those of the EEC's southern Mediterranean partners in the agricultural and industrial sector, the latter lost trade revenue because trade was diverted to the new EEC member states. With this enlargement the EEC also became self-sufficient in many of the Mediterranean products such as olive oil and tomatoes. Therefore the non-EEC Mediterranean states became less important for the EEC, and the economic gap between the EEC and its partners widened (Bicchi 2009).

The EEC became the EU when the Treaty of the European Union (also known as Maastricht Treaty) entered into force in 1993. The end of the Cold War also brought about renewed activism on the part of the EU to engage its eastern and southern neighbours. For its southern neighbours, the EU launched what it termed as the Renewed Mediterranean Policy (RMP) of 1991-1995. The RMP increased the funds committed by the EU for the Mediterranean region and distributed funds through public-private cooperation, more decentralised partnership and the promotion of multilateral networks.

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[2] European Parliament working documents 302/72 (1972-1973). Report drawn up on behalf of the Committee on External Economic Relations on the consequences of the enlargement of the European Community for its relations with the Mediterranean countries.

Moreover, cooperation extended to issues relating to human rights, the environment and the promotion of democracy (European Commission 1989). However the RMP suffered from a gap between the policy goals and the actual efforts made by the EU member states in this partnership. The RMP did not bring about any significant economic developments or major economic reforms in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region to close the structural gaps between the European and the neighbouring Mediterranean economies. Nevertheless the RMP ensured that EU-Mediterranean partnership stayed on the agenda of the EU at a time of great international transitions and tumultuous changes taking place in Central and Eastern Europe (Gomez 2003).

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: the Barcelona Process

At a time of optimism brought about by the Oslo Accords (signed in 1993),[3] the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) was launched. This was the first multilateral framework for cooperation between the EU and the southern and eastern Mediterranean region. At the Barcelona conference in November 1995, the EMP was formalised into the Barcelona Process based on the principles of joint ownership, dialogue and co-operation and the motivation to create a Mediterranean region of peace, security and shared prosperity. At the conference, 27 countries adopted the Barcelona declaration.[4] The objectives of the cooperation can be divided into three sub-areas:

- political and security aspects with the aim to create a common area of peace and stability;
- economic and financial aspects to promote shared economic opportunity through sustainable socio-economic development; and
- Social and cultural aspects with the aim to promote understanding and intercultural dialogue between cultures.[5]

One of the ambitions of the Barcelona Process was the goal to create a free trade area between EU and its southern / eastern Mediterranean partners. Between 1998 and 2005, several Euro-Med Association Agreements were adopted.[6] The EU concluded Agreements with Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. The new Association Agreements included a deadline for the introduction of a free trade area in industrial goods by 2010. The preconditions for entering into this free trade agreement were achievement of macroeconomic stability, low dependence on trade taxes, a low level of external debt, a high level of openness to trade, a liberal regulatory framework and a comprehensive social safety net to minimise the transition costs (Nsouli 2006). Tunisia qualified in 2008 while other countries such as Libya and Syria lag behind. This policy however, potentially has a major impact on many of the Mediterranean economies. If Morocco, for example, were to enter into the FTA framework, one third of local industries would go bankrupt, one third would need major restructuring and only one third would survive. The EU did offer funds to help with

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[3] These agreements were an attempt to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It was the first direct agreement between the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

[4] The Euro-Med partners in 1995 were Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

[5] The Barcelona Declaration of 1995. Web. 7 Oct 2011. <http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/barcelona_en.htm>

[6] The current Association Agreements with Free Trade Area provisions: Algeria (2005), Croatia (2005), Egypt (2004), Israel (2000), Jordan (2002), Lebanon (2006), Morocco (2000), Palestinian Authority (1997), Tunisia (1998). Turkey is in a Customs Union with the EU.

this transition but they were not sufficient. Nevertheless the painful economic transition was accepted as part of the reforms necessary to create a free trade area with the EU, which also comes with other advantages in the developmental arena, and in broader political and security dialogue (Bicchi 2009).

However, the political dialogue continued to be plagued by post-colonial sensitivities since many of the partners were former colonies of key EU member states. Security dialogue was further hampered by the lack of overarching security architectures or organisations in the southern/eastern Mediterranean region and the character of security positions of both regions, for instance, with regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The events of 9/11 with the emergence of the Al Qaeda network had further impacts on how security issues are viewed within the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. According to Tobias Schumacher,[7] a consensus among the political elites in the EU and its Mediterranean partners exists that international terrorism after 9/11 is a new phenomenon and this can only be tackled with stringent measures contained in the Euro-Mediterranean Code of Conduct on Terrorism. Schumacher noted that the fear of international terrorism and the rise of Islamic groups related to the Al Qaeda network provided the political leaders in the southern Mediterranean region the excuse to prioritise political stability over political liberalisation and democratic reforms. The EU was complicit in this and newly imposed policies concerning immigration, asylum and border controls limited civic liberties especially toward third-country nationals with an Islamic background.

The attacks of 9/11 also influenced perceptions of various policy issues such as migration, which are seen through the lens of national security. Migration already been a subject of highly politicized and sensitive policy debates in the EU in the 1990s, and these debates further intensified after 9/11. Within these discussions, migration is increasingly seen as a danger to domestic society and discussed together with the so-called 'threat of Islam'. Migration was linked to a plethora of security concerns ranging across 'public order, cultural identity, and domestic and labour market stability' (Huysmans 2000: 752). To limit migration flows from the southern/eastern Mediterranean countries, the EU has for instance increased the operation of both paramilitary and military security forces on the EU's Mediterranean borders (Eylemer and Semsit 2007: 56-60).

In evaluating the Barcelona Process, many analysts (Emerson and Noutcheva 2005; Soler i Lecha 2008; Kuach and Youngs 2009) attributed the lack of progress to the fact that the goals for the Euro-Mediterranean partnership were either too ambitious or too vague in the first place. The partners in the Barcelona Process also had different expectations towards the partnership. For example, the priority of the EU was to ensure stability in the Mediterranean region and hoped that the countries in this region would adopt European values and models and that these in turn would underpin the stability of this region. However, for many of the Mediterranean partners, their primary priority was better access to the European markets and development aid.

Despite its ambitious economic goals, and the increased provision of EU development aid to the partners, the gap between the EU and the southern Mediterranean region remained. The average GDP of the Mediterranean partner countries remains at least five times

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[7] Presentation at the Euromesco research workshop 'Democracy and Migration in the Euro-Mediterranean Area', 27-8 September 2007, Pembroke College, Cambridge, as reported in Euromesco (2007).

lower than the average GDP of the 27 EU member states despite the fact that the EU has enlarged to include several lower middle-income countries (Magnan-Marionnet 2008: 19-20)

The lack of progress in satisfying economic ambitions is supported by a FEMISE (2010) report,[8] which concluded that fifteen years after the Barcelona process, customs tariffs on European goods imported by Mediterranean countries remain just as high. Moreover, Europe still has not opened its borders to several agricultural products from the Maghreb. Finally, the report makes clear that foreign direct investment and capital flows between 2004 and 2009 appeared also to be very limited.

Despite these divergences in goals and expectations, a positive contribution of this multilateral cooperation is that it has brought together several Middle Eastern countries, including Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and offered a platform for Israel to meet its neighbours to build confidence and trust. However the complexities of the conflicts between the Arabs and the Israelis have also hindered progress in political cooperation between the EU and its southern partners. For example, the proposal to develop a Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Stability and Peace failed because of divergent perceptions of threats and challenges to political stability, making one wonder if the EU was unduly naïve in its approach to its southern neighbours (Attinà 2004).

Overall, the Barcelona Process suffered because of the increasing Israeli-Arab tensions after the breakdown of the Oslo agreements. 9/11 and international terrorism

also seemed to fuel insecurity within the EU resulting in the rise of extreme-right and xenophobic political parties within Europe. All these trends were not helpful in cementing a strong partnership between the EU and its southern Mediterranean neighbours. But the main obstacle to better relations was the continued reign of many authoritarian regimes in this region. Many of these regimes rejected any kind of conditionality that the EU tried to impose in its cooperation programmes (Crawford 2005).

EU's European Neighbourhood Policy and its impact on Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

The post-Cold War situation and the EU's eastward enlargement led to a rethink and a broader formulation of a European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).[9] The ENP was set up in 2004 with the objective of avoiding the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours. The ENP was envisioned to deal with the change in the geopolitical landscape of the eastern part of the EU and the need for stability with its new neighbours and finally to cope with a more complex decision-making process after enlargement. The ENP was thus primarily aimed at addressing the challenges in the East. However, under the pressure of the southern EU member states, the ENP was extended to the southern neighbours.

Currently the ENP includes relations with 16 of the EU's neighbours, which can be categorised into two types – former Soviet states in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus; and Arab states and Israel in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region.[10] Some countries in the first category

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[8] FEMISE is an EU-funded project, which aims to contribute to the reinforcement of dialogue on economic and financial issues in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Union for the Mediterranean.

[9] Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia became member states of the EU on 1 May 2004.

[10] Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.

might eventually become candidates for EU membership, while the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean states are not generally seen as potential members (COM 2003; 104 final; 5).

The ENP differs from the Barcelona Process in two ways. Firstly, the ENP moves from the overarching multilateral framework approach of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) to a strategy of bilateralism with differentiation. Differentiation means that relations with each neighbouring country would call for different approaches, taking into consideration the process and degree of their integration with the EU. Of course, the EMP also incorporates bilateral agreements but these were based on very similar terms and policies. The ENP, however, also gave the opportunity to individual Mediterranean countries to upgrade their bilateral relations with the EU and there were positive elements for taking such bilateral approaches (Aliboni et al 2008: 14). For the EU, the bilateral agreements were an opportunity to extend its political and economical influence into the southern Mediterranean. At the same time, the EU's Mediterranean partners also preferred the cooperation on a bilateral basis. Several of the Mediterranean states never really quite appreciated being put in a group together with rivals and even declared enemies such as Israel in the Barcelona Process (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005: 26).

The ENP also introduced political conditionality – the use of conditions attached to a loan, aid or a membership of an organisation – but since there was little possibility of those countries particularly in the Middle East and North Africa becoming EU members, it was never rigorously pursued. The use of conditionality by the EU has been most successful where membership of the EU is a possibility. In the enlargement process, candidate countries wanting to become EU members have to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria and adopt the *acquis communautaire*. [11] However, where membership of the EU is remote, tying aid, loans and trade agreements to democracy, human rights and good governance reforms has not had much impact.

As the ENP resulted from internal logic within the EU rather than of realities in the Mediterranean countries, it is therefore not surprising that the ENP does not address the socio-economic realities of the southern Mediterranean region and the shortcomings of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. In comparison with the Barcelona Process, the ENP as applied to the countries in the southern Mediterranean region can be described as bilateral cooperation which mainly focuses on technical and economic issues. The issue of political reform, democracy and human rights was not actively pursued (Grant 2011: 4). This view is shared by the EU itself. In its own analysis of the first six years of the ENP, the European Commission concluded that

> The pace of progress is determined by the degree to which partners have been willing to undertake the necessary reforms, and more has been achieved in the economic sphere, notably trade and regulatory approximation, than in the area of democratic governance. However, the pace of progress also depends on the benefits that partners can expect within a reasonable time frame. Here the extent to which the EU has been willing to engage itself with the partnership has also had, and will continue to have, a significant effect.
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> (European Commission 2010)

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[11] That is, the whole body of European Law, consisting of legislation, legal acts and court decisions.

The French proposal - Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is the latest development in the history of EU-Mediterranean relations. On 7 February 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy, then a candidate for the presidency of France, launched a proposal for the UfM.[12] According to him, this would mark the re-establishment of cooperation among European and those Mediterranean countries which are outside the framework of the EU, and to address the shortcomings of the Barcelona Process. However, some analysts (Aliboni et al 2008) believed that it was not the shortcomings of the Barcelona Process, but French concerns about its decreasing role in the Mediterranean region that lay behind the French UfM proposal (ibid).

The French proposal brought about mixed reactions within the EU. The main reservation was expressed by Germany; Angela Merkel pointed out that the UfM should be open for all EU states and the project should be situated within the framework of the Barcelona Process (Soler i Lecha 2008: 28). This comment reflected Germany's questioning over the motives of the French, and also concern that EU money would be used to fund a project which would benefit only a small number of EU member states. The Commission and especially the units involved in the Barcelona Process were also unhappy about the proposal as they regarded it as a criticism of the Barcelona Process. Nevertheless Benita Ferrero-Waldner, then Commissioner for External Relations, requested that the Commission also be represented at the highest level in this new UfM. Despite unhappiness and scepticism from some quarters, the proposal did gain support from some EU member states. At a

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[12] The members of the first proposal were Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and some regional unions.

two-day conference in January 2008, the 'Olive Group' – a grouping of southern EU member states – declared their support. Spain and Italy were the most enthusiastic supporters of the proposal.

The responses from the EU's partners to the UfM were also divergent, but two issues were at the core of their scepticism and criticism. The relation between the Arabs and the Israelis was the first issue as the UfM still includes Israel. The EU continued to harbour the hope that putting some (Arab) Mediterranean countries and Israel in one cooperation platform could help to temper the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, with the preferred bilateral relations of the ENP, some of these Mediterranean partners now had an alternative and were not willing to cooperate to normalise their relations with Israel under this broad regional framework. The second fear of the Arab countries was a renewal of the so-called European paternalism or neo-colonialism. The Algerian foreign minister Mourad Medelci noted that 'relations with the EU are unbalanced and decisions belong to those who have money and know-how' (Schlumberger 2011: 138). The doubts expressed by some of the EU's Mediterranean partners towards further cooperation with the EU demonstrates that despite the engagement since the 1970s, a certain level of suspicion and distrust continues to exist and impact the relations between the two regions.

Turkey (which was party to the UfM proposal) was also initially sceptical, seeing it as a French ploy to distract from the discussion of the accession of Turkey into the EU. President Sarkozy tried to reassure Turkey that this was not the intention and played up the role that Turkey could play in the UfM as 'a great Mediterranean country'.

At the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean on 13 July 2008, 43 countries from the Euro-

Mediterranean region came together to relaunch the Barcelona Process and create a Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).[13] New countries were added to the cooperation, namely Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Monaco. The large membership made it difficult to reconcile the very divergent national interests and hence diluted the intensity of the partnership.

The key aim of the UfM is to promote projects among groups of countries that are keen to do so. Therefore the UfM launched six concrete initiatives to which the member states can take part on a voluntary basis:

1) alleviating pollution in the Mediterranean area;
2) the construction of highways and sea routes between ports;
3) cooperation after natural disasters;
4) the development of solar energy;
5) the establishment of a new university in Slovenia; and
6) investments in businesses.

As one can observe, the UfM focuses on relatively uncontroversial areas of cooperation. Moreover, some issues at this technical level were already the subject of institutionalised cooperation in earlier partnerships (Kauch and Youngs 2009: 965). With the emphasis on functional cooperation, the EU's purported focus on human rights and democracy has become diluted. While within the Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit, the political will to turn the Mediterranean region into an area of peace, democracy, cooperation and prosperity was stated, in practice, the EU was instead looking for a region with 'good enough stable governance' because of security reasons. If one compares

the UfM with the Barcelona Process and the ENP, political conditionality seems to have been relinquished (Bicchi 2011: 14).

One of the biggest innovations of the UfM has been its institutional framework. The UfM introduced two new institutions – a system of co-presidency and the establishment of a secretariat. The system of co-presidency, proposed by the non-EU Mediterranean partners, assures that the UfM is managed by one president from the EU and one from the other Mediterranean partners (non-EU Med). The partners argued that the co-presidency should be a symbol of an equal partnership and would make each partner more aware of its responsibilities and motivate all towards active engagement (MEDEA, European institute for research on Euro-Arab cooperation). However, as both co-presidents are of equal status, the co-presidents can also veto each other's proposals. This created the situation that controversial issues and any criticisms of autocratic powers in the southern and eastern Mediterranean would hardly make onto the agenda for the UfM meetings. Hence the UfM cannot manage any kind of meaningful political dialogue that would promote political reform (Schlumberger 2011: 142).

Like the Barcelona Process, the UfM is similarly affected by the animosities between the Arab countries and Israel and the ongoing tension between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Since the creation of the UfM, the calendar of meetings has not been without disruption. The second Biennial Summit of the Heads of State and Government should have taken place in one of the EU's Mediterranean partners in July 2010. However the Euro-Mediterranean countries agreed to hold the summit in Barcelona on 7 June 2010. On 20 May, Egypt, France – the two first co-presidents – and Spain[14] decided to postpone

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[13] The Union for the Mediterranean members are the 27 European Union member states and the 16 Mediterranean Partner countries (Albania, Algeria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey).

[14] Spain held the presidency of the Council of the European Union from January to July 2010. As in 1989, 1995 and 2002,

the summit because the indirect talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority needed more time. Moreover, a reason mentioned in the media was the threat of Arab countries to boycott the summit should Avigdor Lieberman, Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs, attend the summit. The postponed summit was rescheduled to take place in Barcelona on 21 November 2010. Nevertheless, France and Egypt decided together with Spain to postpone the summit again because of the Israel-Palestine conflict (Bicchi 2011: 12).

Although the UfM is still at its early stage, UfM suffers from the same problems – diverse and large membership, tensions between Israeli and several of its Arab neighbours, etc, that plague the earlier EMP. Some criticism is also expressed of the economic cooperation as the southern Mediterranean countries were not given full access to the European market, especially in agriculture, and 'without free access for agriculture', the EU is not seen as credible as a foreign policy actor who can balance the strategic and political considerations with economic constraints' (Kausch and Young 2009: 967).

Overall, one could see that the EU-Mediterranean partnership in its various incarnations (from GMP to Barcelona Process to UfM) suffered from the way the EU tried to 'impose' its views of a 'region'. By putting Israel together with its Arab neighbours in the naïve hope that the EU-Mediterranean partnership would offer some sort of platform for Israel and its Arab neighbours to promote confidence building and trust in the region added unnecessary tensions to the partnership. The overall partnership suffered and cooperation has been impeded time and again by the Palestinian-Israeli conflicts. The desire to pursue a comprehensive partnership

the EU's Mediterranean agenda has always been a priority for the Spanish presidency.

was also diluted over the years because of political tensions, structural economic problems and the increasing gap between the EU and its Mediterranean partners. The EU has to temper its initial hopes of transforming the region through its partnership and association agreements to focus more on functional cooperation and the EU's overriding desire to maintain political stability in the region.

3. The EU's response to the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring is a term used in popular media for the uprisings and protests which have been taking place in the Middle East and North Africa since 18 December 2010. The Arab Spring protests have toppled authoritarian leaders such as Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt, and have catalysed a wave of pro-democracy protests. What are the causes for the sweeping changes, and what are the immediate responses from the EU?

There are many inter-locking reasons for the Arab Spring. In an interview with James M. Dorsey, an award winning journalist, he noted that the overall issue was the lack of respect and the sense of degradation that fuelled the protests from the people against the rulers. One could add that fundamentally there has been a combination of political and economic stagnation with rampant corruption, growing inequalities and pockets of human rights abuses and lack of opportunities for a growing population of better-educated youths. Anger over authoritarian regimes has increased as the latter tried to tighten their hold over power at all costs. Despite local differences, the protestors in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Yemen shared two major aims: the overthrowing of the old regimes for the establishment of new political orders and the improvement of economic opportunities.

After years of promoting Euro-Mediterranean partnership which include countries embroiled in the current turmoil, one could not help but wonder if the EU was aware of this rising discontent and see the Arab Spring coming. If the EU-Mediterranean partnership had been stronger and had not been weighed down by the Arab-Israeli conflict; if the partnership had succeeded in improving the economic livelihoods of the majority of the people in southern and eastern Mediterranean, would a smoother political transition have taken place? If the EU had insisted on political conditionality and actively promoted human rights and democracy in this region, would the events have turned out differently?

Some scholars have argued that the EU has missed its chance in using conditionality to support political reforms in many of the Mediterranean partner countries. Progress reports from the ENP showed that the EU increased aid to countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco even though there was no visible progress in the improvement of human rights in these countries (ENP Progress Reports 2010 for Tunisia,[15] Egypt[16] and Morocco[17]). Youngs (2006) in fact is of the opinion that France, Spain and Italy influenced the EU to mitigate the use of conditionality on its aid to North African countries. These southern EU member states have downplayed conditionality because of the commercial contracts they had, and because of the fear of destabilising the regimes that protected their investments (Grant 2011: 3).

Other instances of the EU not being more forthright in its support for political reform and efforts to uphold democracy include its silence on the 'rigged' elections in Egypt in 2009, the offer of an upgraded Association Agreement[18] with Tunisia despite election irregularities and the negotiation with Libya for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) (Grant 2011: 10). The EU continued its engagement with the authoritarian regimes in the southern Mediterranean for three reasons: political security such as preventing the rise of political extremism, energy security (mainly oil) and lastly, to manage migration.

Economic stagnation, widespread poverty, inequalities, and high unemployment, particularly among the youth, contributed to the growing discontent. These in turn are closely linked to the political stagnation brought about by authoritarian regimes who, according to Schlumberger (2011: 136), were more concerned with weeding out opposition and challenges to their power and lining their own pockets than to focus on economic and human development for the population at large . Even in countries like Tunisia and Egypt which enjoyed a period of economic growth because of market-friendly economic reforms, most people still experienced a decline in living standards because of the lack of social, educational and political reforms to cope with the rapid changes in societies. Close to half of the Arab world's population is below 25 years of age, well-educated but mostly unemployed. Many of these governments were unable to institute comprehensive policies and reforms that would unleash the full potential of their human resources (Bajorie 2011).

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[15] European Commission (2010) *Taking stock of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): 2009 progress report for Tunisia*, SEC (2010) 514.

[16] European Commission (2010) *Taking stock of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): 2009 progress report for Egypt*, SEC (2010) 517.

[17] European Commission (2010) *Taking stock of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): 2009 progress report for Morocco*, SEC (2010) 521.

[18] An Association Agreement is a treaty between the EU and a non-EU country that creates a framework for co-operation. Areas frequently covered by such agreements include the development of political, trade, social, cultural and security links. The legal base for the association agreements is provided by art. 217 TFEU (formerly art. 310 TEC).

An important characteristic of the Arab uprisings was the combination of a large frustrated group of youths and their use of social media. Some have described the Arab protests as a Facebook or Twitter revolution. Attempts by the government to control the internet could not stem the tide of protests. For example the Egyptian government shut down all internet service for a few days by ordering internet service providers within the country to shut down all services within a short notice, a move which was really unprecedented (Shah 2011: 4). This, however, did not stop the protests from growing.

For many of the Arab countries in the southern and eastern part of the Mediterranean, economic relations with the EU are 'far more prominent than with the US. More than 50 per cent of their trade is with the EU'. The EU is 'also the largest provider of financial assistance and the largest foreign investor' (Schulz 2010: 7-8). Although the focus of EU-Mediterranean relations has been on economic issues in the past few years, this has been mainly at the government-to-government level and there was insufficient focus on the development of the private sector. Economic wealth remained concentrated within the small class of political elites and their cronies (Grant 2011: 4).

On hindsight, the EU-Mediterranean partnership from the 1990s to the eve of the Arab Spring focused primarily on official state-to-state relations. It lacked a broader approach towards society, a policy failing that the EU would have to reflect upon as it considers a new approach to the region in the aftermath of such tumultuous changes. Indeed, some scholars such as Schlumberger (2011: 140) remarked that the UfM and earlier partnerships were focused too much on state-to-state relations and had a P2P (palace-to-palace or president-to-president) bias.

Besides some criticisms of its past failures, the EU's responses to the Arab Spring have also been criticised by analysts such as Brattberg (2011), Grant (2011), Etzioni (2011), as too little and too late. It took the EU a month to condemn the use of violence in Tunisia by Ben Ali's regime against his people. The revolt in Egypt did bring about a faster response, with France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK signing a joint statement that condemned the use of violence and called for a 'quick and orderly transition' and response to the crisis in Libya was led by France and the UK (Brattberg 2011: 1).

Besides the issuing of statements, the EU launched restrictive measures against some Mediterranean countries. Among these measures were the freezing of assets, the embargo on arms, visa bans on top officials.[19] Yet in doing this, Balfour (2011) argues that the EU is following the other members of the UN Security Council instead of taking the lead and acting swiftly in a region that is considered its 'neighbourhood'. Hitherto, the United States (US) and the EU have placed sanctions on Syria's Assad and his family. In an interview, analyst James Dorsey expressed concerns that sanctions will heighten strains on the Syrian economy that is already deteriorating. But the US and EU have been unable to persuade Russia and China to abandon opposition to a UN Security Council resolution condemning Syria's actions. The discussion and actions taken show the complexities of the situation and the difference in opinion on action to be taken. While some members of the EU have intervened in Libya invoking the principle of

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[19] International restrictive measures or sanctions are foreign policy decisions that need to be approved unanimously by the Council as established by Chapter 2, Title V, of the Treaty Establishing the European Union (TEU). The list of the types of sanctions that can be imposed by the EU is long but the most common ones are financial restrictions, commodity and service boycotts, arms embargoes and travel bans (Guemelli 2010).

'responsibility to protect',[20] the unity of the action was compromised by Germany's abstention in the UN to support the imposition of a no-fly zone and possible military intervention in Libya.

A heated debate on the intervention in Libya was sparked after three months of NATO bombing. The UN mandate for the intervention is to protect civilians from Gaddafi's forces. However, after weeks of bombing, there were concerns that NATO had gone beyond the responsibility to protect principle and broadened its mission to include 'regime change'. However, there were people who argued that the intervention in Libya marked a new beginning in the Middle East and North Africa. Finally proponents argue that the intervention is necessary to deter other regimes from deploying violence against peaceful protestors.

The implementation of sanctions and the strong actions taken against Libya furnish perhaps examples of the double standards applied by the 'West'. Amirahmadi and Afrasiabi (2011) explain that the EU and US are 'using double standards by imposing sanctions on Iran for their human rights violations and taking military action against the Libyan dictator while failing to address the appalling repression of the pro-democracy movement in Bahrain'. It also took the West after months of repression and outright violence against protestors in Syria before the US finally called for Assad to leave.

The EU's earlier policies towards its Middle East and North African partners in the Mediterranean region have been seen as a failure in responding to the needs of the

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[20] The concept of the 'responsibility to protect' originated from the idea that sovereignty is not a privilege, but a responsibility. This concept, accepted by the UN in 2005 (Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit), renders it a responsibility of the international community to act if a state fails to protect its citizens from 'genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity'.

people. The focus on order and stability, and the willingness of the EU to accommodate and continue to provide aid to the authoritarian regimes in several of these countries put the EU in an awkward position when the people in these countries rose up against their governments demanding political reform.

4. Consequences of the Arab Spring for the future of Euro-Mediterranean partnership

The transition and turmoil taking place in several of the countries that are members of the EU-Mediterranean partnership are likely to have significant implications on the EU's future policies towards the southern and eastern Mediterranean. The ways in which the EU could support and shape the developments in this region will be the focus of this section.

The transition to democracy

The Arab Spring has unleashed hopes that democracy will spread in the Arab world. The paths to democracy may be different and bumpy, but there is general consensus that the region will never be the same again. Successful transition to democracy will of course depend on many factors, among them, on the countries' circumstances and the degree of preparation by the people and institutions for their new roles and responsibilities. External support can be helpful, but ultimately the new political order would need to be shaped by domestic actors, and the EU needs to be mindful as it crafts its policies in response to the changes taking place.

In the past months, Egypt and Tunisia have both, in different manners, taken steps to form a new government after the overthrow of Mubarak and Ben Ali respectively. But

whether this will lead to democracy as defined or wanted by the 'West' remains unclear. What is clear, however, as put forth by the new head of the Mediterranean Union, Youssef Amrani, is that while Western friends should support Arab Spring reforms they can no longer dictate the terms for democracy.

In the past the EU had focused on creating a ring of firmly governed states to establish a stable region. The concerns for maintaining order and stability in the south of Mediterranean and the Arab region overrode concerns about democracy and human rights. This has affected the EU's credibility, especially with regards to democracy promotion in the Mediterranean region especially because of their efforts to isolate Hamas when the latter won the Palestinian elections[21] (Behr 2010: 85-87).

The current changes demand that the EU adopt a new policy towards its Mediterranean partners. With the 'Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity', a proposal by the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), the promotion of democracy and human rights is now at the centre of this new partnership, and signals the first concrete step taken by the EU to adjust to the new situation in the region. The EU is also proposing to pay more attention to non-governmental actors through the new Civil Society Facility and the Endowment for Democracy. This new body will provide grants to non-registered NGOs and political parties (Balfour 2011).

However, some scholars like Behr (2010) argue that the EU has to define more clearly what and who it will support, and be mindful of the perceptions about such support by its Mediterranean partners, should political conditionality be strictly imposed again. The EU should also consider, in the light of past failures in the EU neighbourhood, the effectiveness of such conditionality in promoting reforms. Indeed some European Commission officials argue that the EU should stop talking about foregrounding conditionality.

While there is renewed desire for the EU to support democracy and human rights and craft a new partnership with its southern Mediterranean partners, the following factors and developments will also continue to shape and influence the EU's response and policy.

The role of political Islam

Many of the protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, etc were led by groups not associated with the Islamist parties. In fact, it was noted that political Islam and many Islamic groups had not featured prominently in these popular uprisings. However, several analysts and observers of the region believe that well-organised Islamic groups will begin to play a more important role in the ongoing transition. This is because they are 'frequently the most important or even the only forces which have managed to survive under repressive regimes' and are the best-organised (Hanelt and Mőller 2011: 5). The Muslim Brotherhood, the best-known Islamic group, has its roots in combating colonialism and it sees Islam as the solution for national problems.

The lack of understanding with regards to political Islam and lack of engagement with Islamist groups create unjustified fears that if the Islamist groups or parties come into power in countries around the southern Mediterranean, the region will become more

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[21] On 25 January 2006 elections were held for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). This was the first time after 1996. Final results showed that Hamas won the elections with 74 seats to 45 seats for Fatah. The response of the Israeli government, the US and the EU was to demand that Hamas formally recognise Israel's right to exist and 'renounce violence' before they would recognise the new Palestinian government. Because of a negative response by Hamas, foreign aid from the US and the EU to the Palestinian authority was cut massively and economic sanctions were imposed.

volatile and less amenable to Western interests (Hamid 2011). Tariq Ramadan however urged the West to try and understand that Islamism occupies several positions across the ideological spectrum. Not all of them are radical and in fact many of them reject violence and condemn acts of terrorism (Corral 2011). An example here is the Justice and Development Party in Turkey, a party with Islamist roots working in a democratic arena (Grant 2011: 2).

The role of political Islam has been one of the main obstacles to the deepening of Euro-Mediterranean relations. Before the Arab Spring, the EU remained cautious in its cooperation with Islamist opposition in the Arab states. The distrust of European governments towards Islamic groups and political Islam runs deep, particularly after 9/11. Political Islam and Islamic fundamentalism are increasingly flagged by right-wing politicians in Europe as contributing to radicalisation and problems of integration of the Muslim communities in their own societies. The tendency to equate political Islam with radicalism and fundamentalism led to the unwillingness of the EU to engage Islamic parties and organizations and their followers and their subsequent marginalisation. Many of the autocratic regimes in the southern and eastern Mediterranean capitalised on the fears of Europeans, equating any challenge to their rule with fermentation by 'Islamists' and playing up the threat of terrorism. However, the reality in many parts of the Middle East and North Africa is that these Islamists are the principal agents for social and economic change (Aliboni et al 2008: 16).

Currently within the EU, there are different opinions towards the development of democracy and the role of political Islam in the Mediterranean. While it is clear that many of the popular uprisings were sparked by youths and professionals, and that Islamic groups only played a very modest role in these uprising, some people are concerned that the Middle East and North African countries are not ready for democracy. They note that the groups in the protests are relatively disparate and disorganised and if elections were to be held, they would be hijacked by the better organised Islamic groups (Grant 2011). The question then arises as to whether the EU, in providing future assistance to the region, should focus on efforts to help the different groups in these societies to organise themselves so that the reformist agenda is not hijacked by any one particular group. Others caution that in trying to forge a better partnership with its predominantly Muslim partners in the region, the EU must pay attention not only to non-religious civil society organisations but must also be willing to discard its prejudice and be open to engagement with Islamic groups.

Economic and energy considerations

In the proposed 'Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity', the EU expressed its ambition to forge a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with its Southern and Eastern Mediterranean partners. However, analysts noted that such a deep and comprehensive FTA is meaningless if the EU does not lift restrictions to agricultural produce such as olive oil, wine, various fruit and vegetables as these remain the key exports of many of the Mediterranean partners (Grant 2011: 6).

Unrest in North Africa and the Middle East has historically been a source for the fluctuations in prices of crude oil on the world markets. The Yom Kippur War in 1973, the Iranian revolution in 1979 and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 all led to an increase in the prices of oil. There is therefore, a concern that the Arab Spring would continue to spread to key oil exporting Gulf nations, with serious implications on oil production and

energy prices. So far, the popular uprisings have been in the less oil-endowed countries. Only Libya, the 13th largest oil exporter, caused some minor fluctuations in the price of oil. However, when protests in Bahrain erupted, the EU and the US were complicit in allowing forces led by Saudi Arabia to enter Bahrain to quell the protests, reflecting the West's concerns toward oil supply and prices.

In the EU's 2011-2013 financial framework, the ENP is only getting 6 per cent of the budget, €5.7 billion to be exact. To fulfil its potential and face the coming economic challenges in the Mediterranean, the region needs much higher investments. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton therefore called for an increase of €1 billion in the ceiling for the European Investment Bank (EIB), the organisation that funds projects through which the objectives of the EU can be realized. The EIB, through the Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership (FEMIP), is the largest investor in the region. Currently, member states have agreed to an additional financial package of €1.242 billion. According to many, this amount is still not enough. They therefore call for the EU to increase its offer to the southern Mediterranean region which can come in the form of more investments and financial assistance, to underpin the reforms so that desired stability and prosperity can return to the region (Sapir and Zachmann 2011).

Regional balance of power

The Arab Spring is also likely to have some consequences for the regional balance of power in the Middle East and implications for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some of the demands coming from the protestors include calls for a more independent role of their countries in the international arena. The close ties of some of the regimes, such as those of Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, to the West have not been viewed positively. The US policy in Middle East with its clear bias towards Israel was maintained through tacit US support for some of the countries ruled by Sunnis who were more concerned about the Iranian influence and their hold over the Shia communities in their own countries. Egypt, the only country in the Middle East that has formally recognised Israel, has been a significant player in the regional balance of power. With Hosni Mubarak gone, there are already emerging signs that Egypt's relations with Israel might become more problematic. This would worry the Israel and the US and complicate the search for a solution to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Israelis are also feeling internationally isolated and the Palestinians, sensing this, have threatened to unilaterally declare independent statehood. A submission has been made to the UN and the Security Council will begin a debate on whether to welcome the Palestinian Authority as a member state.

In an interview, James Dorsey explained that the biggest change towards the Israel-Palestine conflict within the Mediterranean will be the attitude of Egypt. In past years, Egypt has collaborated with Israel. Egypt closed its border in order to isolate Gaza, but soon after the Arab Spring the border was reopened. Egyptian officials explained that they are moving towards policies that reflect the public opinion. Another change because of the Arab Spring is an agreement between Hamas and Fatah which was signed on 27 April. Many agree that the change of the Egyptian government to be less willing to enforce pro-Israel policies was an important contributing factor to this (Duss 2011).

Many western diplomats and observers argue that the Arab Spring reinforces the urgency for peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians or Israel is likely to see itself more isolated. What role the EU can play in

bringing about these talks is unclear. The strong relationship between Israel and the US, the lack of interest of Israel toward the EU (even though the EU is part of the quartet) as a negotiator and finally the fragmented nature of the EU policy towards the Middle East, stemming from the different opinions of the EU member states towards the Israel-Palestinian conflict, has so far meant that the EU has not been a significant player in offering any solutions to the conflict (Schulz 2010: 4, 8, 10).

John Dugard, a South African professor of international law and Special Rapporteur for both the International Law Commission and the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights, in an interview, proposes that the EU can help in setting the agenda for the peace talks by first taking a tougher stand on Israel with regards to settlements in East Jerusalem and insisting on an end to settlement building in the disputed areas. Secondly, the EU should support the declaration of Palestine as an independent state, and finally, the EU should end the isolation of Hamas in Palestine as they have to be part of the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, Dugard also opined in the interview that it is unlikely that the EU would take these three steps as the EU continues to allow the US to take the lead and tends to follow the broad direction set by the US with regards to this issue.

Migration and refugees

As a consequence of the overthrow of regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, and the civil war in Libya, the Arab Spring resulted in an exodus of refugees to the EU. The first Tunisian refugees arrived on the island of Lampedusa, Italy on 16 February 2011. By 5 April, around 25,000 asylum seekers had reached Italy and another 800 reached Malta. The increased number of immigrants led to a fierce discussion in the EU about sharing the burden

of housing these immigrants among the member states.

The discussion about migration flows and refugees to the EU started with Umberto Bossi, the Italian Minister for National Reform's comment that immigrants should be spread across the EU instead of staying only in Italy.[22] This proposal was not appreciated by several northern EU states (Denmark and Germany for instance) and particularly by the French, who only wanted to support Italy financially in dealing with the flows of migrants and refugees to Lampedusa. On 7 April, Italy announced that it would provide the Tunisian migrants with a temporary humanitarian visa[23] that would allow them to freely move around within the Schengen area. This led to angry reactions from other European countries, especially from Germany and France. Countries such as Denmark also reintroduced border controls.

The refugee issue led to a brief abrogation of the Schengen Agreement, which reflected the political sensitivities that many EU member states face with regards to accepting more

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[22] France, Germany and the Benelux countries signed the Schengen Agreement in 1985. Individuals of these countries were then able to travel freely between these countries. Currently the Schengen area includes 25 countries and Romania and Bulgaria are on hold With the Schengen Agreement, checks at internal borders between the signatory states are eliminated and there a single external border is created. To enter the Schengen area, identical procedures are implemented. There are also common rules on visas, asylum and borders controls. Italy has taken more than the fair part of the North African migrants but overall it has fewer refugees than Austria, Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden.

[23] The decree of the President of the Council of Ministers (DPCM) adopted on 5 April 2011, provides for the issue of temporary residence permits for humanitarian reasons in favour of "citizens of North African countries" who arrived in Italy from 1 January 2011 to 5 April 2011. In a second DPCM, the Italian authorities declared 'state of humanitarian emergency in the territory of North Africa in order to effectively contrast the exceptional flow of migrants in the Italian territory'.

migrants and refugees into their societies. Some EU member states proposed a temporary return to national borders and the possibility of isolating any EU member state which is incapable of efficiently managing incoming migratory flows. Germany, the Netherlands, Greece and Malta have already agreed to the proposal to adjust the Schengen Agreement. The European Commission consequently proposed that only under very special and difficult conditions such as the massive influx of illegal migrants could a Schengen signatory state reintroduce temporary border controls.

Migration control is a regular topic in EU-Mediterranean dialogue. The influx of migrants from North Africa and the Middle East will remain a sensitive issue for the future EU-Mediterranean partnership. The proposal by the Commission, in the 'Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity', suggests 'gradual steps towards visa liberalisation for individual partner countries' (European Commission 2011: 200 final 7). Although this perspective is helpful, it should be noted that when Štefan Füle, Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy, proposed some ideas on visa facilitation for the southern neighbour countries in 2010, he was reprimanded by several member states (Grant 2011: 8). Therefore the chances that member states will now agree to more liberal visa facilitation in the Mediterranean region are slim.

Migration has become such a politically sensitive issue linked to various insecurities felt by the populations in the EU member states that the future of the EU-Mediterranean partnership would likely continue to be impacted by the rising anti-migrant sentiments. The exploitation of the fears of migrants to links to terrorism is not helped by a recent report by Europol (2011) expressing concern that the Arab Spring and the economic crisis would likely lead to increase in the risk of terrorist attacks by fundamentalists in the EU. Organizations like the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) have so far been only observers to the Arab Spring. However, the Europol report on EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report concludes that 'should Arab expectations [on the results of the Arab Spring] not be met, the consequence may be a surge in support for those terrorist organizations'. It also reported that some groups might take advantage of the temporary reduction of the control of the state to plot their attacks. The report also warned that individuals with terrorist intentions could easily enter Europe amongst the large numbers of immigrants (Rettman 2011).

5. Conclusion

Despite the unpredictability of the current situation, the Arab Spring has created new political realities in the Mediterranean region which the EU will have to live with and respond to appropriately.

Since the launch of the Barcelona Process in 1995, the EU's Mediterranean policy has been criticized for not linking financial aid to democratic reform, and for giving priority to European concerns like immigration, security, and cooperation on counter-terrorism over the needs of its partners for political and economic reforms.

The Arab Spring and the changes taking place in the region have given the EU and its Mediterranean partners the opportunity to review and restart their partnership. In doing so, they face several challenges such as uncertainties over the political transition and the sovereign debt crisis within the euro zone. Yet the fact remains that the southern and eastern Mediterranean is in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, meaning the EU

has no choice but to be concerned about the political developments and long term stability of the region.
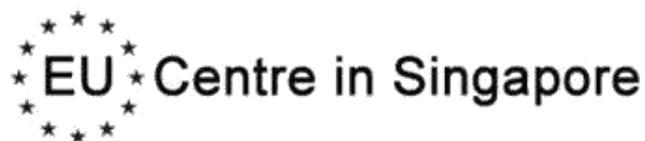
The Arab Spring is proving to be a significant test for the EU and its foreign policy. If the EU succeeds in setting a coherent policy for the region and concentrates on long term support to foster and build a stable, democratic environment, it could profit from a secure neighbourhood with great economic potential. The proposal for the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity is a step in the right direction but the EU has to be mindful of the pitfalls of this model of partnership as revealed by the relatively lacklustre achievements of its long-standing EU-Mediterranean engagement. The EU has to listen more closely to the needs and priorities of its partners and broaden its engagement beyond the elite level to the groups and communities in the societies of its partners. It should not have a one-size fits all approach, and instead encourage the individual partners to present their own initiatives and tailor the policy to each partner appropriately. More importantly, the EU needs to ensure that its policy aims are matched with adequate efforts and resources.

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