

**THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE ARAB SPRING: A (MISSED?)
OPPORTUNITY TO REVAMP THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY-***Nathalie Tocci**

When the dust of the Arab revolts settles, how should EU policy towards the southern Mediterranean be reframed? The lion's share of the thinking around this question has been devoted to one of the two pillars of the EU's Mediterranean policies: the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Whereas the ENP deals with the bilateral dimension of the EU's Mediterranean policy, that is, the EU's hub-and-spoke relations with individual southern Mediterranean countries, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), building on the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), provides the broader multilateral framework of such relations. The Arab spring has led, so far, to a rethink of the former rather than the latter.

The Rationales Underpinning the European Neighbourhood Policy Review

There are three rationales underpinning this choice. First, a bureaucratic rationale has pressed EU institutions to proceed, full speed, with a review of the ENP. A review of the ENP has been underway since March 2010. Caught off guard by the Arab spring, the Union, not known for its rapidity of action, was thus fortunate to have been already engaged in a major mid-term review of its ENP for several months. Indeed, when the revolt broke out in Tunisia in December 2010, the Commission had just finished compiling the contributions of the 27 member states and the neighbouring countries, alongside numerous inputs from academia and civil society. On the basis of such contributions, in October 2010 Commissioner Füle acknowledged that the ENP ought to be revised so as to pay greater attention to political reform, while being ready to commit to deepened political and economic relations with the neighbouring countries. The Arab spring made this fundamental intuition an all-too evident imperative, summed up in what has since then become the slogan: "More for more."

Second, an internal political-institutional rationale has induced the Commission to "use" the Arab spring to reassert itself on the throne of the EU's Mediterranean policies. When, under a French push, the UfM came into being in 2007, the Commission bemoaned its sidelining. The Commission, alongside Germany and several northern member states, fought back, achieving some French back-

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tracking. But the unwieldy UfM-EMP never fully reversed the French drive for an intergovernmentalisation of Euro-Med relations. The Arab spring has provided the Commission with an opportunity to sideline the UfM, which has been delegitimised by its neglect of political reform, epitomised by former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's role as Co-Chair of the UfM (alongside his French counterpart Nicolas Sarkozy). Through its focus on the ENP (of which it is in charge), the Commission (and the External Action Service) have strived to retake the mantle of the EU's Mediterranean policies.

Third, an external political rationale has induced a focus on the ENP. The Arab spring highlighted the need for the EU to press more for political reform in the south, a promise that was made but never kept by the ENP (as opposed to the UfM, which never boasted a transformative ambition). However, it is also likely to lead to greater heterogeneity in the south, with some countries moving towards democracy (Tunisia, Egypt?), others speeding up reform (Morocco), others risking a fall into authoritarian adjustment (Algeria), while others are still entrapped either in violence (Syria, Libya) or greater repression (the Gulf). This greater degree of heterogeneity in the region has strengthened the logic of EU bilateralism and differentiation, which marks the ENP, while complicating further the search for a workable multilateral framework, be it the UfM or the EMP before it.

The Steps Forward in the Review

The first outcomes of the ENP review were revealed in the Commission's March 2011 Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity. These were complemented by the Commission's New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood, disclosed in May 2011. From these two Communications, we can outline a number of new or revised positive features of a revamped ENP.

First, the EU recognises the need to offer more benefits to the neighbours. Aid in the current financial cycle (up to 2013) is expected to rise by €1bn, to be complemented by an increase of €1bn in the European Investment Bank's loans, as well as by a proposed opening of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's operations in the Mediterranean for an initial value of €1bn. Aid is intended to support economic and social development, by improving business environments, supporting SMEs and microcredit, tackling economic disparities, and conducting pilot projects on agriculture and rural development. Alongside this, political reform is to represent a guiding light of the EU's aid policies. Greater resources are to be committed to political reform through the Governance Facility, the Comprehensive Institution Building (CIBs) programme, and the new Civil Society Facility within the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument. In addition, under a Polish push, the EU will establish an Endowment for Democracy, aimed, inter alia, at political party development. More benefits are not limited to aid. They also include the offer to the south (as has already

been done for the east) of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs), which supposedly open the way to delivering on the ENP's unkept promise of a "stake in the single market" for the neighbours. More benefits also include mobility partnerships, which have already been contemplated for the east but not, until recently, for the south. Mobility partnerships foresee the EU's granting of visa liberalisation for certain categories of neighbourhood citizens, such as business people, civil society actors, students and researchers.

Second, the EU acknowledges the imperative of engaging in conditionality. The "more for more" slogan means precisely this: the EU is willing to offer more benefits, in return for more progress on reform by the neighbours. Yet the Commission has not limited itself to positing the need for positive conditionality. It has also accepted that a logical corollary of "more for more" is "less for less": negative conditionality. The EU's recent use of restrictive measures towards countries such as Syria, Libya and Belarus seem to have induced the Commission to shed its instinctive allergy to negative conditionality towards (some of) its neighbours.

Third and finally, the Commission stresses the need to engage more deeply with the civil societies of the neighbourhood. Insofar as the neighbours are not expected to enter the EU, the Union's demands on them (and thus the degree of conditionality towards them) will continue to be dampened by the imperative of pursuing "partnerships" with these countries. Yet the notion of partnership ought not to be interpreted (exclusively) as concerning (authoritarian) regimes, but also civil society. Hence, the EU proposes to provide both greater financial support for civil society and to engage in deepened and more structured dialogue with civil society actors, both in Brussels and on the ground through EU delegations in the neighbourhood.

The Limits

More benefits, more conditionality and more partnership with civil society are good news. But alongside these pluses are a number of minuses, which, alas, can only be expected to increase when the Council has its say on the ENP review in June 2011.

First, the ENP remains trapped in the logic of enlargement and of security, hindering the actual value of the benefits on offer. The Commission has proposed DCFTAs to the neighbours. Working towards and then implementing DCFTAs entail the harmonisation of trade standards and practices to those of the EU. Such harmonisation is a heavy price to pay for the eastern neighbours, with slim chances of EU membership. It is simply not worth it for the southern neighbours, which have neither the prospect nor the desire to enter the EU. Rather than DCFTAs, premised on the logic of enlargement, the EU ought to seriously consider liberalising its agriculture markets if it is truly willing

to put more appetising carrots on the table. Likewise, the EU has proposed mobility partnerships as a valuable offer to the neighbours. The logic of mobility partnerships remains highly security driven. The neighbours are offered limited visa liberalisation only if they comply with strict security requirements regarding readmission and border controls. If and as the southern Mediterranean countries become more accountable to their citizens, they may well become less willing to play along with the EU's securitised migration policy in return for limited visa liberalisation for select elite groups.

Second, the ENP remains trapped in the logic of vagueness, hindering the prospects of effective conditionality. While asserting the principles of conditionality and "more for more", very little guidance has been provided regarding how to make these notions operational. How precisely is the EU to benchmark and monitor its conditions? How will new instruments, such as the Endowment for Democracy, provide added value rather than duplicate existing EU instruments such as the Governance Facility and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights? How will the new Endowment work synergetically with established non-state actors in the field, such as the German political foundations or the American National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI)? Precious little guidance is provided to answer these crucial questions.

Third and finally, the EU remains trapped in a logic of insularity, making its newfound emphasis on civil society welcome but insufficient. Gone are the days of the Barcelona Process, in which the EU acted in the hope (or illusion) of creating a common Euro-Mediterranean home. Not only are both the EU and the southern Mediterranean countries more divided than in the 1990s, but the region is permeated by the presence of new (and old) external actors, which the EU cannot ignore. These include both traditional allies, such as the US, as well as other regional – Turkey and the GCC – and global – China – actors, which are increasingly active in the Mediterranean. The EU, in its ENP review, continues to think it acts in a vacuum, failing to seize on the synergies and contrast the eventual counter moves of the multiple sets of actors involved in the region.

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