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Reality Check: Why the EU Needs to Rethink its Neighbourhood Policy

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Reality Check:
Why the EU Needs to Rethink its Neighbourhood Policy

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Introduction

The Arab uprisings have put the logic and effectivity of the EU's neighbourhood policy (ENP) into question. While publicly making professions of democracy, the EU and its member states had mainly relied on security cooperation with the authoritarian regimes and promoted trade liberalisation based on the expansion of European norms, standards and proceedings. The logic behind this policy is based on neo-functionalist assumptions that the integration of individual sectors would lead to "spillover" effects, which in turn trigger new "spillover" effects (Pace, 2007, p. 664) and eventually bring about good governance and develop into democracy. However, neither the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) initiated in 1995, nor ten years later the extension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to the south could trigger positive dynamics that would create welfare, good governance or democracy in the region. On the contrary, in particular after the events of 9/11, autocratic rulers in the region proved to be close allies of the EU and its member states.

In the wake of the upheavals in the Arab world, the EU engaged in a process of self-reflection and self-criticism. Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle admitted that the EU and its member states had fallen prey to the assumption that authoritarian regimes were a guarantee of stability in the region (Füle in Tocci & Cassarino, 2011b).

After a state of shock, the EU reacted by revising the European Neighbourhood Policy. However, this did not entail a fundamental rethink and review of the essence and ills of the ENP, but rather remained limited to the adaption of some mechanisms, new programmes and mottos. Trade liberalisation based on neoliberal conceptions has still provided the framework for economic development policies. In order to help post-revolutionary Arab countries to get their economies back on track, the EU suggested the establishment of "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements" (DCFTAs), which would open a door to the European single market.

Despite wanting results, the ENP has still been trapped in the logic of enlargement and security and not been able to develop any alternative to neoliberal economic policies (Colombo & Tocci, 2012, p. 90). Economic liberalisation and the expansion of norms and standards could guarantee neither security nor welfare or democratisation. On the contrary, neoliberalism has proved to be perfectly compatible with authoritarianism.

Authoritarian regimes throughout the world adapted to the requirements of neoliberal globalisation. This has often gone hand in hand with limited political reforms but it has not led to democratic openings or diversification. The regimes remained the main source

of authority. In many cases, neoliberal measures such as privatisation even strengthened the financial capabilities of the elites. While a small group of elite members who had access to the top hierarchy could greatly benefit, most people have been barred from the fruits of economic growth.

Neoliberal restructuring entailed a decrease in the capabilities of formalised bureaucratic authority. Despite having all reins of power in their hands, the regimes began to outsource some of the state's functions and services to private actors. This process has supported the informalisation of state-society relations.

Whereas clientelism has always been a part of the game, it has become a dominant practice and a cornerstone of the neo-authoritarian power architectures in the region and beyond. Parallel to marketisation and growing competitiveness, clientelistic networks have not only defined access to the market at the top levels of the economy but they have also shaped the form of social cohesion among the economically disenfranchised.

Although the Arab uprisings removed the authoritarian leaders, they did not remove the political, economic and societal structures established over the last decades. Not only have EU strategies and policies largely ignored these developments in the region, but also most of the political analysis of politics in the region has focused on elites and formal institutions. As Eickelman and Piscatori (1995) rightly hold, all too often observers of the Middle East, but also of other societies, assume that power exclusively resides in formal state institutions, such as the bureaucracy, the military and others, and fail to recognise the significance of the evaluation of a civic order and the agency of non-state actors.

Based on these assumptions, this paper suggests a reality check as the starting point for the recalibration of the EU's policies towards its southern neighbourhood. It mainly focuses on the effects of neoliberal reforms on the state as well as civic order in the Middle East. It argues that neoliberal policies under authoritarianism have involved neither democratisation nor the diversification of economic powers. It highlights that the societal, political and economic structures developed under neoliberal authoritarian regimes are still enduring and should be included in any assessment of dynamics and mechanisms at work. The paper refers to developments in the broader region of the Middle East, but mainly draws on the examples of Tunisia and Egypt; both core countries of the Arab Spring, albeit with differing developments. Based on the idea that any "effective" policy – one that produces the intended result – needs to leave normative conceptions behind

and consider societal developments, it argues for the fundamental revision of EU policies towards the region and attempts to develop recommendations.

The article proceeds as follows. The first part aims at exploring the essence of Euro-Mediterranean relations before and after the Arab uprisings and develops continuities in the EU's policies towards the region. The second part examines the role of the EU in promoting neoliberalism in the region. The third part then deals with the effects of neoliberal policies on the states and their functioning. The fourth part highlights the links and causalities between neoliberal restructuring and neo-authoritarian modes of rule. The fifth part then explores informalisation as a core element of authoritarian rule in the Arab world, highlights its different forms and dynamics and examines the long-term effects on state and society. The sixth part concludes the insights gained and aims to define necessary shifts in approaches. The last part attempts to develop specific recommendations.

Euro-Mediterranean Relations in a Nutshell

Influenced by Kantian ideals and based on neo-functionalist approaches, the EU has functioned as a transformative power, expanding liberal peace throughout the continent by adapting state apparatuses, their organising principles, institutional settings, laws, procedures, policy paradigms, styles and shared beliefs, norms, measurements and indicators to those of a liberal Western European ideal. With the end of the Cold War, the EU has started to develop beyond a mere regional integration project and began acting as a regional and global player.

European foreign policy increasingly recognised a range of global issues such as diseases, climate change, drug use, trafficking, irregular migration, asymmetric warfare, and Islamist terrorism as primary sources of danger. The fact that the sources of these dangers were located in an "external and anarchic environment" (Campbell, 1998, p. 8) and Europe's southern neighbourhood was deemed to be prone to spillover effects of terrorism, irregular migration and the disruption of energy supplies, meant that the EU began to reach out to these regions and beyond.

The Barcelona Declaration signed in 1995 by the then 15 EU member states and 12 Mediterranean countries from the Middle East and North Africa initiated the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP).[1] While the narrative of the Mediterranean as the cradle of the ancient Greek and Roman civilisations certainly provided an emotional and ideal element, the EMP was principally motivated by security concerns (Pace, 2010). The EMP sought to provide a multilateral and normative framework for the "governance" of the Mediterranean, mainly in order to manage irregular migration, and to guarantee trade, prosperity and peace (Pace, 2010, p. 433). The EU's multilateral strategy towards the Mediterranean countries reflected its ambition to export its own "specific and internal experience as a regional organisation, parlayed as a required form of behaviour for external actors" (Bicchi, 2006, p. 293).

Region-building included the extension of EU norms, standards, technical processes, bureaucratic procedures and common rules of trade to neighbours. According to neo-functionalist approaches, which have stood at the core of EU policies, the export of European norms and institutions and "way of doing things" would lead to positive "spillover" effects, transform the partners and draw them closer to the EU. Re-framed as a matter of common interest (Pace, 2007), the EMP was based on three vaguely defined sectors: political and security partnership; economic and financial partnership; and partnership in social, cultural and human affairs. What made cooperation with the EU attractive from the perspective of southern partners was that the EMP promised new economic opportunities in return for security cooperation. The common target was

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1 Also referred to as the Barcelona Process.

defined as the establishment of a Mediterranean Free Trade Area by the year 2010 (Attinà, 2004, p. 141).

In reaction to the events of 9/11, in 2003 the EU launched its Security Strategy and shortly after in 2004 the EU Commission introduced the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Pace (2007, p. 662) asserts that these moves entailed the recognition by EU actors that a multilateral regional framework was probably not the adequate response to "the emergence of social aggregation in the European-Mediterranean political, economic and social space." Different from the EMP, the ENP reflected a bilateral approach. This shift in focus was mainly based on the recognition of the diversity among different partner countries. The most effective innovation the ENP entailed were Action Plans based on "differentiation". Drawn on the model of accession processes, they are "jointly negotiated paths for development and reform through country-by-country differentiation, while the rationalised instrument for assistance is meant to support the Action Plans' objectives" (Balfour & Rotta, 2005, p. 8). Based on the same normative assumptions, these objectives have been far more political and precise than the general objectives set in the EMP. Pace (2007, p. 662) highlights that "the EU policies towards the Mediterranean shifted from what is referred to as 'normative regionalism' to 'normative bilateralism'." The EU's policies towards the Mediterranean claimed the promotion of liberal values as human rights and democracy. Civil society assistance and rhetorical references to liberal democratic values accompanied EU policies and those of the member states, but democracy promotion has never stood at the core of the EU's engagement with the southern neighbourhood. Democratisation was rather perceived as a result of the spillover effects of trade liberalisation and the adoption of templates provided by the union.

This reflects the liberal spirit that underpins the foundations of the EU. Gourevitch (1978, p. 892) highlights that liberals treat all development trajectories as similar. He asserts that liberals believe that development can be repeated according to the same model of already developed countries. They believe that integration in the world economy is also beneficial to developing countries.

Reflecting a liberal European tradition, EU documents and strategies have highlighted civil society as a sine qua non for democratisation (Günay & Haller, 2016). Again based on specific European experiences, civil society has been defined as an exclusively secular arena, leaving a large number of religious organisations and networks out of the EU's assistance programmes.

After the Arab Uprisings

The Arab uprisings caused a sea change in the political setting of the Mediterranean. In response to the upheavals, the EU began to review its neighbourhood policy. Various new financial instruments, programmes and initiatives, and more country-specific approaches were developed. Particularly the new Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility as well as the European Endowment of Democracy are instruments which aimed at supporting democratic transitions through the stronger support of locally rooted civil society actors (Behr & Siitonen, 2013). In 2015 the EU Commission issued a Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions in view of a review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), based on public consultations in the member states as well as the partner countries. However, the review did not entail a fundamental rethink, but rather suggested adaptations in regard to the analysis of causes and needs and the instruments which should be applied. The document suggests further differentiation according to different interests and needs, less ambitious priorities, stronger involvement at the membership level and increased ownership on the side of the partners (European Commission, 2015). Claims for the support of the development of deep democracy, a formula suggested in the first era right after the uprisings, have been dropped. Instead, the document seeks to stabilise the region through cooperation in regard to security sector reform, the struggle against terrorism and the advancement of economic cooperation.

The EU has encouraged the establishment of "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements" (DCFTAs), which should open the door to the European single market to Arab states.[2] Trade liberalisation in the form of access to pieces of the EU single market was made conditional on political reforms in the respective country. The "more for more" approach aimed to foreground conditionality within the ENP by awarding democratic reforms with more access to the single market (Colombo & Tocci, 2012, p. 87). Schumacher (2011, p. 109) highlights that making support and trade liberalisation conditional on democratic reforms assumes that the southern partners are willing to follow a vaguely defined reform path with only few rewards at the end. Tocci (2012) in turn emphasises the inappropriateness of conditionality, "given the fact that until recently the EU engaged in unconditional partnerships with authoritarian regimes."

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2 At the same time, the EU's strategy to promote Free Trade Agreements with different partners also encounters resistance from within. Particularly, the liberalisation of agriculture or the free movement of people are heatedly debated controversial issues.
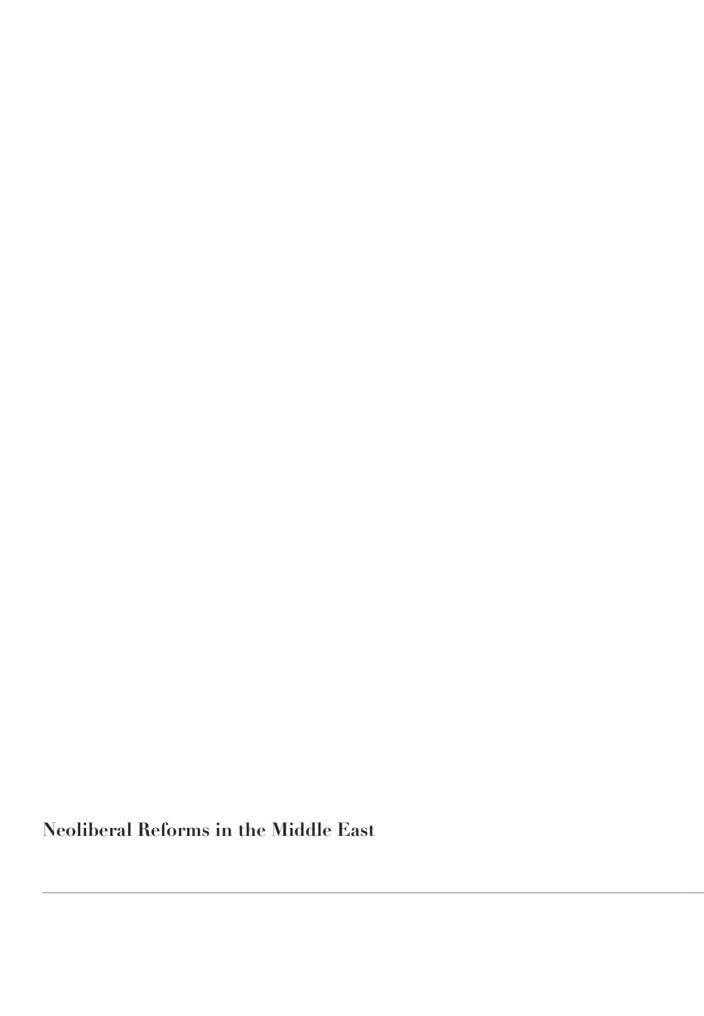
The EU, a Neoliberal Hegemon

Since the 1980s, European integration has aimed at "restoring Europe's global competitiveness" through the reduction of national constraints on trade and competition (Bohle, 2006, p. 64). Neoliberalism is not just an economic programme but, as Brown (2003, p. 40) argues, a political programme that has entailed an entire system of thought and evolved into a form of governmentality. Neoliberal governmentality supported the freeing of market forces and emphasised market rationality. As a matter of fact, neoliberalism has strongly opposed state socialism and the Keynesian welfare state (Bohle, 2006, p. 66). Trade liberalisation based on neoliberal paradigms has constituted the core of the EU's policies towards developing countries at its periphery. One can hold that "neoliberal, capitalist market-economy recipes, economic growth, and an almost sacred belief in liberalisation and privatisation measures, with occasional recourse to financing arrangements with the IMF and the World Bank" (Schumacher, 2011, p. 110) constituted the backbone of the EU's policies inward as much as outward. Holden (2011, p. 158) emphasises that in its external economic policy the EU has adopted an instrumental or moderated neoliberal approach to regionalism.

As a regional hegemon, the EU's external policy cooperation has been driven by its largest powers, which seek to shape their external milieu through a mix of hard and soft power (Hyde-Price, 2006, p. 222).

In relations with the neighbourhood, the liberalisation of trade and economy has been seen as a necessary prerequisite for competitiveness in the global market, from which positive political developments such as democratic reforms, personal liberties and good governance would evolve. The political justification was that the liberalisation of trade within the framework of European rules and norms would stimulate higher growth rates and economic development, which in turn would spark political reform (Tocci & Cassarino, 2011a, p. 4).

Developments have proved that neoliberal reforms have not supported democratisation. On the contrary, authoritarian regimes have proved to be rather adaptable to neoliberalism.

While neoliberal governmentality has even undermined democratic institutions in consolidated liberal democracies in the centre of the global economy, its effects have been much more drastic on countries with weak democratic institutions. King (2003), Guazzone and Pioppi (2009) can be counted among those authors who highlight how neoliberal policies have strengthened illiberal tendencies in the Arab world. Haggard and Kaufman (1992) highlight the impact of market reforms and economic inequality on the political authoritarianism in the broader context of less developed countries. In the following, the paper highlights the effects of neoliberal policies on the countries of the Middle East.

Neoliberal Reforms in the Middle East

Most of the "military regimes" emerging in the Arab world from the 1950s on adopted socioeconomic reforms, which can be best framed as what Gramsci calls "revolutions from above" (Ayubi, 2002, p. 259). Driven by modernisation theory and nationalist fervour, these regimes embarked on radically transforming the modes and methods of mobilisation and distribution through social engineering (Ayubi, 2002, p. 196). Their populist-corporatist modernisation policies (Ayubi, 2002) not only favoured the growth of a highly centralised bureaucratic apparatus but also strengthened the powers of the ministerial elites in the centre. Societal and economic advancement was to be achieved through the state and its institutions. The authoritarian social contract in Nasserist Egypt promised development and welfare in return for loyalty, which could be controlled in clientelistic channels and to a great extent de-politicised (Harders, 2008, p. 24). From the end of the 1960s onwards, state-led modernisation and industrialisation projects successively plunged into crisis throughout the Arab world.

In many parts of the Middle East, neoliberal reforms were introduced subsequent to the debt crisis of the late 1970s. The IMF (International Monetary Fund)-led, liberal restructuring programmes entailed the end of the state-centric model, in which the state was perceived as the premier authority for maintaining security and promoting development. It was gradually replaced by a neo-liberal model premised on the dictates of the market and the preferences of supranational organisations (Adams, Dev Gupta, & Mengisteab, 1999, p. 1). The IMF's support, on which most crisis-ridden countries were dependent, was contingent on the selling off of government-owned businesses, deep cuts in social and welfare services and programmes, the lifting of price controls on basic necessities and the reduction of wage rates. The IMF also pushed to remove trade and exchange controls and to create incentives to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) (Adams, Dev Gupta, & Mengisteab, 1999, p. 3). Similarly, the EU has pushed developing countries to liberalise services, investment and more competition as a condition for access to the European single market (Elliott & Balakrishnan, 2006).

Developments in Egypt and Tunisia showed that there is no positive correlation between economic liberalisation, economic growth, the reduction of poverty and democratisation (Hurt, Knio & Ryner, 2009, p. 307). Neoliberal reforms introduced a notion of "marketisation" under authoritarian governance and decoupled growth of production from employment (Davis, 2004).

Due to perceptions of business-friendly government policies and a favourable macroeconomic environment, Tunisia was long hailed as a success story, not only in the MENA region but in Africa as a whole. According to the World Bank's *Doing Business*

Report 2010, Tunisia was among the top ten most improved economies in terms of business regulation. The country was praised as a model for private-sector competitiveness (International Institute for Labour Studies, International Labour Organisation, 2011, p. 40). However, in reality, a steady decline in capital accumulation in the public sector could not be compensated by a rise in private investments and whilst annual growth rates ranged between 4 and 5 percent the country could not create new jobs and reduce unemployment. (Hurt, Knio, Ryner, 2009, p. 307). Economic liberalisation policies did not support the increase in developed industries but they supported the region's global function as a location for labour intensive production (African Development Bank Group, 2012, p. 28).

Moreover, economic opening under authoritarian conditions induced only limited diversification of economic power centres. In the cases of Egypt and Tunisia, it supported the emergence of crony capitalism and the hardening of authoritarianism (King, 2003). The authoritarian regimes wanted to open the market to FDI and to develop the private sector, but they did not want to give up the commanding heights of the economy (Richards and Waterbury in Roussillon, 1996, p. 58). The control of the finances and the re-distribution of public resources were important for the regimes' survival.

Economic liberalisation and in particular privatisation equipped the regimes with new distributive powers. In other words, "marketisation" within the terms of authoritarianism served as an instrument through which the ideologically washed up regimes could regain power to shape the order or at least maintain power by re-distributing economic resources and political power (Schamis, 2002, p. 7).

Neoliberalism Supporting Neo-Authoritarian Governance

Contrary to expectations that political liberalism will follow economic liberalism with seeming inevitability (Fukuyama, 1989), neoliberal restructuring programmes under authoritarian conditions did not diversify power centres but rather changed the modus operandi of the regimes. In Egypt and Tunisia, economic liberalisation was accompanied by limited political openings. This entailed the admission of political parties, elections and the diversification of media. However, the formal pluralisation of the political arena was not accompanied by the liberalisation of the political system and its functioning as such. The admission of political parties was subject to restrictions, controlled and approved by the government. The room for criticism and oppositional activities was contained and controlled, though in varying degrees between Tunisia being very restrictive and Egypt being the most liberal. In both cases, the dominance of the ruling party was guaranteed through legal provisions, gerrymandering, election fraud and manipulation. The ruling parties had the function of a political organ for obtaining a majority for the president's policies. While participation in a controlled and limited system was conditional on submission to the dominance of the regime, anything that could be deemed as challenging the regime's supremacy was punished. Hence, the political reforms in the 1970s and 1980s entailed formal political pluralisation but they did not intend democratisation. Large parts of the population remained excluded from political processes and economic development (Guazzone & Pioppi, 2009, p. 5). They were rather seen as a means of building up support, and they helped defuse some of the tensions liberal economic policies would engender (Owen, 2001, p. 191). Schlumberger (2010, p. 236) claims that authoritarian regimes may even enjoy some structural advantages over democracies when it comes to generating support as they do usually have more opportunities to control media, civil society and monopolise the political discourse. In short, they have an advantage when it comes to framing the political narratives.

One can conclude that the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East proved to be highly pragmatic and flexible. They got rid of the ideological burden (mostly Arab socialism and Arab nationalism) and survived through the ad hoc implementation of neoliberal reforms and the partial incorporation and imitation of liberal democratic procedures and formal institutions by keeping the authoritarian character of the regime in place. Limited political pluralisation and economic liberalisation even furthered the monopolisation of ultimate decision making at the top end of the hierarchy. While the president and the presidential bureaucracy gained influence, other institutions such as the parliament, the ministries and the state bureaucracy became increasingly undermined. Particularly, administrative organs at the local level have been affected by the decrease in the capabilities of formalised bureaucratic authority. One can conclude that the state, represented by the regime, remained the main source of authority and control, "but it began to delegate some of its functions to private actors and use more indirect and sometimes informal modes of government" (Guazzone & Pioppi, 2009, p. 6).

The Informalisation of State Society Relations

Neoliberal structural adjustment in line with the requirements of the IMF and the programmes and policies of the EU, led to the introduction of a new "social contract of informality" (Harders, 2008) in which hardly enforceable forms of informal activities and clientelistic interest intermediation gradually replaced enforceable citizen rights. Informality is not a new phenomenon but one that has always existed parallel to the formal sphere. Or as Giordano and Hayoz (2013, p. 11) put it, there is no informal sphere without a formal one. The two are mutually dependent and interconnected through various ways. However, what is new is that informality has become a central element of neo-authoritarian governance, not only in the Middle East but also in other countries, mainly of the periphery. Harders (2008) and King (2003) see informality as a more or less deliberate form of governmentality that evolved from the merger between authoritarianism and neoliberalism. Giordano and Hayoz (2013, p. 29) hold that what undermines public structures is less informality but rather the opposite – an ongoing failing statehood that supports the emergence and proliferation of informal relations on all levels of state and society. "In this case, informality is a lubricant, not a grit, in the organisation of a society's public life."

Informal networks have increasingly dominated relations at the top levels of the economy as well social cohesion among the economically disenfranchised. The erosion of formal institutions and the undermining of citizen rights created a blurred space, dominated by uncertainty where informal, intangible relations have gained prominence. Keeping things uncertain and blurred has increased people's dependency on personal ties with the authority. Hence, one can conclude that neo-liberal restructuring under authoritarian regimes supported the rise of informalism, neo-patrimonialism, clientelism, corruption and state interference in the private sector (Tocci & Cassarino, 2011a; Volpi & Cavatorta, 2006; King, 2003)

However, informalism is not a regime type but a praxis, a political and social reality that characterises the practices and methods of governance in more and more states around the globe. The distinction between formal and informal institutions is more difficult than one might think. While some define those that are based on cultural traditions as informal institutions, others refer to the state-society distinction as the crucial criteria (Helmke & Levitsky, 2003). The two spheres are not isolated but rather they have been intimately linked to each other in various ways. There is a constant ambition to expand informal relations into the formal public sphere. "Informality offers the chance to infiltrate the perilous formalised social spaces of the public sphere by means of intelligent and thus sensible strategies and, to a certain extent, privatise them to one's advantage" (Giordano & Hayoz, 2013, p. 11).

Neopatrimonialism and clientelism can be accounted among these strategies where informal personalised relations infiltrate the formalised social spaces of the public sphere. Neopatrimonialism denotes a mixture of two forms of domination as defined by Weber; patrimonial and legal-rational bureaucratic domination. While patrimonialism describes a form of authority where power relations, political as well as administrative, between the ruler and the ruled are based on personal ties and there is no separation between the private and the public spheres (the pre-modern Ottoman Empire can be defined as a patrimonial state where the Sultan regarded the Empire as the extension of his household), neopatrimonialism denotes a form of rule where the differentiation between the public and the private exists, at least formally, and where there is a claim to legal-rational bureaucracy, where governance takes place within a legal and formalised framework, but distribution, solidarity and professional advancement are based on informal, personalised ties (Erdmann & Engel, 2006, p. 18).

Clientelism is usually seen as a component of neopatrimonialism. The term denotes an informal hierarchy, a network that operates within formal institutions and is focused upon influence (Weingrod, 1968). Eisenstadt and Lemarchand (1981, p. 10) emphasise that clientelism can be also seen as a key mechanism of maintaining dependency and securing control. However, it should not be forgotten that it is a relationship with a reciprocal character. While, on the one hand, the patron generates support through the distribution of resources and keeps the clients dependent, on the other, the clients' loyalty is not guaranteed but is based on the provision of goods.

Giordano and Hayoz (2013, p. 14) emphasise that to many Western observers and politicians informal practices based on kinship or religion may seem primitive, pre-modern, corrupt and as a feature that can be mainly found in developing non-Western contexts. However, informal practices such as clientelism are not a cultural attribute. In different forms and shapes they can be found in all societies. The review of a wide range of studies of clientelism, for instance, reveals that clientalistic politics neither depend so much on a certain type of regime – democratic, autocratic or hybrid – nor on a certain cultural sphere, but that it is rather the structural characteristics of a country that determine the nature and patterns of such relations (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). According to Weingrod (1968, p. 382), clientelism is a phenomenon that occurs in states where the political system is highly centralised in the capital and the government is not able to transform or integrate the interests of local representatives in the periphery. In such a case, "gaps" occur between the regions and their representatives and the centre and its representatives. Papakostas's (2001) comparative study on Sweden and Greece seems to confirm the relevance of how local interests were integrated into the state in

the course of the expansion of the modern state for the establishment of clientelism. While the integration of local interests and respect for social hierarchies in the Swedish case had the effect that patronage remained limited to the upper classes, in Greece patronage emerged as a central feature of the modern state. The centralised expansion of the state had the effect that state and politics became intertwined. This induced a selective approach of the state organs towards the citizens and gave political entrepreneurs "the opportunity to mediate between the citizen and the indifferent bureaucracy and thus exact a clientelist fee" (Papakostas. 2001, p. 48-49).

Informal Power Networks – The Allies of Authoritarian Regimes

"There is a difference between informal power networks for political elites and the networks at the level of 'everyday citizens' behaviour' where they retain a different meaning (to get things done)" (Giordano & Hayoz, 2013, p. 12). Clientelism based on crony capitalism helped satisfy the emergent economic elites and gain them as new allies. In the case of Egypt, the ruling NDP became a channel for bourgeois political interests and ambitions. A regime dependent emergent class of businessmen dominated the newly opened channels of political participation at the expense of the demobilised masses (Günay, 2008, p. 259).

Economic liberalisation and limited political pluralism were accompanied by the rise of informality and the personalisation of rule. The presidency, already equipped with strong political powers, turned into something that has been described as presidential monarchy. The president being at the very top of a hierarchic system and presiding over an alliance between the state and its bourgeois constituency united in his hands supreme economic and political powers.

In Tunisia, from the mid-1990s onwards, Ben Ali's rule became more and more one which resembled that of a monarchic presidency. Ben Ali removed the representatives of the Bourguibian era within the higher echelons of the hierarchy and replaced them with new technocrats. This was the starting point of a pervasive elite exchange on all political levels (Erdle, 2010, p. 99). Ben Ali did not alter the Bourguibian state and the system connected with it, but he replaced the elites who were in command. In comparison to the Bourguiba era, Ben Ali further sharpened the hierarchic pyramid by expanding the powers of the presidency. The palace developed into a parallel government apparatus, where the real decisions were taken.

"He increased the power of the presidency to the point of superseding the political attributions of the other state institutions. This new power structure rests on three main

pillars: (1) a fully-fledged palace administration; (2) a plethoric security apparatus; and (3) his own extended clientelist network. These new elements have allowed Ben Ali to mobilise and incorporate all those political resources which he needed to consolidate and perpetuate his newly acquired power" (Erdle, 2010, p. 140).

The personalisation and informalisation of rule had the effect that private businesses came to be dominated by the so-called 60 "Ruling Families" associated with seven clans, all somehow connected with the president and his family. In an authoritarian police state such as Ben Ali's Tunisia, hardly any entrepreneur could circumvent tight relations with the regime. The mafia-like functioning of the Ben Ali regime forced businessmen to complicity. This included, for instance, the sharing of profits in return for legal protection and privileges.

At the same time, a growing middle class became more economically and politically marginalised. The fear of loss of status has been pervasive and in such an atmosphere, Islamic conservatism offered a refuge. Religious brotherhoods, associations, independent mosques and street sheikhs and informal networks became not only the agents of a visible and tangible "Islamic revival" that imbued all sectors of life, but also the providers of social cohesion among parts of the lower middle class and particularly among the poor.

Informal Networks as Providers of Social Cohesion

Neoliberal restructuring implied the state's slow and covert withdrawal from public services. The state's almost total withdrawal from welfare and social policies led to the rise of un-institutionalised and hybrid social activities, particularly among the disenfranchised. Silent encroachments, such as the land takeover, illegal constructions or street vendors selling their products illegally in the streets, have made the rise of informality and the weakening control of the state over social and societal developments visible (Bayat, 1997, p. 55).

At the margins of the state,[3] areas where state power has been fraying out, informal structures, often based on kinship or religion, have become the major providers of social order and cohesion. Such areas can be found in areas remote from the capital, but also at the periphery of the growing cities. In such areas, a broad variety of Islamic welfare and charity networks, including Salafist ones, have gradually compensated the eroding state. At the centre of these networks are usually illegal mosques. These are mosques that are beyond the reach and control of the state authorities and which are run by self-appointed imams. In the absence of the state, these mosques often became the source

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3 See "The State at its Margins: Comparative Ethnographies of the Modern State in Africa, Latin America and South Asia", seminar, School for Advanced Research, April 22–26, 2001 at https://sarweb.org/?advanced_seminar_the_state _at_its_margins

of authority, and a centre of information exchange and personal encounter. Mosque-related organisations, such as charity and welfare networks or education institutes, have played an important role in the socialisation of youth, the maintenance of social order and security and the urban development of the area. By doing so, they have on the one hand challenged the state's monopoly of power as provider of security and social welfare and, on the other, by providing these services, they have guaranteed social cohesion and peace in these areas and thereby helped maintain the existing order.

In a historical perspective, pious foundations, guilds of merchants and craftsmen can be seen as forerunners of today's religious networks. As informal institutions, though recognised by the Ottoman state, they operated in an autonomous manner within society "punishing infractions by their members, defining acceptable practices, and settling disputes" (Eickelman & Salvatore, 2002, p. 95). Similarly, Richard Tapper emphasises in reference to "tribal" regions of the Middle East, that instead of being characterised by disorder and anarchy, these regions have "often offered more opportunities for peace and a 'just' social order than those available through submission to state authorities" (Eickelman & Salvatore, 2002, p. 95). In this sense, seen from a norm-free perspective, he holds that even tribal orders "have sometimes offered the prospects of civil society in the sense of the emergence of institutions autonomous from the state that facilitate orderly economic, social and political activity and that imply a moral order largely distinct from state or royal authority" (Tapper in Eickelmam & Salvatore, 2002, p. 95).

Conclusions: De-Colonising the Minds

The removal of many of the autocratic leaders in the Arab world hardly induced transition to democracy —Tunisia is the exception and even here the consolidation of democracy is questionable—, but it revealed the mechanics, dynamics and foundations that were established under neo-authoritarian rule. Most Arab countries underwent economic liberalisation inspired by neoliberal precepts. Guazzone and Pioppi (2009, p. 11-12) rightly hold that economic liberalisation measures were used by the elites as a strategic tool that helped to restructure external relations and redistribute internal resources; rather than create competitive markets, it resulted in a shift in patronage networks. One can conclude that economic liberalisation under authoritarian rule entailed the informalisation of state-society relations. Brown (2003) highlights that neoliberal governmentality undermines liberal democratic principles and one can conclude from this assumption that it is perfectly compatible with authoritarian rule.

Although an informal realm has always existed parallel to a formal one, over the last 30 years informality has become an authoritarian governance practice. While in the era of state and nation-building the state was eager to expand its institutional formal apparatus over the whole territory, together with the departure from state-led modernisation policies and the introduction of liberalisation inspired by neoliberal precepts, a new "social contract of informality" gradually replaced enforceable citizen's rights. Personal networks have infused all levels of state and society. Clientelistic networks have not only determined which companies and businessmen were allowed to get a share of the pie but they have also replaced the services of the welfare state among the economically disadvantaged. In times of radical socioeconomic changes, they have seemingly provided protection, channels of participation, cohesion and solidarity. Particularly at the margins of the state, where state power has been fraying out, informal networks often based on religion or kinship have acted as important transmitters between state and society by providing welfare and maintaining social cohesion and control. They have operated in the grey zone between the formal and informal. By doing so, they have challenged the constructed dichotomies between the "private" and the "public", "state" and "society", the "religious" and the "secular" realm.

One can conclude that the introduction of neoliberal policies went hand in hand with the weakening of the capabilities of state institutions to transform society. While political analysis, programmes and policies towards the region have mainly focused on the formal realm that comprises parliament, elections, ministries, the bureaucracy and the practices applied, they have at large ignored the huge informal sphere that has not only coexisted with the formal one, but has also infused and interacted with it in various ways.

Informed by liberal and neo-functionalist approaches, EU policies and strategies have ignored the large sphere of informality. The underlying rationale of the EMP initiated in 1995 and later of the ENP has been that the adoption of a European development model would also instigate development elsewhere. The EU has offered trade liberalisation and access to the single market in return for reforms and the adoption of the EU's norms, standards, proceedings and institutional setting. The extension of European norms to the neighbourhood, based on the EU's dominant position in relation to its economically underdeveloped neighbours was reframed as a partnership based on shared values. The EU has been neither concerned with the values and norms of its southern partners nor with the structures and dynamics in these countries.

Much of the EU's difficulties in developing realistic strategies and actively engaging with the dynamics in the Arab world can be led back to the perception of fundamental civilisational and cultural differences between European and "Muslim societies". Orientalist and neo-Orientalist perceptions highlighting the particularity of Islam and Muslim societies and portraying them as the constitutive other of the civilised West have not only dominated public discourses in the various member states but have also influenced the policies towards Middle Eastern societies. From this perspective, Islam, understood as an all-pervasive social, cultural and political entity, has often been identified as the major source of difference between the "West" and the Middle East (Halliday, 2005, p. 2; Sadowski, 1993) and is hence seen as a major obstacle to democracy. The strong focus on religion and its social and societal role often blurs the view. In order to be able to see and understand the dynamics on the ground, it is necessary to leave one's own conceptions of "right" and "wrong" aside.

What is needed is a new approach that not only recognises the diversity in developmental paths but that is also inclusive and embraces a broad range of actors. This entails an entirely new view of the region, one that is freed of Orientalist or colonialist perceptions, which assume the cultural superiority of the West.

EU initiatives in support of democratic reforms or democracy consolidation have generally ignored not only different traditions, but also dynamics and concepts beyond its normative understanding. Ignoring hybrid networks on the ground means ignoring an important social and economic element in most Middle Eastern societies. Any effective neighbourhood policy, one that produces the intended result, needs to go beyond normative conceptions and take these developments into account. The inclusion of political and social agents from diverse social settings and backgrounds (from within the EU as well as in the respective countries) into a broad and inclusive dialogue on different levels is a necessary precondition for an effective ENP.

The gap between the EU's claim to be a positive, transformative and democratising international power and its activities on the ground is particularly wide in regard to the transformations in the Middle East.

Recommendations

As Gourevitch (1978, p. 892) rightly holds concerning economic development: "New conditions require new models, new arrangements of people, resources, institutions, politics. There is no inherent reason why latecomers should develop the institutions of their predecessors (whose institutions were hardly uniform anyway). Indeed, there is every reason to suppose that the political systems of the newcomers must be different." Any effective neighbourhood policy towards the Arab world needs to leave normative approaches behind. Although Europe can be an inspiration for the region, it cannot function as a model. There is no democracy template nor is the notion that trade liberalisation based on neoliberal principles brings about democracy sustainable.

On the contrary, developments in the MENA region as well as in Turkey, the Balkans, Ukraine and Russia highlight that neoliberal globalisation does not necessarily support the emergence of liberal democracy. Hence, instead of continuing with "more of the same" the EU would need to develop new and innovative strategies.

Inclusiveness - This can be only achieved through an inclusive process, which takes the expectations of the people and the dynamics on the ground into account. Such an inclusive process would need to go beyond the known political and economic elites and also include persons at the lower levels of the social echelons. It should definitely also include religious associations, societies and networks, which constitute an important interface between the formal and informal realms and infuse large parts of society.

More knowledge - More research on societal and political dynamics could provide a knowledge base for further action. Research programmes should support direct exchange with partners in the south as well as mutual research grants, scholarships, and joint academic programmes.

New indicators for measuring change - An innovative neighbourhood policy would also need to include new indicators for measuring positive change. This should entail a shift from the focus on implementation to one that emphasises social and political impact (poverty, social cohesion, forms of participation, new forms of solidarity, and so on). The Action Plans and Progress Reports developed under the framework of the ENP provide country-specific bases, but they would need to be adapted according to indicators to be developed.

Modesty - Last but not least, informality as a governance tool is a reality, not only in the Middle East but far beyond. The starting point of any new approach should not be how to eradicate informalism and clientelism, but how to take these realities into account and consider them in policy approaches and strategies.

Leaving normative assumptions aside - Hence, one can conclude that any effective policy towards the region needs to leave normative conceptions and the self-imposed role of a guide aside. What is needed instead is to look behind the facade of the formal sphere and study without any preconceived image or norm the societal and political dynamics and develop strategies and policies accordingly.

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EuroMeSCo

Comprising 106 institutes from 32 European and South Mediterranean countries, the EuroMeSCo (Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission) network was created in 1996 for the joint and coordinated strengthening of research and debate on politics and security in the Mediterranean. These were considered essential aspects for the achievement of the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

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The EuroMeSCo work plan includes a research programme with four publication lines (EuroMeSCo Joint Policy Studies, EuroMeSCo Papers, EuroMeSCo Briefs and EuroMeSCo Reports), as well as a series of seminars, workshops and presentations on the changing political dynamics of the Mediterranean region. It also includes the organisation of an annual conference and the development of web-based resources to disseminate the work of its institutes and stimulate debate on Euro-Mediterranean affairs.

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