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The EU Green Deal. A New Momentum for Democratic Governance in the MENA Region?

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Dysfunctional governance and repression lie at the heart of social, economic and political challenges and crises in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The nature of governance, whether autocratic, corrupt, crony capitalist, highly centralised, patriarchal and/or merely incompetent, led to alarming socioeconomic and political grievances. These grievances accumulated over decades sparking region-wide protests in 2010, 2011 and subsequent years. Without major improvements in the quality of democratic governance,[1] further crises are inevitable, and sustainable stability will remain unattainable, with major negative repercussions for the European Union (EU) itself. Naturally, climate change is augmenting these challenges and increasing the pressure on government performance. The EU Green Deal addresses this uniquely urgent matter in need of assertiveness, namely climate change with its worldwide palpable repercussions and impact for all. The deal has serious implications for economies and hence societies in MENA countries. At the same time, it could and must serve as a vehicle for improved democratic governance in the region. This is also in the interests of the EU's green ambitions, as lasting environmentally sound and socially just policies in countries beyond the EU will hardly materialise without improvements in the area of democratic governance. The two subject areas are mutually dependent; hence, the durable success of climate policies is unlikely without being buttressed by democratic components. This understanding needs to be mirrored in all EU policies and programmes targeting the region by interweaving climate policies with democratic governance.

Dysfunctional governance meets climate change

Most protests the MENA region has witnessed since 2011 and even before have a common denominator: a rage at state performance. The degree of poor governance varies across countries in the region but overall it is central to societies' dissatisfaction and anger at the state and ruling elites. There is ongoing deep dissatisfaction across countries, with the exception of the wealthier Gulf states, with the inability of the state to offer basic services of acceptable quality, such as education, health, social security or public transportation. Rising prices of basic commodities like food and fuel and the lack of employment opportunities and hence prospects for social mobility and more dignified lives and wellbeing continue to be main drivers of grief, pushing angry citizens to the streets. Adding to citizens' discontent is the continuous grotesque enrichment of a small elite, crony capitalism, corruption, and often fierce repression. The repercussions of the protests sparked in 2011 were often devastating, such as the civil wars in Syria, Libya and Yemen. These wars' internal as well as transboundary ramifications will last for decades to come. Countries that were rather immune to this first wave of uprisings in 2011 experienced often massive protests in subsequent years, such as in Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, Sudan and Jordan in 2018 and 2019. In fact, protests

1. As with the concept of democracy, democratic governance does not have one universal clear-cut definition. When the author uses the term, she means democratic components, such as freedom of association and freedom of speech, as well as elements of good governance, such as participatory politics, transparency and accountability.

were only briefly interrupted as a result of the pandemic in 2020, and street protests continue to endure in many countries, often over the same pressing issues (O'Driscoll et al., 2020).

What is particularly alarming in the MENA region is the fact that these strained social, economic and political realities in place are exacerbated by climate-induced negative consequences expected to increase further. Climate change is adding major challenges to fragile contexts. According to models, the MENA region will be one of the areas most directly affected by climate change (Göll, 2017; IPCC, 2021). The repercussions of climate disruption are already manifested in extreme heat waves, regressive rainfall, more frequent floods, and a rise in sea level. The result is, among others, augmented water scarcity in an already water-stressed region and the diminishing of fertile land for agricultural productivity in a region highly dependent on climate-sensitive agriculture. Crop loss, food shortages, higher food prices and unemployment are expected to rise. Hence, poverty is expected to rise as well and development gains to be reversed. The impact will be felt by all but it is expected that the most vulnerable segments of society often located in rural areas will suffer disproportionately. Climate change is hence a multiplier of grievances that have been omnipresent for decades in the region and will continue to fuel anger and spark protests.

This is taking place against the backdrop of already weak environmental governance in the MENA region. In Egypt, for example, there are separate ministries for water, agriculture and the environment, and there seems to be a culture of project-based work as opposed to needed long-term strategic planning and visions. A more integrated and holistic approach is lacking (Gamal, 2021). In Tunisia, there also seems to be a knowledge gap concerning the institutional and political landscape governing these issues. Transparency is absent on how decisions in this realm are taken, and officials in the administration are often aware of climate change but not necessarily of the concrete impact it has on sectors and people inside the country (Z. Boussen, Arab Reform Initiative, personal communication, August 18, 2021). Tunisia, the country with the most advanced democratic processes and decision-making structures region-wide, also serves as an example of a rampant malaise found to varying degrees in MENA governments, namely corruption. In a more recent scandal related to the environment, the Tunisian Minister of the Environment was sacked and arrested together with other senior officials for assisting in the illegal importation of household and medical waste from southern Italy, violating Tunisia's environment laws. Moreover, Morocco – considered a pioneer in the region in terms of climate change – serves as a bad example in this context. Despite the dedication of King Mohammed VI himself and numerous efforts and initiatives, particularly around renewable energy, the country still falls short of attaining its clean energy goals. A major impediment is the state-run, highly centralised, and quasi-monopolistic energy sector, i.e. governance-related deficiencies (Baumann, 2021).

Ramifications of the Green Deal: economies and social contracts under further stress

There are other disturbing dimensions to the climate crisis and Green Deal that will undoubtedly negatively affect

the ability of MENA governments to perform well. The European Green Deal that came into being in December 2019 aims to turn Europe into the first carbon-free continent by 2050. The deal is historic as it will transform fundamental pillars and sectors within societies, such as energy markets, industry, agriculture, traffic, trade, investment and development aid. Given the fact that the EU market is one of the largest in the world – consisting of 27 countries, around 450 million European citizens and millions of companies –, internal dynamics and transformations cannot but have global implications. This transformation will also have to transcend European borders as the EU accounts for only around 8% of global emissions. Concerted climate-related efforts are therefore necessary from all, including countries in Africa and Asia. In line with this reality, the EU intends to align all its external cooperation programmes with third countries, including those in the MENA region, to its own Green Deal ambitions and goals (Council of the EU, 2021).

Hence, energy transitions in the MENA region are inevitable but they will further weaken the states' capacity to deliver to their citizens. The lesser developed and lower-income fossil fuel exporters to the EU in the region, such as Algeria, Libya and Egypt, will see their hydrocarbon revenues dry out starting in 2030, when EU member states plan to substantially decrease their import and use of oil and gas. A fundamental source of state revenue in struggling economies will thereby eventually diminish, further reducing the capacity of MENA states to effectively respond to the most pressing needs of their citizens. This is of grave concern when looking at Libya, for example. The country's economic backbone, namely its oil industry, is crippled because of a decade-long civil war. Today it is in need of massive financial means to rebuild the country and restore social cohesion as well as peaceful coexistence. There is heavy dependence on the oil sector to secure these revenues. In a country like Algeria, where the export of fuel constitutes around 96% of state revenue, the situation will be challenging to say the least (World Bank, n.d.). The social contract between the Algerian rentier state and society is already severely battered, as exemplified by the protests the country has undergone since 2019. They underline the high level of dissatisfaction with state performance, which is very likely to rise with changes in the energy landscape and energy policies. Hence, the very foundation of some governments in hydrocarbon-producing countries will be undermined further and subjected to future shocks with the potential for more social friction and fury within the population. Without devising new, more equitable social contracts, societies' stability will be further jeopardised.

There are other repercussions of the EU Green Deal for the region. The EU will impose tariffs – the so-called Carbon Emissions Border Adjustment Mechanism (CEBAM) – on emission-intensive imports from third countries, including the MENA region. The aim is to avoid carbon leakage, and companies outside the EU should be incentivised to reduce emissions in their production processes. Substantially reducing emissions and adaptation in various sectors in MENA economies is therefore not a choice but a necessity. The EU also expects higher commitment by countries, short-, medium- as well as long-term roadmaps, building on each other in a meaningful and feasible manner, as well as transparency regarding nationally-determined contributions and clarity for the different sectors and citizens in

general. It will also continue to earmark an increased and significant share of its external funding instruments to fields relevant for climate action, in particular through the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) (Council of the EU, 2021).

If the EU is indeed serious about aligning all its external cooperation programmes with third countries, including those in the MENA region, with its own Green Deal ambitions and goals and if it expects non-EU countries to elevate the environmental compatibility of measures and reforms to a central principle of state conduct, MENA states' reform efforts will be further complicated. The environmental compatibility and emissions check could narrow the spectrum of policy options for MENA governments, raise their costs in the short and medium term, and/or delay reform processes despite the urgency in place.

Climate change: a unique threat requiring assertiveness

Although climate change constitutes a global crisis unprecedented in nature imperilling the basis of life on earth, there is an upside to this threat related to its transboundary characteristic and scientific grounding. These characteristics make a different, more assertive policy-making approach by the EU and its member states inescapable if successful combating of climate change is the aim as it is a very unique threat. The uniqueness stems from the fact that the devastating consequences of no action or increased harmful practices are not only felt in one single country even if remotely located, but the ramifications are global because of climate being an omnipresent public good. Extreme weather, droughts, flooding and other effects with major economic, social and political consequences are felt to varying degrees around the entire globe. This transboundary feature with its immediate existential impact for countries worldwide is absent from other types of threats the international community, including the EU and its member states, is confronted with.

Autocracy, for example, is rated in European policy-making and policy analysis circles as a major threat due to autocratic regimes' unwillingness to include their citizens' interests and to respond to their needs, which does not ensure lasting stability. But power abuse, autocratic rule, and the infringement of citizen's rights, such as in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood, lacks this immediate, transboundary feature inherent in climate change. Grievances related to democracy and human rights and the harm inflicted upon societies are first and foremost felt by citizens inhabiting these states. The tipping point where protests erupt, such as the ones in 2010 and 2011, and that leads to instability or even state collapse and civil war is impossible to forecast. In fact, even in the mid or long term, abuses – even drastic ones – do not necessarily lead to protests, turmoil and/or violent conflicts, all crises that have severe economic repercussions as well as spillover effects for Europe in the shape of refugees or increased transnational terrorism. The MENA region showcased how autocratic or semi-autocratic repressive states can stand resilient for decades and subjected only to negligible rattling by a discontented population. How much abuse a society can take before reaching a tipping point cannot be scientifically determined. Therefore, autocratic rule and repression were and continue to be eas-

ier to tolerate for external actors, such as the EU and European states. As long as these actors can pursue their security and economic interests, they are not inclined to turn more assertive vis-à-vis abusive, autocratic states.

This missing scientific basis stands in stark contrast to the threat posed by climate change. The tipping point related to climate change is scientifically set. The guiding body is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the binding document based on solid scientific data and research is the Paris Agreement of 2015. Its goal is to limit global warming to well below 2°C, preferably to 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels. Therefore, European as well as EU policy-makers cannot primarily express worry about non-action on climate change as in the case of autocratic practices and human rights abuses. Sacrificing in this case climate policies for pragmatic compromise is no longer a successful formula, as with climate change it will surely backfire. An indisputable joint effort is necessary and recognised also by the European Green Deal. EU policy-makers also finally understand they have to push for sincere action at home but also globally (Borrel & Hoyer, 2021).

Autocracies versus democracies. Who can better combat climate change?

The question of which political system is best equipped and capable of inducing the massive transformations required for safe climate-related transitions is a pending one. There are voices in the media but also prominent scientists, such as Jørgen Randers, professor emeritus of climate strategy at the BI Norwegian Business School and member of the Club of Rome, deeming ecological autocracies using top-down regulatory measures better suited and more efficient in dealing with the climate crisis (Randers, 2012). One could thereby argue that top-down decisions with unpopular effects are taken very fast, and policy-making in such a setting is not subjected to lengthy, tedious negotiations of interests and the involvement of multiple stakeholders, a legislative authority and/or the general public. Abiding by laws and regulations of the system is not mandatory either, and executive decrees, for example, could be devised to accelerate processes. Often, mechanisms for control, accountability and sanctions that could reverse policies pursued at the top are also missing. The argument could go that the necessary speed is thereby guaranteed, and a more linear development of pressing policies materialises.

Hitherto there has been no evidence that autocratic states are more successful in sustainably combating climate change. The fight is ongoing and has only recently received the necessary political will on many national levels and the global stage. Hence, it has yet to be proven that illiberal political systems, such as the Chinese one, are more successful in reaching their climate-related long-term goals and societal transformation. In the MENA region, for example, with its high density of autocratic or semi-autocratic regimes, it is rather environmental activism that was first in pressuring for necessary climate policies and that continues to do so whether on the national or global level. Suppressing these groups, as in the case of other forms of activism, rather weakens the national battles against climate change and hence makes their success uncertain.

Indeed, democracies have not stood out on that front either. Liberal democracies in the West have gravely weakened the notion of a democratic state being the embodiment of climate-friendly and environmentally sound policies that factor in the long-term perspective and respect promulgated norms, such as human rights and generational justice. For years and despite scientific evidence and clear alerts, the issue was not addressed in the sincere and comprehensive manner necessary and carbon dioxide emissions continued to rise on a steep upward slope. Hence, solid ground for arguing that democracies by default care more about the environment and generational justice and act accordingly is lacking. It is worth mentioning that the majority of the top 20 emitters of greenhouse gases are democratic countries. It is also true that nine out of the ten top performers in the 2021 Climate Change Performance Index are democracies. But the results also illustrate that even if all other countries follow suit and enhance and expand their climate-related policies, the outcome would still fall short of preventing hazardous climate change. And in order to keep global warming significantly below 2°C, the frontrunner democratic governments have to do much more (Burck et al., 2020).

That said, democratic governance – despite its shortcomings and current crisis – is beyond any systemic competition when long-term stability, sustainable development and well-being of societies are benchmarked in the assessment. There is also abundant evidence that robust liberal democracies show better governance in general compared to autocratic or semi-autocratic states (Stockemer, 2014). Specifically on climate change, there is also scientific evidence showcasing how overall stronger democratic qualities have the tendency to lead to enhanced climate performance (Hanusch, 2018a). Looking at the case study of Canada's Kyoto Protocol process from 1995-2012, one of Hanusch's findings was that activities of national coordination mechanisms, such as secretariats, might be participatory and transparent. But when they lack tools for linking results with decision-making, thereby turning reports and outcomes of meetings into policies, they lead to inaction and weak climate-related performance, such as witnessed in Canada (Hanusch, 2018b).

Combating climate change and democratic governance. Mutual dependency

Indeed, there can be no doubt that specific components and features of democratic governance are indispensable in order to transition to a climate safe world and in order for states not to (further) destabilise as a result of necessary fundamental changes in critical sectors and livelihoods. Given the magnitude of the challenge, states more than ever need to have strong execution power and mechanisms, be effective and efficient, demonstrate high regulatory quality and low levels of corruption, and make the rule of law reign. The argument that components of democratic governance are a prerequisite for successful and sustainable climate-induced transitions turns particularly plausible when also looking beyond the central state. It turns plausible when conceptually not seeing democratic governance through the prism of formal political systems and electoral regimes but rather through the prism of principles, processes, power dynamics and state-society interactions and relations, be that at the national, meso or mi-

cro level (Freyburg et al., 2015). When applying this lens, enhancing democratic governance and successfully combating climate change become mutually dependent.

Without participation, transparency and robust communication mechanisms, the battle against climate change cannot be won. It will fall short of the needed outcome and impact. As climate change and the fundamental necessary transformations directly affect people's livelihoods and hence material standards, only people-centred climate policies will garner the necessary support to make them acceptable and thereby durable. Core pillars or actors in society that substantially contribute to the emergence of a participatory, transparent and communicative environment and that are of significant relevance for climate politics are local governments, civil society and the media.

Local government

Participatory decision-making processes may be slower than executive decrees but they almost always yield more legitimate and lasting results accepted by society. In the context of participatory politics and climate change, the significance of local governance is once again catapulted to the forefront. When part of a truly decentralised system vested with substantial prerogatives and applying participatory decision-making mechanisms, local governments tend to foster strong connections to their communities. They possess the local, most up-to-date knowledge making them best placed to identify urgent needs related to climate change and to devise local-level policies with the engagement of citizens. Hence, they are very central in the successful realisation of adaptation and mitigation programmes, and in merging these with local development plans in general. By including citizens, they ensure the necessary level of community-wide ownership, commitment and the emergence of home-grown solutions.

Civil society and activism

The role assigned to civil society organizations (CSOs) and environmental activists in climate change politics is equally fundamental. CSOs act as government watchdogs, as advocators on behalf of certain interest groups, as awareness raisers and promoters of debates, as research centres, and as service suppliers, among others. It is hardly surprising that civil society's role in combating climate change and environmental activism prove essential, and there are many forms of engagement inducing an indispensable contribution (Mittag, 2012). CSOs are successful in acting as communicators and intermediaries between the national level and the local level. This is vital, as decisions related to climate change are taken at the central level, while their effects are felt in the most remote corner. In order for citizens to understand and influence national policies related to climate change, these robust communication mechanisms have to be in place. This is particularly pressing as climate change affects entire livelihoods and requires an overhaul of economic systems, potentially creating losers if not carefully addressed by governments. Citizens are also expected to alter decades-long practices and traditions espoused, for example, in agriculture. A precondition for success here is socio-political acceptance of these necessary changes, making them more durable. CSOs are also involved here because of the trust they enjoy due to their proximity to groups affected and/or year-long engagement in the communities. In general, access to information

and good communication about climate change-related policies proved central, in certain cases increasing the adaptive capacity of rural local communities even without strong engagement of the state (Mittag, 2012).

Independent civil society actors also counterweigh the influence of more established lobby groups with close ties to the ruling elites. They lend more vulnerable, less politically experienced and less well-connected communities a voice. This plurality of voices and advocacy on behalf of different communities is needed as it ensures a balancing of interests, a reconciliation between different interest groups, and a visibility vis-à-vis policy-making circles. CSOs also engage in research on alternative low-emission development pathways. They also disseminate research findings and build capacity on climate change for climate-sensitive media coverage.

The significance of civil society's role is not confined only to the local and national level but also to the international stage, and there is recognition that people working on the frontline are central, a main message from the members of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) participating in the Conference of the Parties (COP23) in November 2017. In Tunisia, for example, credit for elevating environmental issues to the national but also international stage goes to an increased activism on climate change, the environment and biodiversity, social movements highlighting the cause and more Tunisian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participating in relevant fora, pushing the agenda before an international audience (Salman, 2021).

The media

Another indispensable pillar inside society related to communication and transparency is certainly the media. An independent, free and responsible media is an integral pillar of democratic governance for very good reasons. Its role in constructive engagement on vital societal debates is indisputable. The media informs citizens, educates them on vital issues, promotes debates and controversies, watches other powerful actors, holds governments accountable for their policies, and sheds light on the rationale and implications of public policies. This arena of communication is paramount when considering the immense complexities of transformations and green investments necessary to combat climate change and the sensitivity of the issue because of its very fundamental dimension and material implications. Apart from the media's tasks mentioned or as a result of these, the media also shapes narratives and thus possesses great power. When it can operate freely and independently, a government's false narratives can be challenged and corrected. But if constraints obstruct its performance, the result is the omnipresence of misleading or false narratives upheld by governments.

For example, in Jordan the government, particularly through its loyal media, has succeeded in portraying the problem of water scarcity in the country as one primarily caused by citizens' behaviour and consumption patterns (Hussain, 2021). According to this narrative, the government has been up to the task doing its utmost to solve the problem but citizens weaken the impact through their behaviour. And this occurs against the backdrop of various findings showcasing that the water crisis in Jordan is rather one rooted in deficient water management. The government thereby places the problem on citizens' shoulders, diverting attention from its own failure and slowness to act. The same

dilemma holds true for Libya, for example (Altaeb, 2021).

Apart from creating false narratives, the media in many MENA countries also seems unable or is not allowed to lend the issue of climate change the significance, urgency and publicity required, which negatively affects people's willingness to engage with the topic and its direct consequences for their lives (Jaffery, 2020). There is one group, though, that is particularly significant for the MENA region because of its sheer size and which is intensely engaged for obvious reasons, espousing the cause of saving the climate and environmental sustainability, and this group is youths (Al Jayoussi, 2016). Therefore, it is vital to offer young people as a cross-cutting target group space and avenues for action to unpack their full potential in terms of constructive participation, innovation and creativity.

It is therefore evident that central states, particularly as strained as in the MENA region, are not capable of inducing the transformative changes required on their own, especially of unilaterally offsetting potential social disruptions as a result of these changes. Only in partnership with other local actors can smart and socially just ideas materialise and the highest level of socio-political acceptance and durability of polices be attained. Therefore, there has to be a conducive and free environment for these actors to engage.

Policy recommendations

There can be no doubt that policies and measures foreseen by the EU Green Deal are spot on and move in the right direction. What is lacking, though, in the European Council's conclusion on the external dimension of the European Green Deal is a clear recognition that many elements of democratic governance are at the core of successful climate-related policies, and this recognition needs to be anchored in the EU's policies and guiding documents and communications, including those for the MENA region. The EU needs to interweave climate policies with democratic governance.

Make climate change the defining issue aligned with democratic governance

The prominence and urgency – at least on paper – climate change has gained in the EU as exemplified by the EU Green Deal needs to be mirrored in policies beyond the EU's borders. This paradigm shift must transcend the internal perspective. The renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood missed the opportunity to elevate climate change and environmental politics, including biodiversity loss, to the defining issue of its relations with the Southern Mediterranean, specifically in the next decade in terms of policy-making. Climate change and green transition (climate resilience, energy and the environment) are only two of the key directions and policy areas in the New Agenda for the Mediterranean. Instead, they should have been the overarching themes broken down into all sectors and areas of intervention and cooperation, aligning the latter to the overarching topic. This has to be altered as time is pressing, and it is today and in the coming few years that established pathways need to be revisited and reset for safe transitions to materialise. Thus, this EU budget cycle for 2021-2027 is decisive. When refining bilateral programming between the EU and MENA countries, this must be integrated.

Equally crucial, the interconnectedness of favourable and durable climate policies on the one side and democratic governance on the other must be deeply anchored in the EU's policies vis-à-vis third countries, including in the MENA region. Given this mutual dependency, it is paramount to make democratic governance cross-cutting. In the communication on the renewed partnership, good governance is but one of the key policy areas in which actions will take place. The EU must instead recognise the mutual dependency between the two policy areas – and certainly between any policy area and governance issues. It must then make governance components cross-cutting and draw up communications and policies accordingly. The EU must engage more in this integrated thinking and adopt approaches reflecting this rationale. In other central fora for climate change, such as the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) held in Glasgow in November 2021, the EU should be the driving force behind this integrated approach.

Analyse the political economy as well as spoilers and partners

This requires much more analysis of the political economy and potential spoilers as well as supportive structures and actors related to the sectors or areas of cooperation between the EU and MENA countries. This more holistic, strategic analysis must form the basis of decision-making on cooperation agreements. Investment, trade, aid and other instruments of cooperation need to be subjected to this thorough analysis and must incorporate components related to governance issues. The European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) stands out here, and its operations should be guided by this integrated thinking approach. Most MENA countries are in dire need of investments because of their ailing economies, a situation exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. The potential for MENA governments accepting governance-related reforms could be higher than before.

Detected deficits related to democratic governance, whether regarding the central state level or sub-levels must be dealt with and directly targeted through measures and policies within cooperation frameworks. For example, corruption, the lack of policy cohesion and coordination, and counterproductive rules and regulations need to be addressed. Unequal distribution of resources and power between the central government and local authorities also needs to be targeted via reforms. Rules and regulations curtailing the rights and room for manoeuvre of civil society, activists and the media need to be at least moderated if not lifted. These actors, together with youth as a cross-cutting target group and because of their immense significance in the battle against climate change (and any policy area), need to receive substantial attention and support in terms of funds as well as meaningful capacity-building.

Apply negative conditionality if necessary

In order to ensure that the integrated thinking approach bears fruit, a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism needs to be in place. And depending on the outcome, the EU should not only rely on positive conditionality but become more assertive and, where necessary, impose negative conditionality. The NDICI sets out an incentive-based approach whereby additional financial support will be granted to countries that

make progress in governance and rule of law reforms. In the accompanying document to the new partnership with the Southern Mediterranean, it is stated that financing of flagship investments and projects could also depend on governance efforts. Whilst meaningful in essence, these measures are not sufficiently effective and concrete.

In case MENA governments are not willing to implement reforms that strengthen democratic governance, negative conditionality should apply. The assertiveness reflected by CEBAM should also be extended to the political domain. The EU can capitalise on the desolate state of the economies in most MENA countries and hence their extensive dependency on external support and investments, particularly in the field of energy transition, sector transformation, and climate change in general. For example, EU partnerships for the production and export of green hydrogen, a field of major strategic interest to many countries in the region, should incorporate the needed integrated thinking. Here the EU should refrain from pursuing its narrower interests of green hydrogen imports for its own energy transition purposes and factor in the long-term perspective that guarantees sustainability. If political demands are not met, then partnerships need to be revisited or halted altogether. To be certain, negative conditionality or even sanctions rarely lead to a change in the political behaviour of states. But by acting more assertively, the costs of counter-productive and destabilising polices pursued by governments are at least raised.

Draw up a new narrative

The EU narrative for these reforms and policy areas is a major determinant for their acceptance and hence success. This narrative should be sensitive to the concerns of third parties. Climate change offers a unique opportunity here. Both sides of the Mediterranean suffer from climate change, and transitions are inescapable for all. Hence, it is an existential matter for both parties. The EU should frame its demands in the area of democratic governance not in isolation but as predominantly driven by climate policies, and its commitment to a successful Green Deal as a precondition for this success is concerted efforts by all. Governance issues are inseparable from successful climate politics. In this case, demanding political reforms follows a very different logic, and reforms qualify as a means to an end that MENA governments themselves are eager to reach.

In this way, the dominantly normative dimension of political demands would cease to exist. It was characteristic of former EU and other Western countries' approaches on democracy and human rights promotion in the MENA region. This approach was normally met with repudiation and accusations of internal meddling and undermining states' sovereignty. It was also an approach refuted on neo-colonial grounds, rejecting Western supremacy. Language, as always, is also key here. As the principles of democracy and human rights are sensitive to autocratic or semi-autocratic regimes and elites in the region, and given the current crisis of liberal democracy and thus its declining appeal and legitimacy, it is advisable to shift much of the discourse to one centred around environmental justice even more than social justice. The reason is that measures to advance social justice are not necessarily compatible with sound and durable environmental policies and environmental fairness. The opposite is the case, and this is the required trans-

formation in policy orientation and mindsets.

Conclusion

Climate change is compounding problems and grievances and hence challenges for states in the MENA region. The impact of the environment will no doubt become more pronounced. The EU Green Deal is historic in its ambitions for Europe to become the first carbon-free continent by 2050. Naturally, and given the transcendence of climate change, non-EU countries will need to follow suit if combating climate change is to be successful. The Deal will surely result in additional stress on economies and social contracts in the region. At the same time, it must be used to link climate policies with democratic governance given the clear nexus between successful and durable climate policies, on the one hand, and democratic governance, on the other. The EU should push this integrated thinking forward in the framework of the Green Deal. It should elevate climate change to be *the* defining issue between the EU and the Southern Neighbourhood. Related policies need to go in tandem with policies on democratic governance, making the latter cross-cutting to ensure societies' acceptance of transitions and fundamental changes, and hence stabilisation of transformation processes. This requires comprehensive analysis of the political economy as well as of spoilers and partners concerning areas of cooperation and intervention. Based on this analysis, targeted political reforms need to be tied to climate policies. In case MENA governments are not willing to reform, negative conditionality should apply and reflect a more assertive approach that the unique threat posed by climate change requires. Given MENA states' sensitivity to such demands on sovereignty and neo-colonialism grounds, a new narrative should guide relations in order to increase the acceptance of political reforms and programmes. Political reforms should be framed not in isolation but as a means to an end that MENA countries themselves are eager to achieve, namely safe climate-related transitions. The EU would thereby trigger further action on climate change as well as democratic governance, constituting a badly needed new momentum for such democratic governance in the MENA region and beyond.

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