



EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 08 February 2013
A 70/13

EU's response to the “Arab Spring”: The State-of-Play after Two Years

Introduction

More than two years have passed since the dawn of the “Arab Spring”, starting with the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. The situation in practically the whole of the Arab world remains highly fluid yet important differences have emerged among and between the countries and the regions. While overall significant progress has been made in promoting democratic reforms (e.g. holding of elections in line with democratic standards, strengthening of the role of civil society, increased freedom of expression and assembly) many obstacles still need to be overcome in order for these transitions to be successfully consolidated.

Outstanding security challenges remain, first and foremost the ongoing civil war in Syria with its evident risks of spill-over to neighbours, graphically illustrated by the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have flowed into neighbouring countries such as Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Of concern are the internal security threats that Libya continues to face, (even as it proceeds with the long process of state-building), and instability among some of its neighbours, highlighted by the ongoing conflict in Mali, as well as the recent terrorist attack on a strategic Algerian gas facility.

At the same time the social cohesion of some Arab countries undergoing transition risks being undermined by new forms of internal political polarisation, (between secular and Islamist forces, but also between and among affected groups such as women, young people, religious and racial minorities), as well as by a deteriorating economic situation.

EU support to stimulate sustainable economic growth is therefore crucial to the promotion of democratic institutions, provided that the countries of the region contribute to the promotion of a friendly environment for investment, jobs and growth. It should be underlined that economics has a deep connection with politics. An economic collapse would imply a political failure of the transitions. Therefore, EU support is more urgent than ever to help transitions move in the right direction.

P R E S S

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Despite these difficulties and setbacks, it is important to recall that the transformations prompted by the Arab Spring have led overall to important democratic gains. Democratic elections have been held for the first time in several countries, non-governmental and civil society organisations are playing a more prominent role, freedom of expression and association have been strengthened and civilian control over the armies has increased. The checks and balances necessary to build deep democracy are progressively being introduced. These transitions will of course be difficult and will take time – measured in years instead of months – and setbacks may well occur. However, the long-term goal of a democratic and prosperous Southern Neighbourhood is one that requires not only constant commitment from the EU as well as its southern partners to ensure that reform promises are kept, but also strategic patience and timely support measures.

Parties that have Islam as a central point of reference have, through elections, made important gains in the legislative assemblies and in terms of control of executive bodies in several of the transition countries. Respecting the democratic choice of the people, the European Union has engaged in an intense dialogue with the new governments and extended its support on the basis that our relationship will going forward need to take account not only of their official programmes and policies but crucially of their emerging record while in government. EU engagement with all of our neighbours is firmly grounded on the basis of the incentive-based “more for more” principle and on “mutual accountability” as set out in the two joint Communications of 2011 issued respectively on 8 March (on the EU’s “Southern Neighbourhood”) and on 25 May (on a new revised European Neighbourhood Policy).

Support for political transition

Almost from the very first days of the Arab Spring, EU leaders, including the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission (HR/VP) Catherine Ashton made frequent visits to the region to express the EU's political commitment. For example, in May 2011, the HR/VP was one of the first to visit Libya after the revolution to discuss EU support with the new authorities and officially open the EU office in Benghazi. She subsequently opened the EU Delegation in Tripoli in November 2011. At the 5+5 Summit in October 2012, President Barroso, accompanied by the Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Füle, met the leaders of all five Maghreb countries. An EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Southern Mediterranean was appointed and has organised high-level EU Task Forces with Tunisia, Jordan and Egypt. These Task Forces have been important in developing potential synergies in the respective contributions to these countries of the EU, member-state governments, key international financial institutions and private sector investors.

Support for elections has been a key focus and the EU deployed full observation missions in Tunisia, Jordan, and Algeria. An Election Assessment Team was sent to Libya. The EU provided technical assistance to help the authorities organise elections in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Morocco and supported civil society organisations (CSOs) in raising public awareness and training domestic election observers. Beyond elections, the EU is providing extensive support to build democratic institutions.

The role of **civil society** is crucial in contributing to the democratic debate and to ensuring better public accountability. The Commission created the **Civil Society Facility** to support civil society in promoting reform and increased support to the **Anna Lindh Foundation**. The Commission is also providing financial support to the newly created “**European Endowment for Democracy**” to support emerging political/social movements and grass roots organisations.

Support for economic transition

Over the past two years, the economic situation in several of the countries in transition has deteriorated markedly. A continued lack of improvement in the living standards of ordinary citizens risks becoming a serious threat to social cohesion and may well hamper the successful consolidation of democratic transitions. EU support to stimulate sustainable economic growth is therefore crucial to the promotion of democratic institutions, provided of course that our southern partners themselves help to create the right conditions for growth through rapid adoption of relevant economic and institutional reforms. In addition to the €3.5 billion already programmed for the period 2011-13, the EU is providing around €700 million in **new grants** for the Southern neighbourhood, in particular through the SPRING programme (Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth) which provides additional funding to southern partners showing commitment to, and progress in, democratic reform.

The Task Forces have facilitated optimal coordination for **future investment** among the EU institutions, Member States, the EIB, EBRD and other IFIs. The private sector also played a key role with over 100 European business leaders present at the EU-Egypt Task Force last October in Cairo. The recent presentation in Tunis of the Economic Advisory Committee by Vice-President Tajani is another clear example of the added value of Task Force meetings and their follow-up.

The Council approved negotiating directives for **Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs)** with Morocco, Jordan, Egypt and Tunisia in December 2011. Negotiations with Morocco are due to start in early 2013. Tunisia might be ready to launch negotiations later this year.

The **EIB** can now provide **additional loans** for up to **€1.7 billion** (€1 billion from the 'Mediterranean mandate' and up to € 700 million for addressing climate change) and the enlarged **EBRD** mandate – as first proposed by the EU - allowed the mobilisation of €1 billion extra for activities in Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan.

The Commission launched an **agriculture and rural development** (ENPARD) initiative to improve agricultural productivity. The EU is also financing programmes to boost SMEs and reduce unemployment. On **transport**, regulatory reform, building of networks, and maritime safety still require increased attention and may be the subject of a planned Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial meeting in 2013.

On **energy**, the EU has increased support for market reforms and regional integration and is backing the establishment of the Mediterranean Solar Plan together with the UfM. The Commission is consulting with Member States and partners on the establishment of a Mediterranean Energy Community, starting with electricity and renewables. On the **environment**, the EU has continued its support for cleaning up the Mediterranean through the Horizon 2020 initiative. The EU has also supported the draft Strategy for Water in the Mediterranean, pending political agreement by partners.

Development of people-to-people contacts

The Commission launched in 2011 dialogues on **migration, mobility and security** aimed at agreeing mobility partnerships with Tunisia and Morocco. Advanced discussions are underway with Morocco and will continue in 2013 with a view to start negotiations. Preparatory discussions are still ongoing with Tunisia and were launched with Jordan at the end of 2012. Once mobility partnerships have been concluded, the next step will be to seek mandates from the EU Member States for negotiations on visa facilitation agreements and readmission agreements. Additional funding has been granted to **Erasmus Mundus, Tempus** and the **European Training Foundation**.

Enhancing regional cooperation

The EU has renewed its engagement with regional organisations. The EU took over the Northern Presidency of the Union for the Mediterranean in 2012. The EU-League of Arab States Ministerial in November 2012 agreed a comprehensive political declaration and joint work programme. Last but not least, the EU has encouraged regional integration in the Maghreb, including through a joint Communication by the Commission and the High Representative. The Commission has also indicated its readiness to support initiatives launched in the 5+5 context.

The events taking place throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa since the beginning of the Arab Spring have taken on truly historic proportions which will not only shape the future of the entire region but also have repercussions far beyond the countries concerned. The EU is committed to provide long-term support to all Arab countries engaged in democratic transitions and will assist them in their efforts to overcome any short-term obstacles they are facing. The partnership with the governments emerging from the Arab Spring will develop on the basis of their respective records. In that context, the EU will continue to constructively engage with new political actors that emerged from or came to the fore via the Arab Spring. In order to help build and sustain vibrant democratic cultures in Arab countries, the EU will also continue supporting civil society and the work of relevant non-governmental organisations.

ANNEX: State-Of-Play Country-by-Country

Algeria

After the entry into force of the EU-Algeria Association Agreement in 2005 and following a long period of internal debate, Algeria finally expressed its willingness in 2011 to engage more actively in the European Neighbourhood Policy. A first round of discussions on an Algeria–EU Action Plan took place on 17-18 October 2012. The next round of discussions is expected to take place in early 2013. The 7th meeting of the EU-Algeria Association Council was held on 6 December 2012. An agreement has been reached on tariff dismantling on agricultural and industrial products. A Memorandum of understanding on a strategic energy partnership is expected to be concluded in 2013. The EU has been active in a number of sectors: from basic services to economic growth, rule of law, sustainable development, energy and environment. €172 million has been allocated under the 2011-13 National Indicative Programme (NIP), focusing on youth, employment and civil society, in conformity with Algeria's most urgent priorities. In the framework of the SPRING programme (Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth) that is tied to the delivery of on-going political and economic reform measures, Algeria was allocated €20 million in two tranches, the first €10 million supporting governance and the second €10 million tranche, linked to further progress in terms of democratic reform, supporting rural development.

On Algeria's request, the EU sent an EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) to observe the parliamentary elections that were held on 10 May 2012 in which the President's coalition emerged strengthened. National turnout increased by nearly 8% (to 43.16%) by comparison with the 2007 elections. 143 women were elected (approximately 1/3 of parliament). The EOM report underlined the need to improve transparency and to grant political parties systematic access to the national electoral list.

Bahrain

The EU has continued to monitor closely the situation in Bahrain and has, via different channels, expressed concern regarding the internal situation. In addition to a series of public statements, the HR/VP has had direct contacts with her Bahraini counterparts. Visits have been made to Bahrain by senior EU officials, who *inter alia*. visited a human rights activist in prison. The EU has called upon all sides to engage constructively in a process of genuine national reconciliation, without pre-conditions and in a peaceful manner. To date, initiatives undertaken in Bahrain – such as the implementation of the BICI report and the Crown Prince's recent offer of dialogue – have yet to succeed in creating the necessary conditions for reconciliation. The EU therefore calls for renewed initiatives in 2013, in response to the remaining challenges in the country, and has expressed its willingness to provide concrete support to this process through the provision of assistance and expertise. The EU is currently finalising preparations for a project that would have as its main objective to design training on human rights-related issues and to review national legislation to ensure compliance with international obligations.

Egypt

Since the first protests erupted in Tahrir square two years ago, the EU has consistently supported the movement for democracy and human rights in Egypt, calling for a peaceful and inclusive transition. A succession of high-level visits to Egypt has been made to underline and highlight this support, by *inter alia*. European Commission President Barroso and European Council President Van Rompuy, by HR/VP Ashton and Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy Füle. One of the first foreign visits undertaken by the newly-elected President Morsi of Egypt was to Brussels which resulted in agreement to resume bilateral contacts through the structures of the EU-Egypt Association Agreement and a restart of negotiations on a new ENP Action Plan. At the invitation of the government, the EEAS sent two electoral experts to assess the conduct of the Presidential elections in May-June 2012. The technical mission concluded that the elections had been fair and were held in a peaceful environment. Ahead of the parliamentary elections planned for the first semester of 2013, the EU has reiterated its offer to deploy, upon invitation of the Egyptian authorities, a fully-fledged EU Election Observation Mission (EOM).

In terms of financial support for the transition, the EU has already made available €449 million for the period 2011-2013. Furthermore, the EU, together with EIB and EBRD pledged an additional financial package of €5 billion during the EU-Egypt Task Force in November 2012. The €750 million EU contribution was composed of €90 million of assistance from the SPRING programme to support socio-economic reform measures, €163 million from the Neighbourhood Investment Facility and subject to the endorsement of an IMF arrangement, the EU may provide up-to €500 million Macro-Financial Assistance to Egypt with up-to €50 million in grants and up-to €450 million in concessional loans. The additional SPRING funds of €90 million are earmarked for supporting, in partnership with other donors (World Bank and African Development Bank) the government's socio-economic programme. In the framework of the Task Force, the EU and Egypt agreed to jointly explore how to deepen trade and investment relations, including the possible negotiation of a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement (DCFTA).

Jordan

King Abdullah II, partly in response to the winds of change blowing over the region in connection with the Arab Spring, initiated a broad process of political and economic reforms, including increased parliamentary control and oversight of the government as well as a new electoral law which, though not uncontroversial, ensured a broadly representative parliament via the recent elections that were seen by observers to be in line with democratic standards. In line with its commitment to support the reform processes in the Southern Mediterranean countries, the EU provided to Jordan an additional allocation of €70 million from SPRING. This was announced by HR/VP Ashton during the first meeting of the EU-Jordan Task Force held in February 2012, in effect doubling the amount of money available to Jordan from the EU's Neighbourhood programme for 2012. The additional financial envelope is made available in two tranches of 30 and 40 million, with the second tranche linked to progress achieved in terms of democratic reform. SPRING funding is used to support the electoral process, to assist in reforming the justice system, to support efforts targeting public finance management, education and social security, and to help develop the private sector and foster job creation. Following the invitation of the Independent Electoral Commission, the HR/VP decided to deploy a fully-fledged EU electoral observation mission (EOM) in view of the legislative elections that were held on 23 January 2013. The EU EOM will provide a comprehensive analysis of the elections and a set of recommendations, which can serve as a reference point for future electoral reforms. In the meantime, HR/VP Ashton already issued a statement jointly with Commissioner Füle congratulating Jordan on the successful conduct of these elections. In December 2012, the Dialogue on Migration, Mobility and Security with Jordan was launched. During the same month, the Protocol to the EU-Jordan Association Agreement was initialed, an additional tangible sign of our enhanced cooperation that will open new opportunities in a wide spectrum of fields. Jordan has played a vital role in providing hospitality to the increasing number of Syrian refugees fleeing the civil war. The EU is providing support through humanitarian assistance and long-term measures for an overall allocation of over €43 million, including a large contribution to UNICEF to cover the education costs of Syrian refugee-children in Jordan, also benefiting local children in host communities.

Libya

EU-Libya relations derive benefit from the prominent role played by the EU and some of its member states during Libya's revolution, in support of the pro-democratic forces. In 2012, the first EU Head of Delegation arrived in Tripoli, together with permanent staff for all core functions. The EU Election Assessment Team (EAT), deployed in the country to cover the parliamentary elections, concluded that the electoral process had been efficiently administered and pluralistic and was overall conducted in a peaceful manner. The EU is actively supporting the authorities in a wide range of areas. A total amount of nearly €39 million was made available in 2011 for projects in public administration, democratic transition, civil society, health and education. This was in addition to the €80.5 million disbursed to provide humanitarian assistance during the conflict phase in 2011. The EU is providing at least an additional €68 million over 2012-2013 for additional sectors like security, technical and vocational education and training, economic development, migration and further support to civil society. Regarding security, the EU is presently preparing the deployment of a civilian CSDP border management mission to Libya. The EU is seeking to conclude a long term agreement with the new Libyan authorities in order to provide a framework for developing dialogue and cooperation. The EU is continuing discussions aiming at Libya's full participation in relevant regional cooperation schemes. In January 2013, Libya announced its intention to join the Union for the Mediterranean as observer.

Morocco

The EU-Morocco Association Agreement entered into force in 2000 and the first ENP Action Plan dates from 2005. Advanced status under the ENP was agreed by the EU-Morocco Association Council in October 2008. Negotiations for a new ENP Action Plan for the period 2013-2017 on the basis of the Advanced Status were concluded in November 2012 and the procedure for formal adoption is ongoing. As regards the proposed new EU-Morocco “Mobility Partnership”, negotiations are advancing at a satisfactory pace and agreement on a political declaration is expected already sometime during the first semester of 2013. As regards trade issues, negotiations on liberalisation in the area of trade in services were continued in 2012, the issue will be taken up in the context of the future Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) negotiations. A scoping mission for a future DCFTA took place in July 2012, with negotiations expected to start in early 2013. In the meantime, the agreement on liberalisation of trade in agriculture entered into force on 1 October 2012. Negotiating directives for a new Fisheries Partnership Agreement were adopted by the EU in February 2012 and, following preliminary technical talks, two rounds of negotiations have so far been held. Morocco remains the largest recipient of EU assistance in the ENP-south region with €580.5 millions earmarked for 2011-13 with a focus on social and economic development, environmental protection, institutional support (i.a. justice and human rights). Additional funding under SPRING amounted to €80 million, supporting a human rights programme and inclusive economic transition, targeting notably education, health and rural development.

Syria

After the start of the Syrian uprising in spring 2011 and the subsequent escalation of violence and human rights violations by the Syrian government against its citizens, the EU suspended bilateral cooperation with the Syrian government and froze the draft Association Agreement. Since then, the EU suspended participation of Syrian authorities in its regional programmes and the European Investment Bank (EIB) suspended all loan operations and technical assistance to Syria. The EU thereafter initiated and progressively expanded a policy of targeted restrictive measures, including *i.a.* an arms embargo, an asset freeze and travel ban on members of the Syrian regime and an oil import embargo. In response, Syria suspended its membership and participation in the Union for the Mediterranean. The EU Delegation remained open until December 2012, when its activities were reduced to a minimum level for security reasons.

The initially peaceful mass protests in Syria developed rapidly into an intensive large-scale armed conflict leading to the death of more than 60,000 Syrians, according to UN estimates, and causing extensive damage to infrastructure and harm to the whole civilian population. The EU has repeatedly called for an end to the violence, for President Assad to step aside and for the launch of a political transition. The EU fully supports the Joint Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and the League of Arab States, Lakhdar Brahimi, in his efforts to find a negotiated solution to the crisis. The EU has urged the UN Security Council to agree on UN action towards Syria. In the UN Human Rights Council, the EU achieved the convening of three Special Sessions on Syria and the adoption of respective resolutions. The EU strongly supported the mission of the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, and efforts aimed at ensuring accountability for crimes committed during the Syrian conflict. The EU also provided material equipment to the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) during its operations. The EU Foreign Affairs Council of December 2012 declared the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as legitimate representatives of the Syrian people. The EU encouraged the Coalition to persist in its commitment to full inclusiveness and the principles of democracy and human rights.

The humanitarian disaster caused by the conflict in Syria has impacted millions of Syrians. According to UN-OCHA, 4 million Syrians are in need of assistance inside the country, in addition to the more than 700,000 refugees in neighbouring countries. The EU has so far allocated more than €400 million for humanitarian aid, approximately half of the sum coming from the European Commission and half from EU Member States. Beyond humanitarian aid, €100 million has also been provided by the European Commission through the different EU instruments to complement humanitarian aid by addressing longer term consequences of the conflict for the Syrian population (civil society, human rights defenders, refugees and internally displaced). The Commission aid is helping people within Syria approximately in the same volume as refugees, mainly in Lebanon and Jordan, and in close cooperation with UN agencies. The EU is the leading donor internationally. The EU has repeatedly urged the Syrian regime to allow humanitarian workers, agencies and organisations unhindered access to those in need.

Tunisia

The EU moved swiftly to support the transition in Tunisia. Political support is illustrated through regular visits (President Barroso, HR/VP Ashton, Commissioner Füle, other Commissioners, EP President), Council Conclusions and HR/VP declarations. In addition, an EU-Tunisia Task-Force was held in September 2011. Support has been also provided to civil society, to the preparations of the elections, including the deployment of an EU Election Observation Mission (EOM). Over the last two years, political contacts have been intense, with the Tunisian leadership keen to be seen as a close partner of the EU. In February and October 2012, Tunisian Prime Minister H. Jebali made visits to Brussels. A political agreement was reached on the text of the new ENP action plan towards a “Privileged Partnership” in November 2012. Resumption of negotiations on liberalisation of trade in agricultural and fisheries products is pending. Discussions with a view to a “Partnership for Mobility” on migration and security issues are ongoing. Negotiations are being prepared for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DFCTA), for an agreement on Liberalisation of Air Transport Sector and for an agreement on Acceptance And Conformity Assessment for industrial products (ACAA).

Since the revolution, overall EU financial support for Tunisia has increased from €240 million for 2011-2013 to €390 million over the period 2011-2012. The EU financial and technical support is focused on the political and socio-economic reforms engaged in by the Tunisian government in order to provide a targeted response to the real needs and priorities of Tunisia. €100 million was provided through the SPRING programme to support political/governance reform and inclusive economic growth, notably targeting the reform of the justice sector, capacity building of civil society, support to the renovation of popular neighbourhoods and support to the implementation of the association agreement and to the democratic transition.

Support programmed under the ENPI in 2012 focused on economic recovery (“Programme d'Appui à la Relance - PAR II” of €68 million) as well as health and the fight against inequalities (€12 million).

Yemen

The Yemeni revolution started in early-2011 and resulted in protracted negotiations with former President Saleh to step down after a 33 year-long rule. These efforts eventually brought about the only negotiated transition towards democracy in the region to date, when the former President and representatives of the ruling and opposition parties signed the Gulf Cooperation Council Agreement and Implementation mechanism in November 2011. Elections took place thereafter, in February 2012, and can be considered as fairly successful. The EU is one of the leading supporters of this transition, both politically and financially, in close cooperation with the international community. The EU has been particularly responsible for the outreach to all factions and parties, to ensure a fully-inclusive process, particularly within the National Dialogue. HR/VP Ashton issued repeated statements in support of the transitional government, at the same time warning potential spoilers to not derail the transition. Much still remains to be achieved though before the next elections planned for 2014. The National Dialogue has not yet started. Delays in this process affect almost every other major reform attempt, as the outcome of the National Dialogue should guide the direction of these reforms. The EU's immediate response was given through assistance provided to support the political transition process by strengthening key electoral institutions to boost economic growth, and to improve basic service delivery. The EU's unwavering commitment to Yemen was also repeated at the Donor's Conference in September 2012 where the EU pledged €170 million to support Yemen and its people in tackling the many challenges it faces: humanitarian, security, governance, institution building and economic development. The EU remains one of the leading donors in Yemen.
