
QUALITATIVE REPORT

AFTER THE “SPRING” EUPHORIA, A RESTRAINED OPTIMISM

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When this year's Survey was launched, a long time had passed since that December day in 2010 when a young Tunisian managed to transform a region characterised as being resistant to change. Since then, everything has been in a state of flux, even more so when unprecedented political changes have taken place in the region and new conflicts have been added to long-standing ones, such as in Syria, taking root in a fragile and vulnerable terrain and overshadowing the future of a whole generation.

Over two years later, the reading of the Survey's results enables us to take stock, measure the impact of the events, sound out states of mind and approach the future with better knowledge of the desires and expectations of a population trying to quickly adapt to the new reality of constant and unpredictable change.

Arab Democracy under Construction: a Shrinking Prospect

The prospects for the construction of a sustainable democracy enable us to organise the countries assessed in three groups, which are distributed almost in the same way as in the previous Survey: Tunisia, Lebanon and Morocco in the leading position; Jordan, Egypt and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in the second group; and, finally, Algeria, Libya and Syria (see Graph 1).

Although the trends are generally constant, the 2012 assessments seem to reflect a certain disappointment in relation to transition and reform. The 2011 euphoria aroused expectations which were possibly too high in terms of the process of change and its rate of evolution, and the tensions and turmoil endured during 2012 have lowered them. Greater disappointment, more realistic expectations and discontent with the management of the newly-elected governments are elements that have resulted in less positive assessments, most pronounced in the case of Tunisia, Libya and Syria.

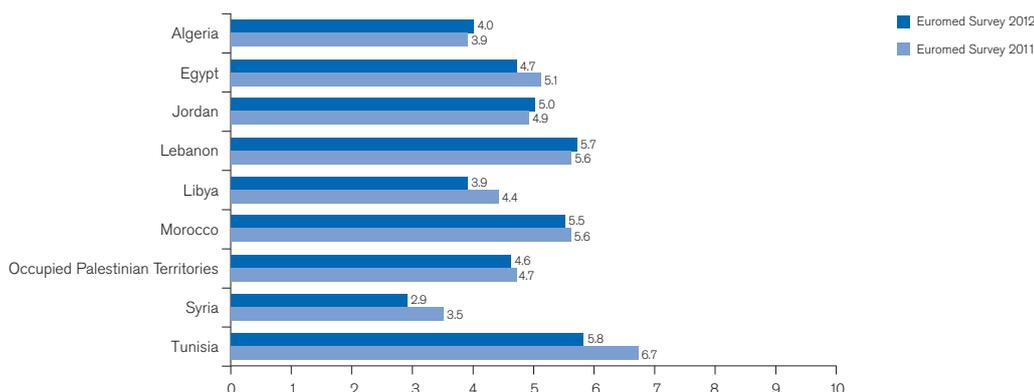
One of the difficulties when considering the question is timescale, given that it is not the same to envisage a stable democracy within two years as within 10. Many respondents specify that their assessment is framed within a period of 5-10 years, making it clear that it is a complex process: “Sustainable democracy is not something that can be built over a few years; there will be backlashes, ups and downs as indeed was the case in Europe, where it took decades, if not centuries.”¹

On the other hand, regardless of the origin, a certain cultural determinism stands out in the judgments made. Some respondents allude to distinct conceptions of democracy by Europe and the southern neighbours, an incompatibility between Islam and democracy, an antidemocratic culture of Arab countries or directly to the Islamist rise as an element that limits democratic evolution. Other options suggest the interference of external actors as a negative determining factor of this democratic evolution.

1. Open answer to Q.1. Respondent from Denmark.

Graph 1: Assessing the prospects of deep and sustainable democracy in the following countries. Comparing 2011 and 2012 results

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for very improbable and 10 for very probable)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd and 4th Euromed Survey

In the case of Algeria, for instance, those who believe most in its democratic potential are the Algerians themselves. Moreover, many of their comments indicate a negative vision of the change: “Unfortunately, after the Arab Spring, we are faced with a democracy confiscated by the Islamists, moderate or extremist, who in the end have the same objectives.”² Undoubtedly, the still recent trauma of the 1990s civil war, which caused around 200,000 deaths, the risk that a change may provoke disorder, the rise of Islamists or even foreign interference all explain the social and political resistance to change. The nature of Algerian power and its high national income have contributed to placating the attempts at protest and many Algerians seem to prefer a “soft” change: “Even if in some countries the protest movements seem more important, the most likely prospect would be a change of regime but without the democratic opening being guaranteed, while in other countries such as Algeria the change of regime, although difficult, will probably lead to more democracy.”³ Algeria seems comfortably stagnated in a hybrid state, which is neither a dictatorship nor a democracy.

In comparison to the previous Survey, Egypt is slightly less positively assessed, possibly due to the political drifts of the last year and the frustrated expectations of improvement in the economic and social fields. In the last year, the country has endured delicate moments of political and social instability, with a recurrent trend of the population, especially youths, retaking the streets as a protest against the policies promoted by Mohamed Morsi’s government (consequently, an Egyptian respondent calls for “stable” not to be mixed with “democratic”) and because of the growing doubts about his inclination to monopolise power and his capacity to manage this transition phase alone.

Jordanians are more positive about their own prospects for democracy than in the previous Survey, possibly because the 2011 reform initiatives (new party law, electoral code and constitutional reform) have taken more than one year to be approved and/or to have concrete effects, such as the call for elections for January 2013. Although the protests continue, mainly in the south of the country, it is clear that the monarchy has kept a margin for manoeuvre with the reforms applied. Moreover, regardless of where the democratic process may lead, the country benefits from improved credit thanks to the stability it offers in a convulsed regional context due to the Syrian conflict.

2. 3. Open answer to Q.1. Respondent from Algeria.

Although the previous prospects for Syria were devastating, in the current results the assessment of its democratic potential plummets to 2.9 on average which, in fact, it achieves thanks to the highest assessment made by Syrians themselves. This slight optimism could be due to the need to keep alive the hope for a future of peace, democracy and freedom faced with the violent shift the conflict has taken and the tragic situation of the civil population. In contrast to one year ago when it seemed that the situation could be resolved, now the perception is that violence could become a permanent feature.

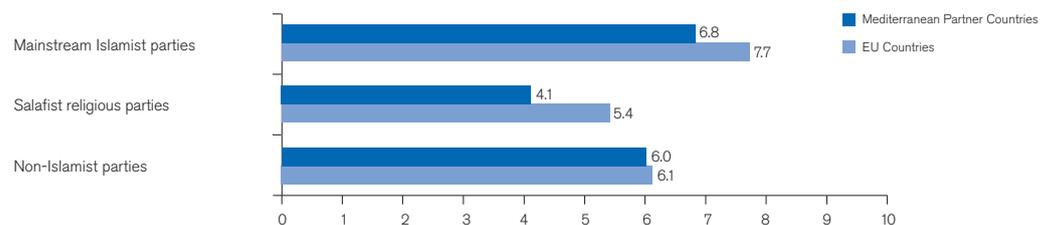
Tunisia, the country which spearheaded the “revolution”, has since then been the “great democratic hope.” One year ago, the first free elections in the country were held, and a new coalition government was established led by Ennahda, prompting great expectations. It seems that they have not been fulfilled given that Tunisia has lost almost 1 point with respect to the previous year. Indeed, 2012 was a complicated year. The emergence of violent Salafism, the gradual polarisation between seculars and Islamists at the social and political level, the disappointment with the “troika” government policies, the slowness of the constitutional process or the frustration with the promises of social justice have provoked several social outbursts in the last year, such as the Siliana events, and have led to questioning the government’s action and Ennahda’s democratic intentions. And this was before the assassination of the left-wing political leader Chokri Belaid, which contributed to worsening the existing political gap. It remains to be seen whether this trend towards pessimism will be reverted or confirmed after the holding of new elections and the passing of the Constitution.

Impossible Labels: Political Actors in Competition

What will be the role of the political actors in the future Mediterranean panorama? Respondents had to answer this complex question based on three pre-established categories: mainstream political parties, non-Islamist parties and Salafist parties. We must first recognise that categorisations are always conflictive and it was obvious that this necessary simplification would involve indisputable conceptual reservations.

Although it was unintentional, we must recognise that the question reflects the view (very widespread, above all in the northern Mediterranean) that the line of division in the Arab world between religious and non-religious parties is taking shape. This generalisation concentrates on the current social polarisation and overlooks the fact that, until now, the Arab political panorama has been exclusively dominated by non-Islamist parties, whether right-wing, left-wing, nationalist, pan-Arabist, Socialist, republican or of other types. Moreover, this categorisation does not leave room for the inclusion of other religious parties, such as the Shiite or Christian parties, present in Lebanon and in other countries, or other key actors, such as the army or youth groups (see Graph 2).

Graph 2: Expected role of the of following political actors in the future Mediterranean landscape
(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stand for negligible role and 10 for key role)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 4th Euromed Survey

The countries in which respondents consider that the mainstream Islamist actors will have a more prominent role are Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey, in fact three countries in which these actors are leading the respective governments. However, this trend is not followed by Morocco where, although the Justice and Development Party (PJD) is now leading the government, its role is considerably undervalued. Does this consideration mean that the PJD lacks a political future or rather that it is not the real power holder in the country?

In contrast, when the aim is to assess the future relevance of the non-Islamist parties, Lebanon makes the most positive assessment, followed by Turkey and Tunisia. It is curious to see such a strong demand for the future role of non-religious parties in a country such as Lebanon, where Hezbollah plays a crucial role. Similarly, Turkey and Tunisia are in second and third position, respectively, which confirms that there is an intensive political polarisation between Islamists and non-Islamists in both countries. Along with the loss of influence caused by the Islamist rise, many non-Islamist parties are considered to be linked to authoritarian political regimes, as co-opted opposition movements and “accomplices” of tyranny. In fact, this is how many respondents put it: Islamists have received a vote of compensation because of the repression endured in the past, are actors in the social and political fields and must be able to participate fully. For some, this participation is an unavoidable stage, as if it were a temporary illness. For others, as stated by a Moroccan respondent: “Islamists will be one of the vectors of change in Arab countries.” Some respondents state that political participation will transform or “shape” the thinking of these political actors and some foresee their failure or loss of influence with the erosion that comes with government.

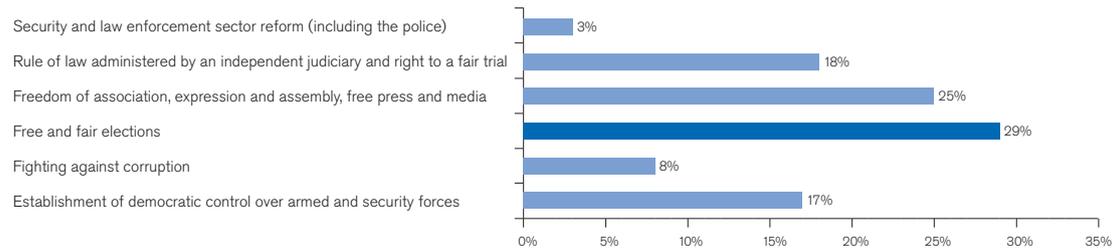
The negative assessment is even more acute when it refers to Salafist actors. Of course, Egypt leads the list of countries in which Salafists will play an important role in the future (and responds to the role they currently play in the political panorama). The countries where respondents consider they will play a more irrelevant role are Lebanon, where Salafists are in fact intervening in the socio-political scene, and Morocco, where they could do so in the future if the rumours about the possible legalisation of Salafist parties are confirmed. Although rivalry is concentrated between Islamists and non-Islamists, it is increasingly more apparent between mainstream Islamists and Salafists, competing for the same discourse and electorate, which could finally benefit the non-religious parties.

Criticisms of all political parties, disappointment with the performance of Islamists in power, political disaffection of citizens and disenchantment with their programmes is a constant reflected in many of the comments received. In fact, several respondents point out the need for dialogue between all the parties, for the formation of coalitions to face the transition period, above all in the case of non-Islamist actors, and to recover the links with a citizenship alien to a political class they cannot trust.

Foundations of the Democratic Edifice

It is much more complicated to assess the results of the third question, in which respondents are asked to establish a list of priorities from six elements characteristic of solid democracy. The overall results attached the greatest priority to the holding of free elections (see Graph 3). However, this prioritisation is different in the case of Egyptians, who consider the rule of law and judicial independence as priority number one, which, in accordance with the disagreements between government and judicial power, is understandable.

Graph 3: Benchmarks that should be prioritised in the first stages of the implementation of new constitutions. Answers as first priority (%)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 4th Euromed Survey

The second element to be prioritised in the democratic construction agenda is the chapter on freedoms. In fact, it is curious to see how the Survey's average order of priorities coincides with the order given by Tunisian respondents. Thus, after the first group of priorities (elections, freedoms and rule of law and judicial independence), we have a second group with control of the armed forces, the fight against corruption and reform of the security sector. It is to say the least curious that a country such as Egypt, where in some moments during the transition process there were fears about the army's willingness to hand over control of the country to civil hands, civil control over the military is in last position. Possibly it still retains this consideration as the arbiter and guarantor of the state traditionally assigned to it. Moreover, it is surprising that in countries where corruption has been a characteristic of the overthrown predatory regimes, its removal is relegated to last positions.

It is clear that, despite insisting that holding elections is no guarantee of democracy, being able to exercise the right to vote in a context of freedom, without coercion and with true electoral power is a right that citizens very positively assess, as it had long been denied to them. In fact, freedom is another of the emerging values in the region, something that has been lacking for many decades and which forms an inseparable part of the new participatory vigour of citizenship.

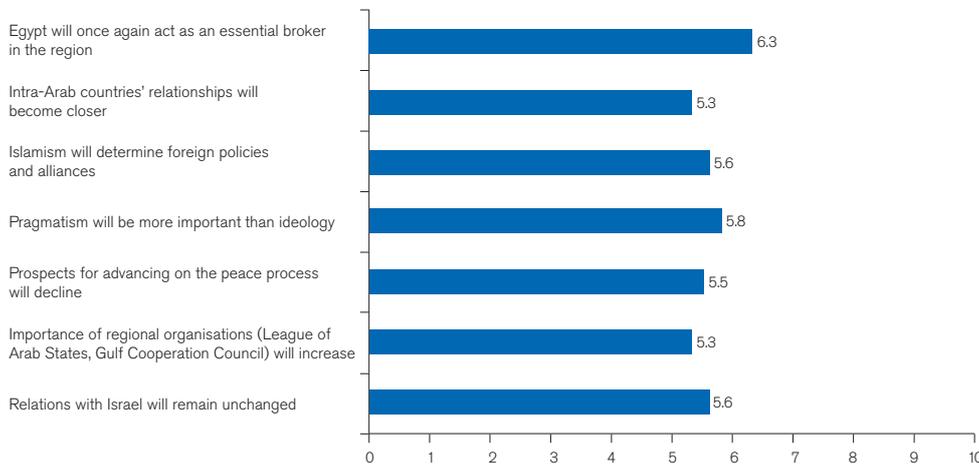
In short, the way priorities are ordered is the result of what has been denied to citizens for a long time and of the instinctive desire to exercise pluralism and democracy. In contrast, the elements which could be considered more technical, albeit crucial, are seen with less urgency, as secondary stages of the process.

Towards a Different Foreign Policy?

After this review of the prospects for domestic policy, it is time to approach how the possible changes in foreign affairs are seen and assessed. Although the scenarios proposed are pertinent, the truth is that the geopolitical assessment cannot be complete without bearing in mind other determining actors that have an effect on this regional context. Is it possible to interpret the relations between forces, alliances or decisions on foreign policy, without taking into account the role played by major regional actors such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey or Iran and international actors such as the European Union, the United States, Russia and China, some of which are increasingly competitive in the Mediterranean context? How can the external evolution of Egypt – and its relations with Israel – be interpreted without assessing its strategic relation with the United States? How can we predict the future of Islamist foreign policy without stressing the strengthening of increasingly influential countries such as Qatar or Turkey? Finally, how can we explain the Syrian conflict without taking into account the external variables that determine it such as the Iran-Saudi (i.e. Shiite-Sunni) cold war or the showdown between the United States and Russia on Syrian terrain?

Having said this, it seems clear that Egypt is bound to recover this role as a regional pivot that it has traditionally played. Although the country remains considerably enclosed within its own problems and domestic fractures, there is hope that Egypt will recover its political centrality. In fact, the Egyptian role in the mediation of the last escalation of violence between Israel and Hamas or some of President Morsi's behaviour in his few foreign actions have been, in general, assessed far more positively than his domestic policies. Perhaps Egypt will again assume this Arab centrality traditionally attributed to it, not so much because of achievements but because of symbolic meaning. As a respondent notes: "Taking into account its importance in history and its role as geographic link between the Mashreq and the Maghreb, Egypt will finally overcome its current difficulties and again play a role as a broker in the region."⁴

Graph 4: Concerning the reshaped foreign policy in the region, how would you assess the probability that: (average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for no probability and 10 for very high probability)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 4th Euromed Survey

The second more probable scenario is that pragmatism will be more important than ideology. This assumption seems quite clear among Mashreq and Maghreb respondents, and the assessment is more negative the more distant the geographical origin of respondents from the region under analysis. In other words, Arab citizens themselves are the most convinced that political realism will be the prevailing variable when designing and implementing foreign policies ahead of ideological postulates. In contrast, Europeans attach more importance to the primacy of Islamism as a driving force of foreign relations.

It is interesting to see how Europeans, from a distance, emphasise cultural and identity elements as a determining factor in foreign policy: Islamism will forge foreign alliances or "Arabness" will be a cohesive element in regional foreign policy. In contrast, citizens from the region attach less importance to culturalist aspects and the policy focused on identity factors and point to pragmatism, the need to satisfy national interests beyond mobilising ideologies, considerably in keeping with what has happened in the past and in the last few months.

Although after the outburst of popular mobilisations in the Arab world the notion of pan-Arabism was revived and after the electoral victories in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco people spoke of a new "axis of Sunni political Islam", in the last two years we have seen that the foreign policies have evolved little with respect to the political lines marked by the pre-revolutionary regimes. Consequently, it is difficult to foresee if these identity elements will become a factor of change in foreign policy. Hence, the devotion to pragmatism as a backbone of regional relations.

4. Open answer to Q.4. Respondent from France.

As for the peace process, Arab citizens are the most optimistic, although it is perhaps not so much due to the possibilities of advancing as to the fact that they do not consider the peace process exists as such and, therefore, what does not exist cannot get worse (“there is in reality no peace process to be advanced...”). This scenario is closely related to the one which suggests that relations with Israel will remain unchanged. Those who argue this hypothesis with more conviction are Mashreq citizens, Israel’s neighbours, in contrast to Maghreb citizens who hold the opposite view. While in the remaining scenarios Maghreb and Mashreq citizens offered more homogenous readings, in this case the neighbourhood provides a differential trait in terms of the way Arab-Israeli relations are articulated. Perhaps everything is a matter of nuances or attitudes towards the conflict; as a respondent states: “Maybe the anti-Israel rhetoric will increase, but without practical impact.”⁵

Finally, it remains to be assessed whether the regional organisations (Arab League and Gulf Cooperation Council) will have greater relevance. It is inevitable to recognise in this scenario the difficulty of placing at the same level two such functionally and operatively different organisations. While the Arab League continues to be a forum echoing regional disagreements, the GCC is increasingly demonstrating its capacity for regional influence, as shown by Morocco’s and Jordan’s approach to this club of economically solvent monarchies.

Unpredictable Instability, the Great Enemy of Prospective Analysis

The answers reflect the diversity of opinion and perceptions which, in many cases, can be due to subjective and personal views of the respondents rather than to impartial analyses. However, the answers are no less valuable, as they allow us to approach the reality from distinct perspectives. We cannot forget that the sample has its limits in terms of size and representativeness. It is clear that respondents have a certain linkage with Euro-Mediterranean dynamics and, in many cases, they are experts, politicians or diplomats, whose profile corresponds more to an elite rather than to ordinary citizens. Nevertheless, the results continue to be representative of a certain citizen feeling and views present in our reality.

Moreover, interpreting the meaning of responses, comments recorded, reading between lines and developing hypotheses is an exciting but extremely risky exercise. It is interesting to see how the responses evolve from one year to the next and try to fit them with current events and political dynamics. Nevertheless, the analysis must be approached with the necessary reservations, especially in a region in a state of flux where any spark, any unexpected event, can unleash more instability and drastic reorientations that are difficult to predict. After decades of stagnation, the Arab world has fully entered a time of uncertainties, sometimes risky, sometimes uncomfortable. And, despite everything, full of hope.

5. Open answer to Q.4. Respondent from Austria.

