

EUROMED POLITICAL AND SECURITY COOPERATION: A NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVE

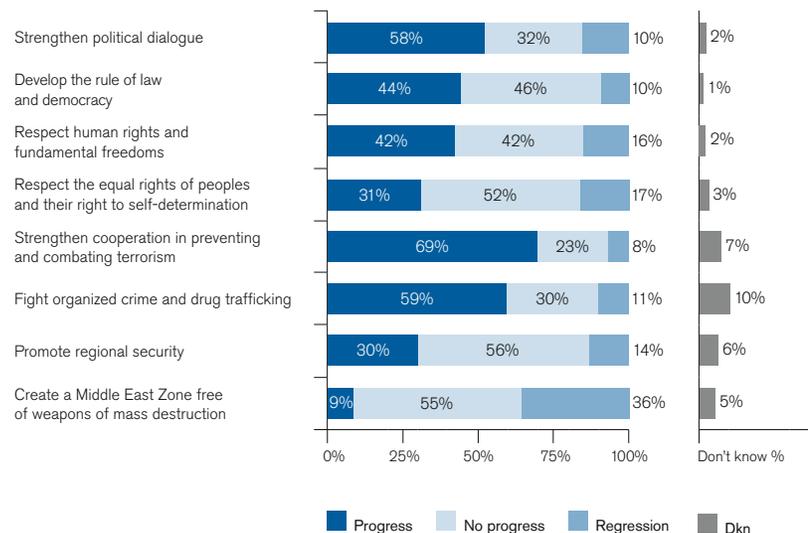
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Introduction

One of the main results of the Euromed Survey 2011 is the positive assessment of Euromed cooperation in the fight against international terrorism and organized crime. 69% of the respondents think there has been progress in preventing and combating terrorism, 59% of them see progress in the fight against organized crime and drug trafficking. Security issues are on top of the EU's policy agenda with regard to the MENA region and they also rank high on the policy agenda of old and new regimes in the South. At the same time, however, the assessment of developments in the field of democracy promotion and human rights is negative overall. 46% of the respondents cannot find any progress in the development of rule of law and democracy and 10% even think there is regression. A good deal worse is the assessment with regard to human rights and fundamental freedoms. Here 42% of the respondents negate progress and 16% come to the conclusion that there had been regression.

Graph 1: Assessing the progress achieved in the objectives set in the Political and Security basket of the 1995 Barcelona Declaration



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

Euro-Mediterranean Political and Security Cooperation can be analysed from various angles. The focus of this analysis is not so much on the achievements in the field of security policies as such, but rather on the presumed side effects of enhanced and successful security cooperation on other policy fields, especially the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights. My argument is that success in the security dimension of Euromed cooperation and failure in its normative dimension interrelate with each other. The results of the questionnaire back this assumption, as could be expected since it is not at all new. However, they also provide us with new and unexpected insights, thereby drawing a more nuanced picture of EU Mediterranean relations before, during and after the Arab Spring. This analysis is structured in five sections. Chapter two summarises the results of the questionnaire regarding the EU's impact on political change in various countries of the MENA region. We wanted to know whether the EU is perceived as a supporter of political change or rather as a preserver of stability, which was, and in most countries still is, provided by longstanding autocratic regimes. Chapter three has a focus on the concept of security, including a gender-perspective. What does security mean for women in the MENA region and how do their demands impact on Euromed relations? In chapter five, a few basic policy recommendations will be drawn from the key findings of this analysis. Before that, however, a few things need to be said with regard to the methodological constraints of this Survey.

Methodological Constraints

This Survey is not a public opinion poll, but an exercise of assessment and identification of the main successes and difficulties, potential and shortcomings of institutionalised Euro-Mediterranean relations. Therefore, only actors and experts involved have been interviewed within this project. Against this background it is astonishing, if not worrying, how many people answered with “Don't know” to some of the questions, especially those regarding specific programmes and budget lines. This confirms that the “Euromed machinery” is still a domain of experts that does not reach out to the people. But not only that; even within this elite group of experts we find more or less knowledge with regard to the various policy fields. To represent the different degrees of expertise, the statistical material drawn from the questionnaire differentiates between the answers given only by those who perceive themselves as experts in a specific policy field on the one hand, and the answers given by all respondents, including those who answered “Don't know”, on the other. Unless stated otherwise, my analysis is based on the answers of the well-informed group. By doing so I am well aware that this group is extremely small and thus not representative in strict statistical terms. Furthermore, it is likely that the assessment of officials within the “Euromed machinery” is unduly positive since they are asked to assess their own work. Nevertheless, the opinion of this small, involved, and elitist group is decisive in assessing the state of affairs in Euromed relations since they are the ones who know the complexity of all the problems in hand.

Another thing that needs to be considered to put the results of my analysis into perspective concerns the rapid changes in the region that we have been witnessing since December 2010. Many actors have changed and in some countries it is not yet clear who the relevant actors will be. For us it was extremely difficult and in part simply impossible to detect the relevant actors and experts within the newly evolving political elites. It is quite likely that many of them either had not been asked or, when asked, could not answer in detail due to their lack of familiarity with institutionalised Euromed relations. All in all, we find among the respondents many people – in some countries presumably the majority – that are part of old regimes. When analysing answers in the context of the Arab Spring this needs to be taken into consideration, since their perceptions and interests are presumably antithetic to the perceptions and interests of change agents. Last but not least, the enlargement of institutionalised Euromed relations must not be forgotten. With the coming into being of the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008, south-eastern Mediterranean countries, namely Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro, joined the club. The answers of representatives from these countries have little to do with the political changes in the Arab World and follow their own logics of action. Furthermore, attention

should be paid to comments of respondents criticizing the broadness of some of the questions. Firstly, because the differences between the countries are so big that questions concerning the region as such were sometimes problematic. Other respondents addressed the problem of causalities. How can we know exactly where political change comes from? Internal and or external factors can trigger change but we have no means to quantify their impact.

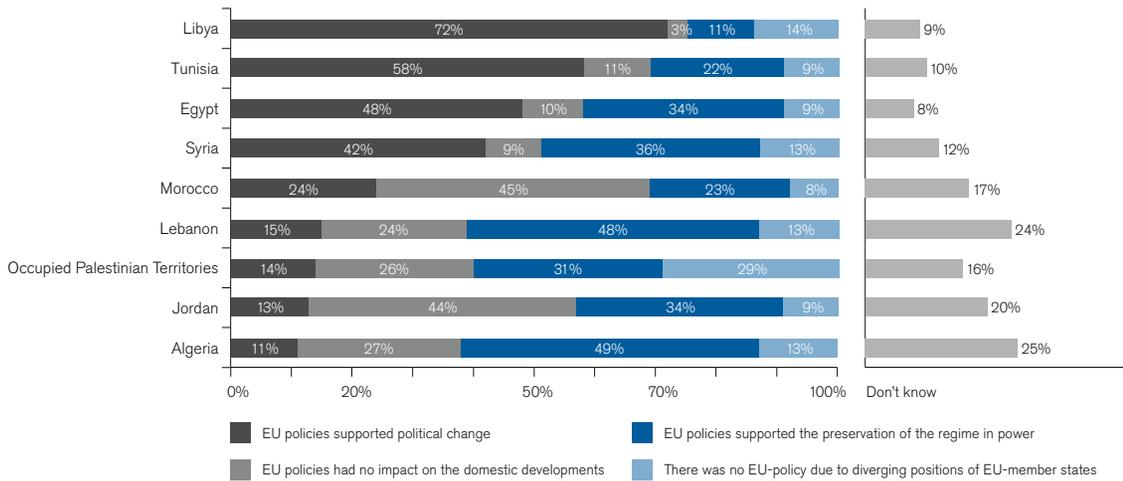
Most of these methodological constraints are due to the exceptional circumstances in the region and therefore could not be avoided. In consequence, however, the data needs to be analysed with great care. No final results should be drawn from this Survey. It is rather a matter of detecting the relevant questions for a new research agenda to understand what is going on in this rapidly changing region and how Europe should (re-)act. Nevertheless, I will draw a few practical conclusions from my analysis with regard to those results that I perceive as sufficiently cogent.

The EU as a Change Agent in the South?

As said in the introduction, there is a significant discrepancy between the positive assessment of Euromed cooperation in the realm of security (terrorism, organized crime and drug-trafficking) and a negative assessment of Euromed cooperation in the realm of democratization and respect for human rights. Both dimensions, security and democratization, interrelate with each other, since democracy promotion functions as a long-term instrument to foster stability in the EU's neighbourhood. EU democracy promotion is not driven by normative considerations alone, but serves also – and perhaps even foremost – as a strategy of EU security policy. Inspired by the theorem of democratic peace, the European Security Strategy (2003) clearly mentions the EU's interest in being surrounded by a “ring of democratic friends.” Democracies are believed to be more reliable and predictable than other regimes, using peaceful means of conflict resolution, at least between each other. With regard to its southern neighbours, however, the EU felt confronted with a dilemma. Being convinced that Arab autocracy is insuperable and misperceiving the aspirations and capabilities of modern Arab society, the EU opted for the autocratic regimes. They seemed to be the only reliable and predictable partners with regard to core interests of the community: keeping down political Islam, fighting international terrorism, holding back migrants, and serving Europe's growing energy demands. With the inauguration of the strictly intergovernmental Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2008, the EU seemed to have given up the political goal of democracy promotion, offering the autocratic regimes in its southern neighbourhood co-ownership and unconditioned cooperation in depoliticized functional projects.

Since the Arab Spring, it has become obvious that this policy was a failure, since it produced neither democracy nor stability, but a huge credibility gap. The 2011 Euromed Survey confirms this negative assessment, proving growing disenchantment with the UfM in the answers to question two. Lessons learned from this failure can be found in the EU's renewed neighbourhood policy, which has re-strengthened the normative dimension of Euromed relations. According to the answers given to question nine, this policy change is welcomed by most of the respondents. So is the EU's impact on political change, which is considered to be high at least with regard to the revolutionary countries. According to the answers given to question six, the EU has supported change in Libya (72%), Tunisia (58%), Egypt (48%) and Syria (42%). In contrast, EU policies with regard to those countries where a spill-over from the Arab Spring is restrained with a mix of modest reform and repression, no fundamental policy change can be detected on the side of the EU. Here, only a minority of respondents concede a positive impact of the EU on policy change: in Algeria (11%), Jordan (13%), the Occupied Palestinian Territories (14%), Lebanon (15%) and Morocco (24%). A prudent conclusion that could be drawn from this data is that the EU does not really follow a new approach with regard to the stability-democracy dilemma, but merely adapts its policy when forced to by the circumstances in specific countries. It seems as though the stability paradigm still prevails in EU Mediterranean politics, at the expense of democracy promotion, including respect for human rights.

Graph 2: Assessment of the role of the EU in the Mediterranean Partner Countries during the “Arab Spring”



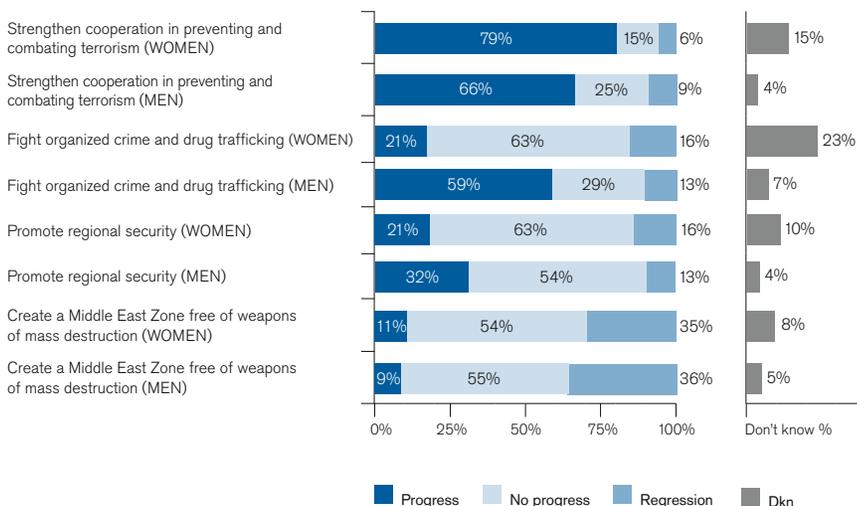
Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

Diverging Concepts of Security

When analysing the results of the questions concerning security on the one hand and democratisation on the other, it is interesting to have a closer look at the “Don't know” answers. Whereas 7% of the respondents feel unable to answer questions concerning progress in the fight against terrorism and 10% cannot assess progress in the fight against organised crime, people seem to be much more aware of the political situation in their countries. Only 1% could not assess the development of democracy and rule of law and only 2% answered “Don't know” to the question concerning human rights and fundamental freedoms. Obviously, people can literally feel the lack of freedom in their everyday life. Freedom from fear is one of the criteria defining the concept of human security.

Even more interesting is the analysis of the “Don't know” answers if we differentiate between men and women. Merely 4% of the men could not assess progress in the fight against terrorism compared to 15% of the women who had been asked. Concerning the fight against organized crime, the knowledge gap is even wider: 7% of the men could not answer this question, compared to 23% of the women. Security in the traditional sense is obviously a male domain.

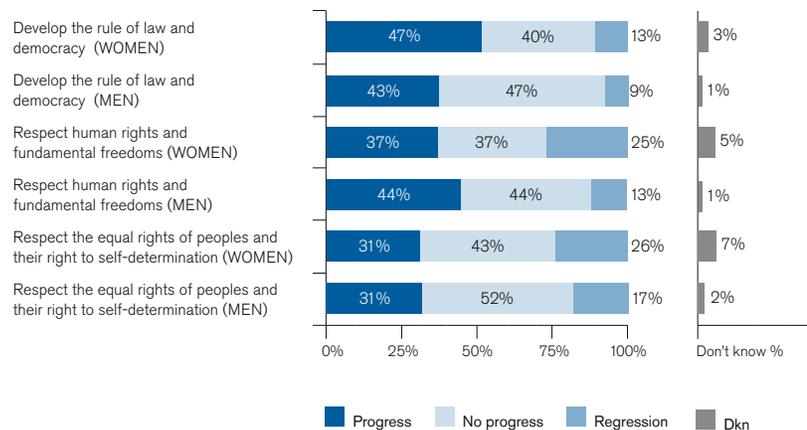
Graph 3: Evaluating the progress achieved in the field of the objectives of the Political and Security basket of the 1995 Barcelona Declaration



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

In contrast, women seem to be extremely sensitive in their assessment of the normative dimension of Euromed relations. While the group of (well-informed) women assesses the development of democracy more positively than the (well-informed) group of men (progress is seen by 47% of women compared to 43% of men), they are more sceptical when it comes to human rights and fundamental freedoms. 37% of the female respondents see no progress in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms and 25% even perceive regression, compared to 44% of the men who see progress in this field. It is quite likely that the lack of women's rights, which in most MENA countries is more problematic than elsewhere in the world, can explain this divergence in male and female perspectives. Women's security is threatened on various levels, be it through domestic violence, structural violence (e.g. personal status law) or repressive violence (e.g. "virginity tests"). The next Survey 2012 will have to be more sensitive with regard to this dimension of security, which cannot be de-coupled from democracy and human rights. The rather vague concept of human security is highly debated for well-known reasons. In the preparation of the Euromed Survey 2012, however, it might be useful to add this dimension.

Graph 4: Evaluating the progress achieved in the field of the objectives of the Political and Security basket of the 1995 Barcelona Declaration



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

Expectations

Having neglected Arab civil society, and having antagonized political Islam, there are no established channels of communication between the EU and the new political actors in the Arab southern neighbourhood. The EU simply does not know them. Against this background, it is more than difficult for the EU to enter into a dialogue with the newly evolving regimes, which in most cases will have a strong Islamist bias, and the very heterogeneous spectrum of civil society, including the liberal vanguard of Tharir Square. After all, what could the EU say to the young rebels that tried to free themselves from rulers that had enjoyed decades of European backing? It is no surprise that the respondents are rather hesitant when asked about their expectations concerning future EU action. The majority of respondents think the EU should remain cautious and work on the basis of the demands emanating from the South. However, there are differences according to specific countries. Here, the results from the questionnaire confirm the EU's new strategy to give up on regionalism and develop instead tailor-made programmes to meet the specific needs of each country. With the ENP Action Plans, the EU already started on this track in 2004 and will deepen it further. If this is the case, not the UfM but the ENP will be the decisive framework of future Euromed relations. However, according to the questionnaire, quite a lot of respondents, even those who denounce the UfM, still believe

in its Secretariat. Since the Secretariat plays a major role in the administration of the technical projects, among others the solar plan, it is more than likely that this dimension of the UfM will survive. Yet the projects are a deliberately de-politicised domain of Euromed relations and will therefore not be the framework for the EU to impact on processes of transition in the South. All in all, countries like Tunisia that have already entered a process of transition, will be easier to approach than countries like Egypt where the power struggle has not yet come to an end, to say nothing of Syria, which is almost out of reach for the EU.

The overall demand for the proactive, yet cautious, involvement of the EU in southern partner countries contrasts with the discourse on this sensitive issue that seems to prevail in Euromed academic conferences and civil society meetings. Here much more scepticism can be felt among southern participants, embedded in fundamental criticism on past EU Mediterranean policy. Apart from the fact that this scepticism cannot be measured, it is worth considering that perhaps especially those respondents who work in the “Euromed Machinery”, be it as officials, NGOs, or entrepreneurs, demand an active EU involvement in the region.

Conclusions

For the EU, which so far has had extremely dense yet almost exclusively intergovernmental relations with its southern neighbours, the Arab Spring was an embarrassment, because it revealed the credibility gap between the EU's normative rhetoric on democracy promotion and its realpolitik on the ground, supporting autocratic regimes at the cost of domestic change agents. Thus, it is time for a fundamental policy change. The analysis of the Euromed Survey 2011 gives a few hints on the direction to go:

- 1) The EU should give up the one-sided focus on stability. Although it is more than likely that processes of transformation in the MENA region will be lengthy and presumably also violent, change as such should not be perceived as a threat to European interests. Change is a precondition for long-term democratisation.
- 2) The EU should not trade stability against democracy and human rights anymore. Having adopted the renewed neighbourhood strategy with its strong normative dimension, which is welcomed by most of the respondents, words should be followed by deeds.
- 3) Avoid double standards: the EU will create a new credibility gap when supporting change agents in one country (e.g. Tunisia, Egypt) and not in others (e.g. Algeria, Jordan). People in the region are very well aware of such incoherencies.
- 4) If democracy is to come from within a country, the EU should give up on intergovernmentalism and open up to civil society. This includes the very heterogeneous spectrum of political Islam.
- 5) Make gender democracy part and parcel of EU democracy promotion and human rights. When doing so, however, it is important not to impose European concepts of gender democracy, but to stick to universal standards on the one hand (CEDAW) and the domestic gender discourses within each country on the other.