

THE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE IEMED SURVEY 2011 REGARDING THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN POLITICAL AND SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE WAKE OF THE ARAB SPRING

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On 18th December 2010, when Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire to protest against corruption and mistreatment by the Tunisian police force, the course of events which followed his self-immolation took both human rights activists, who had spent years monitoring human rights violations and oppression in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and policy-makers and journalists by surprise. Eric Goldstein (2012) from Human Rights Watch admitted that although they knew about the problems in the region, “we failed to see how quickly it could ignite into a region-wide revolt that is, in large part, a struggle for dignity.” This struggle seems to be far from ending. Violent clashes continue in Syria; following the presidential elections, reforms have not yet taken place in Yemen; protestors in Saudi Arabia are re-organizing by forming new alliances such as the women’s right to drive campaign; the tension in Tahrir is increasing, as the post-Mubarak interim government is still in power. As a protestor in Tahrir made it clear in November 2011, the MENA region is volatile: “This is our second revolution. We arrived with our dignity and we will leave with it. We are not weak now. We know our rights. I am going to stay here in our square until we change this government.”¹

This article will conduct a qualitative analysis of the Survey results in the area of political and security cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region with the purpose of identifying contradictions, while hinting at new possible ways for cooperation within the existing approach.

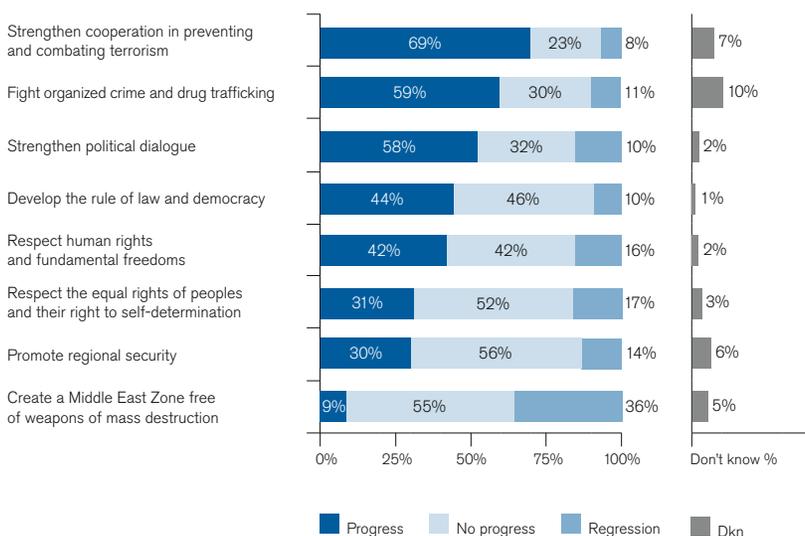
The main finding of the qualitative analysis is that within the Euromed political and security partnership, the most well-known and developed areas of cooperation are those which have been prioritized by the EU member states. However, this can jeopardize the EU’s international identity as a promoter of values, which, in turn, can compromise its transformative role in world politics. In order to preserve its transformative role in its southern Mediterranean neighbourhood with the new popular regimes, the EU should adopt a more active role in promoting democracy, human rights, and international peace. The analysis starts with the examination of areas where “progress” was perceived by respondents. This is followed by a questioning of the role of the 2005 Five Year Programme in promoting democracy and human rights. Finally, the EU’s role as an international problem-solving actor will be discussed with specific reference to the Survey results about the on-going conflicts in the MENA region. The article will conclude with some policy recommendations.

1. Voices from the Arab Spring were collected by the BBC. It is available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15842158> [last accessed: 6th May 2012].

“Progress” in the Areas Prioritized by the EU Member States

One of the most striking results of the Survey is that the majority of respondents (63%) do not have a clear perception of the policies within the Political and Security Cooperation of the Barcelona Process. An analysis of the positive answers (37%) shows that in two areas of the Barcelona Process (strengthening cooperation in preventing and combating terrorism, and fighting organized crime and drug trafficking), “progress” is perceived the most. Curiously enough, both areas are prioritized by the EU and its member states. However, in the areas which have direct positive impacts on individuals’ lives in the southern Mediterranean (such as developing the rule of law and enforcing democracy and respecting human rights), it is the perception of “no progress” which comes to the fore (Graph 1).

Graph 1: Evaluating the progress achieved by the priorities defined in the Political and Security Partnership within the framework of the 2005 Five Year Work Programme



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

This result can be seen as evidence of a long-lasting tension in Euro-Mediterranean political-security relations: whose interests dominate the Barcelona Process’ political agenda?

After the Cold War, the idea that Europe could not be safe if its neighbourhood was in turmoil became prevalent. In 1992, following a list of political and economic problems in the southern Mediterranean countries, the Commission (1992) stated that “these problems are also our problems – such is their influence on the region’s security.” The Barcelona Process was launched to address this concern in a way that EU policy-makers aimed to transform its southern neighbourhood without offering the membership perspective. The first basket of the Barcelona Declaration was originally designed to cover both political issues ranging from human rights promotion to self-determination and security issues including the prevention of the proliferation of the WMDs and resolution of military conflicts. In this basket, the EU aimed to ensure its security by promoting social and not just state interests in its southern neighbours, namely by enforcing democracy, human rights, and peace. However, within a very short period of time, this common security perspective faded in favour of policies primarily aligned with EU member states’ interests. This can also be inferred from the Survey results. When respondents are asked about the extent to which the general objective of the Barcelona Process regarding the establishment of an area of peace and stability has been achieved – excluding the “Don’t know” answers (11%) –, the Survey mean remains at only 3 on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 stands for “not achieved at all”.

In this restructured political agenda, cooperation against terrorism and cross-border organized crime became the main priorities. This created a contradiction, which is still having repercussions for the EU today, namely the cooperation with authoritarian states in the southern Mediterranean as a means of addressing these problems in a more effective way. Counter-terrorism was included in the first basket as a “serious threat” in the 1998 Palermo and 1999 Stuttgart Euro-Mediterranean Councils, later on giving rise to *the Euro-Mediterranean Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism* in 2005. Since then, EU support has advanced and now covers a wide variety of areas (Wolff, 2009a). While terrorism poses a threat to individuals in North Africa, what goes often unacknowledged by the EU is that some practices of authoritarian regimes to combat terrorism have generated serious human rights violations (Baracani, 2005; Galli, 2008). As a result, the perception has emerged in some sectors of North African public opinion that southern Mediterranean regimes do the “dirty work” of the EU (Bilgin and Bilgic, 2011: 7). Along these lines, an Algerian academic clearly stated that “the EU acts like a machine that seeks to promote its interests with undemocratic regimes in the name of ‘pragmatism’” (quoted in Bilgin, Soler and Bilgic, 2011: 19). This ultimately means that the high rate of “progress” responses in the aforementioned areas does not necessarily mean a positive outcome of the EU cooperation with the MENA countries.

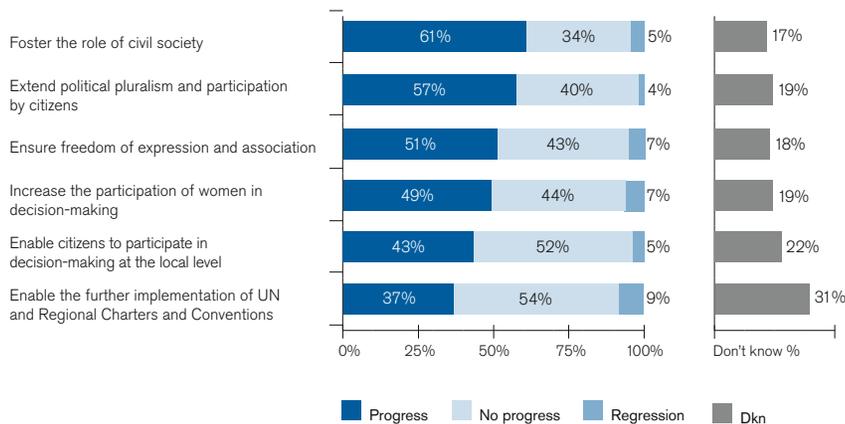
One of the most important findings of the Survey relates to the perception of “regression” in the area of human rights promotion. Such a finding is a worrying one for the EU, not only because the promotion of human rights, democratic values and good governance were presented as the foundations of the first basket of the Barcelona Declaration (while “progress” in these areas has remained below 50%), but also because the EU international identity is built upon these values. In this sense, the number of responses pointing to a “regression” in the area of “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (16%) represents an important setback for an entity whose international identity and power are derived from these values. This setback is embodied in the words of an academic and activist from Egypt in relation to the rule of law and human rights: “*the EU doesn’t apply the values it claims to believe in when it comes to countries outside of the EU*” (quoted in Bilgin, Soler and Bilgic, 2011: 26).

As some authoritarian regimes were toppled in the MENA region, one would have expected the social groups which have been critical of the EU cooperative policies towards the overthrown regimes to voice their concerns more. The Commission (2011) has acknowledged this possibility and has called for a new approach with emphasis on “deep democracy,” “partnership with societies” and “reinforcing human rights dialogues.” This new approach would not only correspond to the new political realities in the southern neighbourhood, but would also be an opportunity for the EU to revamp its image as a pioneer of values in world politics. This image is the core that defines the EU’s power.

A Critical Question: the 2005 Five Year Programme or the European Neighbourhood Policy?

One of the most outstanding findings of the Survey about the Five Year Work Programme is the considerably high number of “Don’t know” answers. Such a level of unawareness about this programme can partly be explained by the European Neighbourhood Policy, which has become the main arena of Euromed cooperation since 2004 (at least in terms of perceptions). Another interesting finding is the high rate of “progress” responses in the areas of democracy, political pluralism and human rights promotion (Graph 2).

Graph 2: Evaluating the progress achieved by the priorities defined in the Political and Security Partnership within the framework of the 2005 Five Year Work Programme



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

However, a cautious interpretation is needed here. Considering the high level of unawareness of the 2005 Five Year Work Programme, progress in the aforementioned areas can be mainly attributed to the ENP. This is important for the EU because it shows that, through its bilateral approach and more ambitious democracy and human rights agenda, the ENP is likely to be more successful than the Barcelona Process in achieving its objectives.

Although it was presented as “complementary” to the Barcelona Process, the ENP was designed to amend the failures of the latter within the context of new political realities in the post-9/11 era. Dissatisfied with lack of political transformations in the southern neighbourhood, the Commission suggested a new framework for developing political relations with its neighbours in 2003. The ENP reflected the vision provided by the Commission. Unlike the EMP, the ENP was built upon two principles: bilateralism and differentiation. Contrary to the holistic multilateralism of the EMP, through the ENP, the EU has established relations with each neighbouring country on a bilateral basis. The EU objectives in relation to each partner have been differentiated depending on the political, social and economic conditions of the country in question. Therefore, the EU has abandoned the “one-size-fits-all” blueprint agenda for democratization.

The tools that the EU has been using are also different. Individual Action Plans, individually negotiated with each partner, and ENP Annual Country Reports and National Indicative Programmes published by the Commission have provided a more detailed agenda and guidelines in the areas of promotion of democratic pluralism and human rights. Hence, the Commission has been able to define the sectors for each partner in which reform is mostly needed. In addition, new financial tools were introduced such as the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. For example, in Egypt the latter has enabled important projects for civil society participation in politics (Wolff, 2009b).

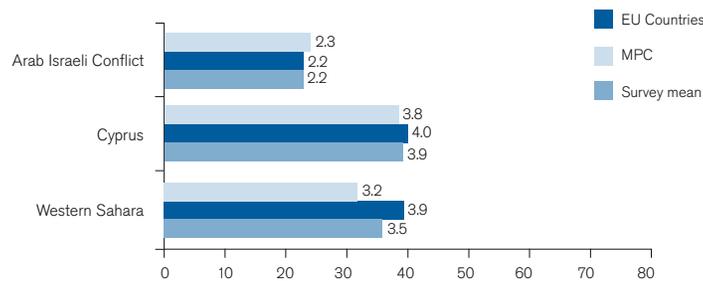
The point is that the high level of perception of “progress” in the areas of political pluralism and increasing role of civil society can be seen as a consequence of the bilateral and differentiated agenda of the ENP rather than of the 2005 Five Year Work Programme. The former has devoted more efforts (both in political and financial terms) to political transformation in North Africa. The role of the EU in the Arab Spring remains a question: did the EU, as Benita Ferrero-Waldner once put it, sow “*the seeds of change at the inside*” in North Africa?² If the answer is “Yes”, a less passionate political agenda (such as the one promoted in the Union for the Mediterranean) cannot be an option for the EU in the new MEDA region.

2. Available at <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/06/341&type=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> [last accessed: 1st May 2012].

A Popular Expectation: A More Active EU in Conflict Resolution in the MENA Region

The figures concerning the likelihood of resolution of the Cyprus conflict, as opposed to those for the Western Sahara and the Middle East conflicts, can be read as “the EU effect” (Graph 3). The “EU effect” has two dimensions. Firstly, the EU can encourage the conflicting parties to approach the conflict through a new lens: as a common problem where parties should work together (not against each other) in order to find a solution. Secondly, the EU can use its close political and economic relations with the conflicting parties as a leverage to encourage them to engage in a constructive dialogue. All the sides in the Cyprus conflict (Turkey, Greece and Cyprus) are closely associated with the EU. However, the continuous ineffectiveness of the EU to create the conditions for the referred “EU effect” can change this perception and jeopardise its capacity as an international actor.

Graph 3: Assessing the probability that the following conflicts will be solved in the near future
(average on a scale of 0-10)



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

The most important feature which differentiates the Cyprus case from the conflicts in the Western Sahara and the Middle East is the EU's potential involvement in the resolution of this conflict. In the case of the Western Sahara, the EU's first attempt to address the conflict was under the first basket of the EMP, which was hampered by the failure of the realization of the “Charter on Peace and Security in the Mediterranean” and by the 2002 Spain-Morocco almost military confrontation over Parsley Island. Through the ENP, the EU originally showed stronger political determination to solve the problem, mainly reflecting the vision enshrined within the 2003 European Security Strategy. However, the EU's original commitment was watered down due to the hesitancy to take an active political role. In addition to member states' divergence on the issue, the EU's cautious stance of “not replacing the existing conflict resolution frameworks” (read: the UN) has eventually led to disengagement (Gillespie, 2010).

Similar hesitancy can be observed in the Middle East conflict. In this case, the ENP again promised a more active involvement of the EU. The Action Plans of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories included calls for a more constructive dialogue. However, some argue that rather than using its political and normative power to force parties to negotiate with the purpose of achieving a resolution, the EU seems to be more interested in political reforms in Palestine (Smith, 2005: 771). Another problem has to do with the lack of political dialogue between the EU and the democratically-elected government of the Gaza Strip. In line with the aforementioned criticisms of the EU's perceived lack of interest in the human rights of non-EU citizens, “the perception in some Middle Eastern countries is that the Union's failure to recognize Hamas just goes to show that the ‘rules of the game’ are biased against the Arab world” (Barbé and Johansson-Nogués, 2008:94). These perceptions not only raise doubts about the EU's international problem-solving role (reflected in the Survey results), but they can also damage the EU's identity and power.

Respondents are relatively positive about the Cyprus conflict resolution. In relation to the EU, the most striking difference in this case is that all sides of the conflict are closely associated with the EU. Greece and Cyprus are both EU member states and Turkey is a candidate country. However, both sides seem to be frustrated with the EU's lack of active engagement. While Cyprus is uncomfortable with the EU's passivity concerning Turkey's reluctance to recognize one of its member states, Turkey and Northern Cypriots are still waiting for the EU to keep the promises made to the Northern Cypriots during the 2004 Annan Plan referenda process. In addition, the accession negotiations of Turkey are on life support. The Cypriot Presidency in the second half of 2012 and Turkey's refusal to conduct political dialogue with Cyprus can mean turning off life support. The EU is still expected to take an initiative before this potentially destructive scenario takes place.

In spite of the EU's disengagement in all three cases, 93% of respondents expect the EU to play a greater role in conflict resolution in the Mediterranean area. However, this credit may not be unlimited.

Recommendations for EU Policy-Making towards the New MENA Region

Based on the analysis of the Survey results, the following recommendations can be made:

- The EU should adopt a more balanced approach between its interests in combating terrorism and cross-border organized crime and the interests of individuals in southern Mediterranean countries regarding democracy and human rights promotion. With new popular regimes in the region, this balanced approach can enhance the EU's political effectiveness.
- The ENP's bilateral and more ambitious political agenda seems to enjoy a positive perception from the southern Mediterranean partners. The EU should pursue its proactive approach, which was revitalized in 2011. In this sense, the Union for the Mediterranean with its limited approach is less likely to provide the political and security partnership that the new southern popular regimes seek.
- The perception of "regression" in the Survey results in the area of women's participation is a worrying one. In the Arab Spring, women's organizations have been playing an important role. The EU should establish more direct contacts with these organizations and put pressure on the new governments to facilitate women's participation in politics.
- The EU should adopt a proactive approach with regard to conflict resolution in Cyprus. This would be a test for the EU's international problem-solving role. It is obvious that allocating huge amounts of financial aid (as in the case of the Middle East conflict) is not enough. People in both the EU and its southern neighbourhood expect a greater political involvement from the EU in conflict resolution.

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