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The first Survey was marked by the setting up of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) as an attempt to revitalise and revamp the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) fifteen years after the launch of the Barcelona Process.

While building on the monitoring exercise of the state of play of the Partnership started in the 2009 Survey, the second Survey also included a section devoted to taking stock of the progress made towards the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EMFTA), as foreseen in the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, by 2010.

This third Survey, while pursuing the monitoring exercise of the previous years for comparison purposes, also includes a thematic dossier focused on the implications of the Arab Spring for Euro-Mediterranean relations and for Arab countries' internal dynamics, as well as on the Political and Security Cooperation basket of the Partnership, which was a key component part of the Barcelona Declaration.

Important changes have taken place in the southern shore of the Mediterranean since December 2010 – the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi on 17th December being the catalyst of the Tunisian Revolution and the wider Arab Spring, which led to a wave of protests and riots across the Arab countries against authoritarian practices and calls for dignity, justice and freedom. Meanwhile, the Union for the Mediterranean found itself at an impasse and was unable to react, mainly due to the tensions caused by the Arab-Israeli conflict. In addition to this, its institutional setting was seriously weakened since the co-presidency was partly represented by the very same leader against whom Egyptians were rebelling. This did nothing but undermine the legitimacy of this institution even more. In this respect, the recent rearrangements in its institutional architecture are expected to reinvigorate the UfM and give it back its credibility.

For its part, the EU did react relatively quickly to the Arab uprisings, although not always in a desired outspoken and coherent manner. In any case, what the Arab unrest has blatantly brought to the fore are the shortcomings of an EU policy towards the South based for too long on a political dialogue limited to the governmental elites, paying little or no attention to the claims of civil society.

As already pointed out in the last Survey, the time has come for the EU to rethink its strategy with regard to the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights, which is based less on political declarations than on clear and active support for the processes of democratic transitions under way.

Undoubtedly, a new opportunity has emerged for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Its success will depend on the EU's capacity to readapt its strategy by listening to and taking on board the needs and demands of Arab civil society. This ability to empathise will be particularly challenging in times like these, when Europe is becoming increasingly self-concerned about the economic hardships it is going through. Yet the EU cannot afford to overlook the political developments in its southern neighbourhood, for both crises (the economic in the North and the political in the South) have a mutual impact on each other.