The current year has brought crucial events that will radically modify the Mediterranean landscape in the near future. Although the Barcelona Process, slowed down by its prolongation via the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) – which, moreover, is not very comfortable with its structure, projects and visions – did not directly contribute to the development of the population on the South Shore, it did open eyes on both shores, without explicitly intending to do so, to structural problems associated with the matter of political reform and democratic transition in South Mediterranean countries.

The first months of 2011 were the stage for a good number of protest movements in Northern Africa as well as in the rest of the Arab countries. The protesters chose revolution as a definition of what occurred in Tunisia and Egypt. This will cut short any external attempts to modify views of events and will lead us to consider the situation from a less “Euro-centric” angle. Indeed, we have noticed that over the past few months culturalist analyses on the capacity of South Mediterranean societies for democracy have become quite obsolete. This is not the place to condemn the prejudices and stereotypes that have inundated Western literature for decades, but it is important to mention them.

The new communication technologies (blogs, social networks and satellite networks, as well as mobile telephony) and the armed forces have been pointed out as being essential factors in the success and culmination of these revolutions, each in its own way and to different degrees. Naturally, the former factor can represent the common denominator in all the successful revolutions or those underway. The role of the armed forces, on the other hand, is not so “positive” in the various cases. Understanding how these two main factors function will open perspectives on possible future transformations of the political arena in South Mediterranean countries. This article discusses these factors and their impact, as well as the main regional actors active on the political stage, with the aim of providing a realistic view on the future of the Mediterranean Region.

The Role of New Technologies and Social Networks

In Ben Ali’s Tunisia, control of the media and its repression was one of the activities most dear to the regime. Since then, new communication technologies have spread considerably as a means to avoid censorship. Blogs have been an essential tool for supplying information. Social networks have also opened a window for freedom of expression despite highly effective state control of internet. The protests that began on 17 December 2010 proved, through their development, the key role played by these means of communication. The fall of the regime has paved the way for a ramification of this sector in all regards, without it being dominated by one or another of these emerging political forces. Social networks are seeing the creation of numerous new groups that represent the different political and social trends. Tunisian Islamists have also managed to join the trend of agitation underway on the net. In fact, all the political parties active in the local arena, as well as those seeking to emerge, have created an account on social networks. Information on events is transmitted nearly in real time and well before being broadcast by the “liberated” Tunisian or pan-Arabic stations highly active in the area since 14 January
2011. In addition to images, videos and documents transmitted via these accounts, social networks have allowed anonymous people to make themselves heard, addressing the Tunisian population with a more or less thought-out discourse in order to express a position on events concerning them.

The “imitation” effect of these techniques and procedures has been prominent in the Egyptian case. A “new pan-Arabism” has been born. Far from fossilised ideologies and hackneyed slogans, the young people of the Arab countries, the new “citizens,” have succeeded in creating a new definition of Arab nationalism more linked to the values of democracy, freedom and dignity than to the utopian dreams of territorial unification used by repressive regimes to increase their control while being incapable of meeting the political and economic demands of their “subjects.” Egypt was the first beneficiary of the Tunisian fervour in all of its dimensions, in particular in the communication sphere. We have observed the highly “constructive” exchanges that have taken place among the young people of the two countries on the most appropriate manners of virtually communicating and making their influence felt. It is true, however, that in the case of Egypt, freedom of speech was much more liberal under Mubarak, particularly since the beginning of the 21st century. These past few years have seen the creation of private satellite channels and the growth of private press relatively critical of the regime. “The dogs bark but the caravan passes” – this has been, to a certain extent, the Egyptian regime’s position on the subject of freedom of expression.

In other Arab countries deeply concerned with the political changes in Tunisia and Egypt, the common denominator was the apparent surprise, not allowing the officials and censors time to react. In Syria, for instance, after a period of hesitation, the media placed the emphasis on the instability that the events in Tunisia and Egypt could engender. Then, the “official” analysis identified the relations of the “dead” regimes with the Western world as having been the main cause of their demise. On the other hand, blogs of all tendencies acclaimed the accomplishments of the Tunisian and Egyptian peoples, recalling their similarities to the situation in Syria.

In Algeria, considered by observers as the country most concerned with what is going on in Tunisia, and even as “fertile ground for change” the State media provided only the most minimal coverage, clearly revealing the government’s discomfort or concern. In the private press and on internet sites it was enthusiasm that predominated, with direct forecasts on the situation in Tunisia and the assertion that an evolution in this direction in Algeria could not be ruled out. Hence appeals made to the government to grasp the significance of the Tunisian revolution and open the doors to freedom before it were too late.

The Arab authorities are beginning to feel the weight of cyberspace more than ever before

Social networks were the main source for all press agencies and television stations. Among these, Al-Jazeera was the first to use the videos and sound recordings posted by protesters, while attempting to verify their authenticity and reliability as much as possible. After having been “shunned” by the majority of Tunisian intellectuals for years, considering it having affinities with conservative movements, Al-Jazeera suddenly became the “Tunisian” channel par excellence. In its coverage from 17 December 2010 to 14 January 2011, it demonstrated extreme professionalism. The other pan-Arabic channels attempted to follow events, but they could not compete with Al-Jazeera. One of the latter’s journalists, from Tunisia, stated that “after a great many years when we hadn’t had the opportunity to send a cameraman, we suddenly found ourselves with hundreds – it was the protesters themselves who were our main sources.”

The events in Tunisia have emphasised the profound changes in the Arab media scene. They were followed by millions of Arab television viewers and internet users. The reticence first shown among certain activists at the idea of using social networks seems to have dissipated. The Arab authorities, fearing a domino effect after the Tunisian revolt, have not only taken economic measures in order to absorb the rising anger in their respective societies, but, above all, they have also grasped the real danger of new communication technologies and have begun seriously thinking about the adequate methods for limiting their damage.

The Arab authorities are beginning to feel the weight of cyberspace more than ever before. Control will be stepped up, governments turning to more effective experts.
For over forty years, the word “army” in the Arab world was synonymous with coup d'état and state of emergency. The institution was at the origin of political systems or their ultimate guarantor. Whereas it represents a component of the security apparatus, the government’s last recourse, in Tunisia and Egypt, as we have seen, it dissociated itself from the police forces and recognised the legitimacy of protesters’ demands, eventually leaving its chief in power. What has happened over the course of the past few decades to make societies rejoice at the intervention of the armed forces or even call for it, as was the case in Tunisia and later during the Egyptian revolution? Aware of the historical weight of the army in the construction of the nation-state after independence in the respective countries, the majority of Arab leaders, whether emerging from the army’s ranks or not, quickly understood the danger it could represent. They all undertook to marginalise and neutralise it, particularly by granting it considerable economic privileges.

In Egypt, it was the United States that financed this policy for the most part, granting substantial allowances to generals. At the same time, the heads of State developed a complex system of security apparatuses whereby the State’s mission to protect was metamorphosed into protection of the regime. Security agencies are in charge of information tasks and maintaining order; they control citizens’ everyday activities. Designed as the coercive arm of the regime, these security agencies became the direct managers of policy and public space. Direct management of public life by these agencies has grown without precedent over the past decade. More security has entailed less politics; the insurrections in the region reveal the decline of political institutions.

The characteristics of security systems in the Arab world are no different from those of Latin America, Eastern Europe and Southern Europe before their transition to democracy: the role of shield between the State and society, operating in a closed circuit of apparatuses varying in size and complexity, but whose culture of impunity and method of operation remain the same and encourage an inexorable logic of terror.

The mass insurrections that broke out at the beginning of the year had the effect of breaking the closed circuit in which the machines of power operate. The population serves as an indicator of divergences and catalyst of rivalries. The people’s insurrection has had the effect of separating the institutions serving the regime from those that claim to serve the cause of the State – first and foremost, the army. Kept away from tasks of maintaining order, the latter can play the role of guarantor of the transition. There are numerous links between it and the security apparatus, however. Long isolated from political decisions, even during the Bourguiba years (1957-1987), the Tunisian army has not been involved in the country’s economic life and has thus not participated in the regime’s corruption. Members of the Egyptian armed forces, on the other hand, have been in power since the revolution of 1952. Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser had an ambitious social and economic development project for his country and for the entire Arab world. His nationalist ideology won over the people, who forgave him his failures in political management and his systematic attacks on the freedom of expression. In contrast, his successor, Anwar al-Sadat, also from the army and champion of economic liberalism to the benefit of a new parasite upper class, introduced the culture of corruption while ensuring the loyalty of the army: he granted it economic privileges with a view to marginalise it. Over the past ten years, the resentment of the army towards Mubarak has grown. The president elicited discontent by allowing a small circle of businessmen gravitating around his heir to accumulate more and more wealth.

In the days preceding the regime’s downfall, differences emerged: should they continue to support Mubarak or force him to resign? The consensus in favour of the second option grew stronger, but the army seemed to hesitate to assume the responsibility itself for deposing him.

The great difference lies in the nature of the military intervention: in Tunisia, the army acted to protect the people; it forced Ben Ali to leave, with the approval of the American “friend.” The Egyptian army, on the other hand, appeared at the onset of events to fill the security gap in the street. It subsequently remained neutral when the regime’s militia forces attacked the protesters. It definitely made the decision to break with a dying regime but preserve the system. After the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, the army is in a position to set its conditions for the return to civil power. For the time being, nothing would indicate it wishes to supplant it. In this regard, observing Turkey’s political management of the military facet will help to comprehend future scenarios.
Turkey: An Example to Follow?

Turkey has opted for renewing the strategic vision of its foreign policy. It has done so following reflection over the course of several years. Turkey’s recent diplomatic ambition, timidly deployed since the year 2000, has now been assumed. But the question remains of whether Turkey has the capacities corresponding to the ambitions of a middle power that would not endanger its institutionalised links with the West.

Turkey’s political expertise in democratic transition, the coexistence of diverging forces and its management of the relationship between politics and the military will serve as fertile ground for cooperation with a number of South Mediterranean countries.

It is certain that the new foreign policy corresponds to a long-term strategic option in accordance with a perspective based on coherent analyses of the multipolar world. However, it is clear that the reticence increasingly felt in Europe to Turkey’s accession has played a primordial role in its new diplomatic orientations. While waiting for Europe, Turkey has the ambition of becoming a real middle power. The leaders in Ankara are convinced that an influential Turkey will strengthen its arguments and help persuade the European Union (EU) to accept its accession.

According to Ahmet Davutoglu, architect of Turkish diplomacy, Turkey is “a country with a multidimensional geography”; it should pursue a “policy of peace”, become a pole of “regional stability” and attain a situation of “zero problems with neighbours” thanks to “soft power.” Becoming a leading State in the region is not a camouflaged desire. The leaders of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), realised that it was possible to change the rules of the game in neighbouring regions “surrounding” them and extend their political and economic influence towards farther regions that had been the monopoly of the great powers.

Certain observers qualify the new Turkish diplomacy as “neo-Ottoman,” since it gives priority to relations based on cultural and religious affinities. These analyses show ignorance of the social and internal dynamics transformations in Turkey. A Syrian intellectual rebels against such a simplification, asking: “Is it conceivable that a knowledgeable man such as Erdoğan erase a century of History in which Turkey has modernised and ridded itself of the weight of its Ottoman heritage?” A lucid analysis sums up the situation stating that the AK Party in power is “a conservative party on issues of society, democratic in policies and neo-liberal in economics. It is the political expression of the new Anatolian bourgeoisie that has grown in power since the 1980s. This entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, puritan and traditionalist but attached to a democratic regime and pro-European, is part of modern Turkey.”

The political and economic weight of Turkey was strengthened during the Arab revolutions. The return of Egypt on the regional arena will not weaken the Turkish role. The two countries will open to areas of their respective interest. Turkey’s political expertise in democratic transition, the coexistence of diverging forces and its management of the relationship between politics and the military will serve as fertile ground for cooperation with a number of South Mediterranean countries. Hence, Turkey plays a decisive role, and will continue to do so in the future, in the peace process between Arab countries and Israel despite the tensions it has experienced over the past few months with the right-wing Israeli government. This conflict, which remains without a fair and equitable solution, is the crux of all the geopolitical problems hampering all projects in the Mediterranean.

The Israeli-Arab Conflict

The widespread and deep-rooted attachment in the consciousness of Arab societies to the Palestinian issue is not a marginal phenomenon or simply a fad.

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3 KILo M., the al-Safir daily, 6 September 2010, Bayreuth.
It is a constant that should be taken into account when attempting to comprehend the region’s complex structure. Public opinion as well as the Arab elite are more than ever concerned by this conflict, which drags on, becoming increasingly difficult to resolve. Like any socio-political action in countries in this region since the emergence of the Nation-State, decisions to sign peace treaties were not made after consultation with the people, but were rather decisions imposed from above, completely marginalising the role of societies and their representatives. Since then, peace has existed only between governments, but has been completely absent from the spirits and cultures of both sides. Hence, a more scathing animosity can be seen in the societies whose governments have signed treaties with Israel than in the Arab societies that are not yet members of the “peace” club. The measures to be undertaken so that peace can be adopted by Arab and Israeli public opinion must be considered. In the current situation, this is an impossible task. The occupation of Palestinian territories, with the “autonomous” territories surrounded, rendering the economic situation unbearable for the Palestinian people, the war in Iraq, the matter of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees and the heightened sentiment of injustice and rejection do not but increase the barriers to any hopes of political improvement leading to economic development.

To escape war through wars seems a suicide policy. Leading the warring parties to hold talks without prerequisites could be one of the solutions. This would involve recognising the different parties without preliminary selection. The representatives of the different parties would be chosen by each party, even if the choice may seem wrong to some, a factor which would in no case affect their credibility within their society.

The Gulf States and the Mediterranean Region

The Gulf States are at a critical point in their turbulent history. On the one hand, the matter of the legitimacy of rulers worries some (Bahrain), the rise of Islamism others (Kuwait), terrorist networks financed by a faction in power yet others (Saudi Arabia) and competition for control of a heterogeneous government yet others (United Arab Emirates). In addition to all of these seeds of agitation, conflicts that are undeclared but not, however, camouflaged, are developing between leaders (Saudi Arabia and Qatar, for instance). These conflicts are portrayed in different manners but the media play a primordial role in inflaming them. This rivalry is reflected on the Arab stage in general in the use of oil revenue to influence allegiances. Saudi Arabia can be seen to play an increasing role as a vehicle of American policy in the Middle East, while Qatar attempts to play the role of a “free electron”, with its ambivalent policy seeming to open towards Israel while providing support to radical movements. The rise in oil prices will but accentuate the impact of policies undertaken by these States on the ensemble of Arab countries. The issue is to ascertain in which direction the autocratic regimes of the Gulf States will go: will they move towards political opening or remain in a state of political stagnation that will engender implications regarding retrograde forces of all types? It is also impossible not to notice the timid attempts at opening through the organisation of municipal elections in Saudi Arabia and legislative elections in Kuwait and elsewhere. However, there is also no denying that the oil manna is in the hands of the ruling families, and that these countries exist on the basis of selected distribution. The Gulf region is strewn with US military bases and national security is ensured by experts from different Western countries. This reveals the fragility of these States. Their fears following the Arab revolutions could turn into efforts at “sabotage” via the manipulation of financial aid to South Mediterranean countries, aid they will be needing on the short and medium terms.

Perspectives for Democratisation and Reform

Beginning in the year 2000, a great hope arose among certain people, from the Maghreb to the Mashreq, with the rise to power of King Mohammed VI in Morocco, King Abdullah in Jordan, President Assad Jr. in Syria and Prince Hamad in Qatar. The idea of political reform seemed to be gradually advancing, according to some who believe it is enough to spend nine months in Europe to become a democrat. Numerous current leaders in the region have studied here. For instance, the majority of dictators in Sub-Saharan Africa went to major universities or military schools in Europe. The great hopes arising at the beginning of century were quickly dashed, however; the disappointment was so great that the reactions of the population, in particular young people,
began to be felt. With the recession, institutionalised corruption, very high unemployment rates, virulent repression and muzzled speech, the social protest easily turned into political protest in its most concrete version.

In this context, Arab civil society has experienced significant development after having been present only in weak States such as Palestine and Lebanon. They succeeded in asserting themselves in countries where reforms were undertaken, as Morocco and Jordan. Since then, three types of civil society organisations have emerged in the region:

- Real civil society, which manages to make its way, with great difficulties, through a minefield.
- Organisations that are actually governmental, behind which are always family members of the ruling class. These organisations, which attempt to replace the failing social role of the State, manage to garner European aid.
- The civil society of cocktail receptions revolving around Western embassies. This is where the diplomats or posted Europeans find their “natural” interlocutors, for understandable reasons: they speak their language, drink alcohol like them, their wives do not wear veils, etc. It is the "desired" formula. The situation is moving towards this paradigm. To remedy its shortcomings, it is necessary to seek the support of European civil society and have the latter act as a conduit for all of Europe’s Mediterranean policies. Official institutions could support such a scheme without being in an advanced position.

Notice that the Turkish example provides food for thought that could eventually help develop ideas for the future of Arab civil society, such that the different trends – religious and secular – could harmoniously coexist.

The post-revolutionary period will experience an effervescence of civil society organisations of all sorts. The efforts of Western funding agencies will concentrate on establishing “efficient” and “transparent” programmes to assist in the process. Needs will be expressed by those concerned and there will no longer be any external “agendas”. It will be much more judicious to meet the expectations and demands expressed by credible actors of civil society in countries undergoing change.

In the “revolutionary” movement sweeping the Arab countries, fears of a counterrevolutionary movement are the order of the day. Everything will depend on the transition and how it is managed. Hence political movements with religious connotations (the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Al-Nahda in Tunisia) sow panic due to their weight and organisation among the ranks of the secular. This consideration, however, remains on the order of speculation or exaggeration. Even if the first stages of the new political structure lend themselves to confusion regarding the democratic convictions of certain radical representatives of religious movements, this should not call into question the entire process of constructive national dialogue.

**By Way of Conclusion:**
**What Will the Future Bring?**

The most important revolution that has taken place has been that of the triumph of the people’s will over submission, of audacity over fear and of participation over despotism. The transition will not be easy and requires numerous factors to succeed in founding a constitutional State and institutionalising the separation of powers. The presence of a multitude of emerging political forces is a normal, positive phenomenon. Experiences in Eastern Europe display the same processes: several years after revolutions there, the situation returned to normalcy, with alliances based on common principles. The transitional period remains critical and highly fragile, but the strength of those men and women who succeeded in overthrowing some of the most feared tyrants of contemporary History will not weaken in the face of reticence, sabotage or bad will. This process will need support from Europe, the closest neighbour, whose economic interests and political stability concerns should lead it to provide support to the democratic process, after having supported authoritarian regimes for a long time, authoritarian regimes existing under diverse banners. Foreign intervention in an interactive form aiming to provide support to democratic transition is more than necessary. We must not adopt the position of isolation and state that the transition period in the South Mediterranean should be effected exclusively through the efforts of the population alone. It goes without saying that they should assume the brunt of it, but without foreign aid, their mission will be more fragile and threatened. This aid – intervention – can come in diverse forms. Support should be provided to the democratic tran-
position by strengthening the development of national economies and helping them to emerge from a long episode of corruption and poor governance. Thus it will be necessary to strengthen projects between civil society organisations on both sides of the Mediterranean and support social projects in the sphere of development. The experience of democratic transitions that have taken place in Southern Europe (Spain, Portugal and Greece) could provide useful patterns, especially insofar as preparing elections and reform in the security sector.

This process will need support from Europe, the closest neighbour, whose economic interests and political stability concerns should lead it to provide support to the democratic process, after having supported authoritarian regimes for a long time.

The esteem that the insurgent Arab peoples have gained among the international community is very important. It is a factor that will contribute to the desired change in the stereotypes and prejudices saturating Western political literature.

It is important to emphasise that the fear that took root in the spirits of the Arab countries’ populations during decades of humiliation and repression has changed sides. Arab leaders now have the “opportunity” to share this feeling, finally. A number of Arab leaders, as was the case with Syria’s Bashar al-Assad, believed their countries had been spared and they did not feel concerned by what was happening in neighbouring countries because “they are different”. The ophthalmologist’s forecast was shortsighted and Syria has in turn been “hit” by the wave of protests.

Governing under a state of emergency over the course of several decades is the epitome of weakness. The majority of Arab regimes do not have or no longer have legitimacy. They have spent years despoiling their countries under various pretexts. They have frustrated any attempts at real development by applying economic policies without identity, whether left-wing or right-wing. To stay in power the longest time possible, they have developed a systemic corruption in order to share revenue and possibly distribute it among protective elements and centres of power helping them to repress and muzzle public life. They even usurped civil society by encouraging the creation of a civil society made to measure, as corrupt and clientelist as the government itself. Finally, they rendered the press mute if not accessory. By censoring all artistic and literary creation, these regimes are the primary culprits responsible for assassinating the soul and creativity of an ancestral culture, something that none of the invaders or colonisers had managed to do in centuries. The commotion of these “sand tigers” is no longer surprising, with a good knowledge of how they operate and their composition.

The revolt spreading through countries where the social, cultural and political conditions are ripe is not an infection, for revolution is not a virus but rather a remedy and the annunciation of a resurrection. The overwhelming wave will continue to spread, but possibly under different forms. Each country is different, with its particular circumstances, capacities and factors that prepare the ground for such deflagration. In any case, to speak of idiosyncrasies should in no case reassure the fearful and the champions of stagnation. It is only to explain that the form of change can vary from one country to another. All Arab countries without exception will face this wave sooner or later.