

## **Egypt after the Revolution of 2011 – still a Matter of Democracy versus Stability?**

### **1 The democracy vs stability problem**

As we have witnessed within the first weeks of 2011, the Tunisian and the Egyptian people achieved a fundamental change in government and leadership within their countries. This historical break no political analyst had predicted is still open-ended and raises a number of questions for the role of the European Union in the future. For the case of Egypt, the direction and likeliness of a deep societal democratization process are still unclear. The role and ability of foreign actors such as the EU and its member states to support this process have so far not been shaped into a new political strategy within the Neighbourhood Policy.

Before the Arab revolutions of 2011, the foreign policy of the European Union towards the Mediterranean countries was often characterised by a dilemma between the EU's stability and democratization goals (see Cavatora & Pace, 2010). The change from EMP to ENP was assumed to imply a re-orientation of EU foreign policy goals from a normative long-term oriented democratization to a strategic short-term stabilization of authoritarian systems on the Southern shore of the Mediterranean.

Although the European Union maintained its strong rhetoric of support for democratic reforms on the ENP agenda, the actual measures and implementation show “gaps between discourse and practice” (Bicchi 2009). “So far there is little evidence to the fact that the ENP is trying to live up to the strong language used at the policy's outset in favour of democratic promotion.” (Johansson-Noguès 2007: 192). This also nourishes the complaint about “double standards” (demanding democracy, but supporting authoritarian rulers) in the Mediterranean policy of the EU.

This state of the art of the academic debate about the impacts of the ENP can be characterised as the “expectation-implementation gap” in the field of EU democracy promotion. The contrast between the strong normative rhetoric and the poor outcomes of EU democracy promotion in the MENA countries is offending the idea of a “normative power EU” (Manners 2002). The “expectation-implementation gap” results from a normative ascription to EU foreign politics towards the Southern Mediterranean to serve certain values commonly accepted to be democratic.

This assumption about the value orientation of the EU Mediterranean politics can be doubted: EU politics – in general, and towards the Mediterranean countries in particular – are not an altruistic normative endeavour but interest-based actions following the patterns of EU decision making and EU internal interest constellations. In this perspective, the ENP is the outcome of a number of influence factors inside the EU system. One of the main problems for the implementation of the ENP is the restricting effect of the environment of authoritarian rule in the Southern Mediterranean Neighbourhood states. This imposes a number of control interventions and restrictions on the implementation process by the institutional setting of the cooperation with the EU.

The combination of an interest-based interaction by the EU and an authoritarian recipient in effect led to a stabilization and legitimization of authoritarian rule. Since the European Union not only followed democratization but also economic and security interests, the maintenance of the relations with non-democratic regimes is important and not impeded by the violation of democratic and human rights standards. Additionally, the bureaucratic systems of Mediterranean authoritarian rulers allowed a successfully re-steering and watering-down of the EU democratization policy towards the country.

These mechanisms of trade-off between democracy and stability in the EU policy towards the Mediterranean might be reconsidered after the January/February 2011 revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia. This article endeavours to explain how the relationship between democracy promotion and regime stabilization worked in the recent history of EU-Mediterranean relations. It presents the example of the cooperation between the EU and Egypt and shows how the interest filter system of bilateral relations is generating a number of regime-conformous topics narrowing down the democratization agenda of the EU. In effect, this interest filter is the main cause of the “expectation-implementation gap” of EU democracy promotion.

The article continues to give an overview over the current situation inside Egypt after the revolution and collects some evidence for a changed relationship between democracy and stability inside the country. It then describes the first attempts taken by the European Union and gives some analytical perspectives for problems possibly arising in the future of the EU cooperation with Egypt in the field of democracy promotion.

The central argument of this article is to create an evidence-based critical approach for the analysis of EU democracy promotion and EU foreign policy in general. It assumes that:

1. EU foreign policy is primarily interest-based politics, resulting from the internal dynamics of the EU system, including norms and values which, however, lack a clear instrumental function.
2. In this respect, the environment of implementation of EU foreign policy is decisive for the match between policy objectives and impact: An unfavourable environment such as authoritarian rule has a restrictive effect on EU policy.
3. The democratizing power idea about European Union politics inherently carries a normative ascription, which should be modified by the empirical evidence.
4. The tension between a normative and an empirical reflection of the EU policy creates the “expectation-implementation-gap” of EU foreign policy. The size of this gap is depending upon the environment and is the bigger the harsher the misfit of the EU system with the cooperation partner is.

This approach tries to create an empirically based analytical approach to EU foreign policy and to substitute normatively instructed as well as purely descriptive elaborations on the topic. The Mediterranean policy is an appropriate example for EU foreign policy because it represents an example for the effects of the EU on a regional level and encompasses nearly all aspects of European hard and soft security. It is not an accession policy and confronts the European Union with non-democratic rule, which is the starting point for any democratization policy.

## 2. EU ENP Policy in Egypt before January 25

Looking back on the formation of ENP, the central argument for its creation in terms of EU politics was the concentration on vital aspects for the future development of the European integration process in a friendly environment (European Commission 2004). In their argumentation for creating the ENP, the EU policy makers mainly stressed two interests closely related to the European integration process: (1) to secure the state of integration internally and (2) to secure a friendly environment for the EU in accordance with its security interests. This is due to the fact that the Eastern Enlargement in 2004 created a new “near abroad” beyond the new members in Eastern Europe which implied a more direct confrontation with risks of migration, terrorist activities, and even civil war.

The merger of the Eastern Neighbourhood countries with the Mediterranean partner countries promised to overcome the meagre results of the Barcelona process and to activate a more effective conditionality in the cooperation with the Mediterranean countries. For all neighbourhood countries, the general decision to offer everything but membership (Prodi 2004) can be seen as the general guideline for the policy. On the other hand, the ENP’s design is also a concretization of foreign and security policy after the approval of the European Security Strategy in 2003 (European Council 2003), claiming a demand for European activity to address the severe societal problems in the Southern Mediterranean.

This context of overarching EU security interests and tense internal interest constellations (between East and South as well as between the Commission and the member states) created the ENP as a policy patchwork. This included the former ideas of the Barcelona Process as well as more specific objectives directly related to the assumptions in the European Security Strategy, like migration management, fighting organised crime and human trafficking, and cooperation in the energy sector. The bilateral and positive conditionality approach additionally changed the procedures from EMP to ENP fundamentally, promising a more practical approach for the implementation (Bauer 2011).

All in all, the ENP promised stability for the EU in a double sense: for the ongoing integration process inside the EU and for a reliable treatment of the regional environment. In this respect, it is a highly important determinant for the cooperation between the EU and the Southern Mediterranean and its democratization approach and impact.

Additionally, the context of negotiations and implementation with authoritarian regimes on the Southern shore of the Mediterranean affected the democratization agenda heavily. In the case of the Egyptian authoritarian system, the empirical evidence shows how authoritarianism contributed to the multi-faceted character of the ENP inside Egypt and how it brokered the general democratization agenda towards a regime-friendly modernization policy.

Egypt’s political system and social structures, like many in the Arab world, have widely been described as authoritarian or neo-patrimonial (Weber, 1922).<sup>1</sup> Central structural features of these systems are: informal influence, bargaining and strong leaders (Pawelka, 1985). Together with the societal organization along family and patriarchal social structures, this forms systems of high concentration of political

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<sup>1</sup> On the challenge of Arab authoritarianism for the EU policy see Brumberg, 2002; Jung, 2006; Asseburg & Koepf, 2007; Mattes, 2008; Bicchi, 2009; Youngs, 2006; Zaki, 2008.

power. In concrete terms, the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak as the strong leader figure was surrounded by a number of competing elite groups, like military, police and businessmen, who received different forms of privileges directly and informally by the ruler (such as monopolies, loans, land deals or direct funding). At the same time, the distance between citizens and elite was assured and kept up by strict control, and complex and hierarchical bureaucracies (Kreitmeyer & Schlumberger, 2010, pp. 17 sq.). The logic of the persistence of these systems was the suppression of alternative political movements or oppositions.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the Egyptian side was not at all interested in an interference of the European Union into domestic politics aiming at a substantial system change. The argument emphasizing the regional security position of Egypt with strong ties between the US and the Egyptian military and a secularly oriented regime served as an immunization strategy against any Western request for more substantial changes. The Egyptian political elite hence provided a resistant and hierarchical system structure to address the European Union policy.

The core management agency for all EU cooperation with Egypt is the Egyptian Foreign Ministry and its “National Steering Bureau: Egypt–EU Action Plan & Association Agreement”. All policy fields of the association agreement and the action plan have to be co-ordinated between the European representation in Egypt and this department of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry. The Foreign Ministry can be seen as the distribution hub inside the Egyptian system to distribute the tasks of the cooperation amongst the responsible Ministries.

The Ministries again implement certain tasks by themselves – especially all kinds of regulation and norm adoption to the European Union. The most prominent sector is the trade liberalization in order to establish compliance to the Common Market (Interview with Commission official, 20 June 2011). Other sectors of cooperation – in the social and economic cooperation – recommend the activation of third parties to implement EU policy on the base of projects. The ministries therefore activate private companies (in the case of the implementation of economic cooperation and joint investment) or civil society organizations (in all social and human rights project oriented areas). In the field of social help and human rights assistance, all civil society interaction is coordinated by either the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR), the National Council for Women (NCW) or the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM), which are all state-controlled agencies established by the authoritarian elite to promote modernization in the respective fields. These agencies are responsible for the activation of NGOs and civil society to take part in projects sponsored by the European Union. Mostly, only internationally experienced NGOs have a chance to win the competition following the rules of the European Union, because other organizations fail to meet the criteria set up by the European Union (Interviews with NCCM official: 13 April 2011, 24 November 2010).

The Egyptian government is also distributing the EU funding to these national agencies. Hence, all financial aid of the EU has to pass the governmental level to reach civil society. This practice, along with the budget support approach of the European Union, has earned a lot of critique concerning the impact of the EU

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<sup>2</sup> This included a lack of democracy with conditions diverging intolerably from the European ideas of participative democracy, rule of law and protection of human rights (see Council of the European Union, 2008; Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, 2009; U.S. Department of State, 2008; Amnesty International, 2006)

financial aid. It was seen as a major instrument of the authoritarian elite to re-direct and control the financial flows from the European Union.

The power the Egyptian elite invested in (1) keeping EU officials from the centres of power, (2) centralizing control in the hands of a few experienced and reliable Foreign Ministry officials, (3) distributing and splitting information amongst different ministries and governmental agencies, and (4) controlling negotiations as well as financial support of the EU indicates the strong resistance against foreign interference by the authoritarian elite.

Accordingly, the ENP implementation not only had to serve a complex interest constellation inside the European Union; it also faced a highly restrictive context inside the Egyptian authoritarian elite. In taking into consideration the twofold bunches of conditions and restrictions, the cooperation can be characterised as a “double-conditional cooperation”.

Thus, the empirical results on the implementation show a watering-down of the content of the ENP implemented inside Egypt, which can be described as a concentration on vital development goals. These development goals display the lowest common denominator between the EU and Egypt’s national authorities. The concretization of the content of implementation can be described as an “interest filter system”, where an ever more concrete enumeration of objectives and issues from the level of the EU-Egypt Action plan (in 2007), the Country Strategy Paper (also in 2007) to the National Indicative Programme (NIP) for 2011 to 2013 can be detected. The NIP is the display level for all distributive actions taken by the European Union inside Egypt and gives a clear picture of the content of the general policy sectors.

In general, it shows a “functionalization” of the ENP, focussing on capacity building and uncontested areas of societal modernization, which in fact weaken the rhetoric agenda of the ENP. Two main reasons for this reduction of the objectives, compared with the priorities mentioned in the Action Plan, are given by the Commission: On the one hand the obviously limited capacity of the Egyptian institutions to implement the Action Plan agenda; and on the other hand the EU’s consideration of areas where it has “comparative advantage and where there are distinct possibilities to complement the work of other donors ...” (European Union, 2007, p. 19).

Thus, the EU financial aid concentrates on enhancing administrative capacities, the development process, convergence with European norms and uncontested fields of human rights: women and children. This approach applied by the EU is stressing the functional dimension of the lacking convergence between the EU and Egypt – and not the content of value promotion.

In its effect, it is a defection from the normative values declared in the ESS as well as in the ENP. In the procedural dimension, it served as a stabilizing factor for the Mubarak regime by acknowledging the conditions of limited implementation set by the authoritarian system and actors. It also contributed to a stable but non-democratic environment of the EU.

The empirical evidence of the ENP practice until January 2011 in Egypt shows that the overall democratization objectives were extremely hampered by the implementation environment of the authoritarian rule in Egypt. In fact the content of the EU policy was filtered by the hosting administration and thus got a more functional than a normative impact. In practice, the stabilization effect of ENP gained in Egypt dominance over any normative democratization.

**Interest Filter System in Egypt by sectors of EU Interaction:**

Interest Filter System in the EG ENP	Political Dialogue	Economic Cooperation	Sustainability and Security
Action Plan 2007	“Barcelona acquis”, covering human rights protection, political dialogue and conflict resolution, democratization, economic integration, improving macroeconomic governance, science and technology cooperation, people-to-people contacts	A group of economic development fields in a developmental politics sense, with issues like industrial development, regulatory approximation to EU standards and poverty reduction. The re-formulation of the fields of economic action as development issues is clearly an expression of the main Egyptian interests in the ENP	A group of political fields, encompassing central recent EU interests in the cooperation with Egypt, like the management of migration related issues, the cooperation on organised crime and trafficking, and the enhancement of cooperation in the energy sector.
Country Strategy Paper 2007	Supporting Egypt’s reforms in the areas of democracy, human rights, good governance and justice:	Developing the competitiveness and productivity of the Egyptian economy	Ensuring the sustainability of the development process with effective social, economic and environmental policies and better management of natural resources
Indicative Programme 2011-2013	Improvement of institutional capacities, financially, and local, incl. justice; enhanced CS dialogue; only women and children rights enumerated	Improvement of transport sector, energy convergence with the EU, liberalization of trade	education reform, water sector reform, waste management, local communities

### **3. Conditions for ENP Policy in Egypt after January 25**

The resignation of President Mubarak and his handover of power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces on 11 February was followed by the dissolution of the Parliament and lead factually to a suspension of the constitution of 1971. By this step, the full legislative as well as major parts of the executive power were merged in the hands of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Al Masry al Yaoum, 20 February 2011)

The so-called constitutional referendum of 19 March 2011, with 40 % participation, voting in favour of the proposed constitutional changes (Al Masry al Yaoum, 21 March 2011) additionally empowered the nearly absolute rule established by the military. At the time of writing, the parliamentary as well as presidential elections are planned for November 2011. A substantial constitutional reform still has not gained contours, the administrative and official staff has only partly replaced so far, except for the most influential and hated persons in the front line of the regime.

Though the January / February events have widely been labelled as “Egyptian revolution”, the transition from the culture of authoritarianism in politics and society has just started and will take a period of social learning as well as re-education. It can be esteemed as a major hampering factor for the beginning transition process that it is currently administered by a military junta which shows opaque forms of decision-making, neglecting the persisting exclusion of the protest movement as well as other political powers from political dialogue. The establishment of a national dialogue or round table which could have helped broker and mediate the first steps of political transition was never a request of the political movements and consequentially lead to a situation of political exclusion.

At the time of writing, the enthusiasm for the democratic change has decreased fundamentally, due to the problems arisen after the revolution: the dramatic economic downturn by the collapse of the tourism and parts of the foreign trade sectors puts a heavy pressure on bigger parts of the society; the partly violent and aggressive practices of religious movements mobilise deep layers of hate and prejudice. Additionally, the formerly high reputation of the military dwindled by its opaque attitude towards democratic transition and the sluggish initiation of legal proceedings against the former ruling elite. Altogether the dilatory management by the military created a climate of fatigue and instability inside the population.

In a nutshell, only a few crucial changes have taken place: the step-down of Mubarak and the most prominent and hated representatives of the authoritarian system. A fundamental system change is postponed until after the announced elections, public administrations are still full in force in their old shape. Only some of the top personnel in ministries and administration have been exchanged. The Egyptian revolution is taking a big breath, until it will get momentum by the elections; in the meantime the military is assuring minimum public order and stability.

The Egyptian revolution created a situation of transition which is by definition a period of instability and limited prediction. The societal situation is unstable and the likeliness of a fundamental democratic change is unclear. The interest structures and the strengths of influence of the military, the representatives of the old regime, the Muslim Brotherhood and the youth protest movement are not fully clear and predictable.

#### 4 EU role after January 25

After the step-down of President Mubarak all four heads of the European Union concerned with Neighbourhood Policy, Catherine Ashton, José Barroso, Štefan Füle and Herman Van Rompuy, have given statements on the events in Egypt or North Africa. Though Van Rompuy's statement (President European Council, 2011) is very general in expressing the need for adapting the ENP, Füle (European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, 2011) emphasizes the already existing framework of cooperation and priority on democratic reform, good governance and human rights within the ENP, which might meet a friendlier environment in Egypt after the revolution. A conceptually new approach is mentioned by Barroso (President of the European Commission, 2011) and specified by Ashton (European Commission High Representative, 2011b), talking about a three-fold response of the European Union on the developments in North Africa, emphasizing "deep democracy", economic development and renewed people-to-people contacts, which should lead to "sustainable stability" as the new central idea on the treatment of the Mediterranean Neighbourhood Countries. The "deep democracy" concept mainly consists in the explicit inclusion of civil society, and the "more for more" extended positive conditionality offers the enhancement of the former ENP approach. The conceptual framework was also elaborated by Ashton (European Commission High Representative, 2011a) as the new "Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity", drafted in a Joint Communication of the Commission on 8 March 2011. Three elements are specified as the basis for this new partnership:

1. Democratic transformation and institution building;
2. Stronger partnership with the people;
3. Sustainable and inclusive growth and economic development.

Although the rhetoric turn in EU foreign policy towards the Mediterranean, promoting the democratic transition with unprecedented emphasis, the substantial content and procedures are still relying on the ENP programmes and tools. The revision of the ENP towards the Mediterranean countries might re-arrange the emphases of the current implementation round, concerning direct approaches to civil society organizations and encouraging bottom-up initiatives, which might be served by the first-ever application of the Instrument for Stability in the Mediterranean since March 2011 (Interview with Commission official in Egypt on 16 March 2011). On the other hand, until now, the further development of major parts of the EU policy in Egypt is determined by the network of agreements and tools already decided upon (Interview with Commission official in Egypt on 17 June 2011); in this respect, any new approach is path-dependent on the ENP and the tools created by it.

It is uncontested that the EU did not play any role in the youth protest movement against Mubarak. This seems to be a simple, but important fact, but this mainly domestically driven logic of the Egyptian revolution should be taken into consideration for the further development of and judgement on the EU policy.

At the moment of writing the EU representation in Egypt continues its path of cooperation started with the Indicative Programme 2011-2013. Its interpretation of the new initiatives of the European Union is that it is a variation on the ENP cooperation, which does not consist a completely new approach (Interview with Commission official 28 May 2011; 18 September 2011). The impact and success of an enhanced

democratic attempt of EU policy is strongly connected by the responsible officials to the expected development inside Egypt.

## **5. Democracy vs. Stability – revisited**

The empirical analysis of the ENP during the Mubarak years in Egypt shows that despite the European Union having incorporated democracy support into its policy, the implementation was restricted by the authoritarian environment. It resulted in a concentration on functional aspects of the cooperation and depended on the smallest common denominator to be reached in the negotiations with the national authorities.

The ENP established an expectation implementation gap, which can be traced back to the double conditional cooperation structure and the interest filter system described above. In this perspective, the ENP had a stabilizing effect on the legitimization of the authoritarian rule in Egypt, giving democracy promotion only the limited space the national Egyptian elite agreed upon.

Currently, a military junta governs Egypt, giving some perspective for a democratic order in the future. This period of transformation with currently evolving political powers and unclear prospects for elections in autumn is by its character a phase of instability. The political distribution of powers in the future Egypt is opaque. This could lead either to a more instable domestic situation, which could also affect the interests of the European Union as well as the Egyptian people, or to a democratically consolidated stability.

To turn it the other way around: democracy without stability could worsen the problems the country is facing in terms of economic development as well as good governance. The shrinking economic activity is already a non-negligible problem affecting the motivation and orientation of the population and could pave the way to uprisings and more violent conflicts (along the cleavages of rich and poor, Christian and Muslim, young and old) inside the society.

Thus, democracy promotion can be reached by pursuing the interests not only of the European Union, but also of the Egyptian people. These consist of the substantiation of fundamental rights, participation and the rule of law as a normative core, but also of security sector reform and economic participation and prosperity as a material base for development and societal change.

The central question for a future role of the European Union is: How to meet the requirements of the Egyptian people's situation?

In this respect, the Arab Spring is a window of opportunity for the European Union to fundamentally re-think its policy approach towards the Mediterranean and to reflect upon the mix of instruments to apply. In order to reach an – in any case limited – impact on the democratization process, the European Union should substantiate the conditionality approach with principles of cooperation and link these to support instruments for the democratic transition. The economic dimension of cooperation is an important prerequisite to reach a minimum of stability inside the country and an area where both sides share interests. This could be used as a trigger for a comprehensive approach of the European Union by vitalizing the conditionality in terms of democratization and economic stabilization.

In a nutshell, the current challenge for the European Union Neighbourhood Policy is to support democracy as well as stability for Egypt at the same time.

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