



A new approach for a new context

Europe and Europeans faced with turmoil in North Africa

Antonin TISSERON

Associate Fellow at the Thomas More Institute



The political turmoil in the Arab world has caught international powers unawares, despite the internal pressures that had long since been diagnosed. Influenced by the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions and by the civil war in Libya, the face of the new Mediterranean is just starting to take shape. However, there is no denying that as far as the European Union is concerned, the recent transformations show the limits of the policies implemented until now.

In the current climate of increased vulnerability in southern Mediterranean countries, it is time to strengthen the Euro-Mediterranean relationship. For there are a number of worrying trends. But in the face of the current risks and threats, it is not just a question of adapting our neighbourhood policy, but of redefining the entire European identity and Europe's relationship with the rest of the world.

Libya is entrenched in a civil war which will no doubt have serious consequences for the region, whilst revolts and revolutions in North Africa have transformed the face of the Mediterranean. The influx of thousands of Tunisian immigrants on the Italian beaches and the island of Lampedusa as well as uncertainty regarding the future of Libya, given the involvement of foreign fighters and the effects of the civil war on neighbouring countries, speak volumes about the challenges facing the region.

In the light of the current instability in North Africa and the threats looming on the horizon, Europeans need to reconsider Euro-Mediterranean relationships and their role in a world shaken by fervour and power games.

Instability in Mediterranean countries

> Given the economic and demographic situation of the countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean and the vulnerability of the region, Europeans must continue to show their commitment to North African countries, especially the more fragile petrol-importing countries.

> A policy focussing on the fight against terrorism and immigration at European borders is not sufficient in the current situation given the risks weighing on North Africa.

The fragility of Mediterranean countries refers primarily to uncertainty regarding the future of Libya and to the effects of the civil war, which is giving terrorist groups the opportunity to acquire weapons, to widen their audience and to recruit and train fighters. Libya was one of the main suppliers of foreign fighters in Iraq, where nearly 20% of foreign fighters entered Iraq *via* Syria in 2006 and 2007 (1). Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb was not mistaken when it called for solidarity with its "Libyan brothers" at the start of the civil war. Just as the Sahelian countries were right to share their concerns about the risk of destabilisation in the region and NATO was right to get involved in the conflict.

Dissent continues in the rest of North Africa, and power in Tunisia remains fragile. Even in Morocco, the opposition remains on alert, as do the terrorists responsible for the Marrakech attack on 28th April, despite the speech made by King Mohammed VI on 9th March announcing major political reform, and in particular a referendum on a new constitution which would give executive power to the Prime Minister and implement regionalisation. Given the circumstances, one of the key questions we should be asking is whether North African countries are able to cope with the challenges facing them now and in the future, i.e. fighting terrorism and criminality, managing the pressures of immigration from Sub-Saharan Africa, carrying out political and economic modernisation, and curbing the radicalisation processes. As so rightly pointed out by researcher Jean-François Daguzan back in March, if public expectations are disappointed, we are in danger of witnessing a revolutionary second ballot which, this time around, would bring new extremists or new authoritarian populists to power. And in the new set-up, violence would break out in proportions far greater than those seen in January 2011. From this point of view, instability is only just beginning... (2).

The very idea of an Arab revolution can be called into question given the multiple types of dissent and demands in the form of revolts, uprisings and war. However, the demographic and economic context represents a real time-bomb. The February 2011 report published by the Euro-Mediterranean Forum of Institutes of Economic Sciences identified three factors that are to blame for tension in Mediterranean countries belonging to the Euro-Med partnership (3): the extremely high numbers of young people under the age of 15 (81.5 million people out of a total population of 269 million, i.e. one Mediterranean in three), the discrepancy between the number of people who might want a job and the number of formal jobs available (173 million potential workers aged between 15 and 65 compared to 74 million jobs on offer) and the number of unemployed people (over 8.5 million people, i.e. all those who previously worked in the formal sector and can no longer do so). Figures are probably underestimated and do not take non-employment into account.

Vulnerability is increased by political turmoil and economic trends. On the one hand, the deterioration of the image of southern Mediterranean countries and of security in the region affects investments and economic activity. The tourist industry, which covers 60% of the commercial trade deficit and represents 6.5 % of GDP in Tunisia, was particularly severely affected by the mayhem which preceded the fall of Ben Ali and the ensuing instability. On the other hand, as shown by the IMF in its October 2010 report on the world economy, the increase in the prices of agricultural commodities and the impact of the international economic crisis in Europe are likely to weigh on petrol-importing Arab countries, starting with those in the Maghreb, which are highly dependent on Europe for tourism and for fund transfers and investments (4).

Acknowledgement of failure for the European Union

- > **Europe's policy in the Mediterranean must be rethought, clarified and simplified to make it of real meaning to the southern populations.**
- > **Above and beyond any technical aspects, the most important question is to establish expectations.**

To the European Union, it seems as if the revolts in North Africa are casting doubt on their policies in the region. Ever since the Barcelona process, and up until the introduction of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), stability and security were regarded as the European Union's primary objectives. The Barcelona process launched in 1995, which grouped together the fifteen European Union member countries and twelve Mediterranean countries, was based on a shared desire to create a "Euro-Mediterranean area of peace, stability and security". Eight years later, European Commission President Romano Prodi said exactly the same thing on launching the ENP when he announced that he wished to create a "ring of peace, stability and prosperity" around Europe.

Considerable resources have been put into achieving this goal. Counting the Union for the Mediterranean, there are just under ten systems designed to connect the two shores of the Mediterranean, which together cost over 20 billion Euros between 1995 and 2013. As part of the MEDA fund for Mediterranean countries that have signed the Euro-Med partnership, Europe allocated 4,685 billion Euros to supporting economic development and aiding the democratisation process between 1995 and 1999. For the period from 2000 to 2006, the MEDA II envelope was set at 5.3 billion. Following the launch of the ENP, which covers ten countries south of the Mediterranean (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, the Lebanon and Syria) and six countries in the East (Moldavia, the Ukraine, Byelorussia, and three countries from the South Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – added in 2005), funding continued to flow at the same high rate. Out of the 12 billion Euros allocated for the period from 2007 to 2013, two thirds of funds are intended for Mediterranean countries and one third for countries in the East.

Such a surfeit of initiatives has damaged the legibility and coherency of action taken by the Union, which is the foremost donor of public development aid in the world (5). Criticism of European aid does of course feed on the lack of communication from European institutions regarding its success, but as stated on 4th March 2011 by Jean-Yves Moissoner, deputy editor in chief of the magazine *Maghreb-Machrek*, the difficulty in restructuring a project today is that the prior stock-pile of Euro-Mediterranean policies has led to a deep-seated "institutional fatigue" amongst our southern partners. Some countries are starting to tire of the rapid succession of Mediterranean programmes decided upon by Europe, in which they feel as if they are less and less of a stakeholder (6).

However, looking beyond the more technical dimensions, any kind of strategy based on an attempt to achieve stability in North Africa should be queried, as indeed should the very idea of the Mediterranean as a geopolitical area. Resorting to non-binding plans in a bilateral context has produced a region marked by one of the lowest rates of economic integration in the world and has led to a wait-and-see attitude in terms of political reform, with no real prospects for integration for the so obviously fragile southern countries. Surveys undertaken on the way in which the EU is perceived in North Africa have shown that until 2010 "it was seen as a cold monster that only took interest in controlling its borders, making safe its energy supplies and protecting itself from terrorist attack. The values of democracy, freedom and justice are not associated with the EU, far from it!" (7).

Re-establishment of relationships in the Euro-Mediterranean area

- > **The prospects put forward by the Commission in order to re-establish the partnership between the two shores of the Mediterranean must not conceal the need for discussions regarding the amount of aid to be provided, given the fragility of certain North African countries.**
- > **European countries must clarify their immigration policy and give priority to a joint approach which will meet the concerns of those European countries on the front line when it comes to immigration.**
- > **Given the low level of regional economic integration, the European Union needs to invest in projects that will help unite the populations on the southern shores of the Mediterranean.**

On March 8th 2011, the European Commission submitted a report calling for revision and adaptation of European strategy, rooted "in a joint commitment to common values". In particular, the strategy outlined by the Commission introduces the idea of setting conditions for the allocation of aid. "The EU should be ready to offer greater support to those countries ready to work on such a common agenda, but also reconsider support when countries depart from this track" (8).

This report paves the way for surpassing the limits of the ENP and gives hope to southern Mediterranean countries by closely associating the security of the European Union with democracy and by seeking to make civil society more closely involved. However, in addition to the fact that renovating the ENP would interfere with the political ambitions of European countries, the key issue which needs to be discussed with regard to future financial prospects is the amount of aid to be provided on account of socio-economic imbalances on the southern shores of the Mediterranean. Solutions do exist for releasing additional funds, for instance by bringing neighbouring countries in line with aid levels for candidate countries for EU expansion, even if that means slightly reducing structural funds for regional policies (9). The 12 new member states (100 million inhabitants) share joint policies, particularly when it comes to granting structural funds, for which they have priority, i.e. 150 billion for the period from 2007 to 2013. In comparison, the instrument for pre-accession, which covers 8 candidate countries (100 million inhabitants), has only been granted 12 billion Euros, as has the neighbourhood instrument for 16 neighbouring countries (200 million inhabitants to the south and 75 million to the east)...

The question of immigration and mobility between countries bordering the Mediterranean also needs to be reviewed, in an unexaggerated, sincere manner. The European pact on immigration and asylum, adopted during the French Presidency in 2008, has reached its limits, since each individual EU country is putting its internal political stakes first. A few countries bordering the Mediterranean cannot be expected to take in thousands of immigrants in the name of the right to asylum. In other words, they should not have to accept irregular immigration under exceptional circumstances by virtue of a jointly adopted law whose consequences are not the same for all the signatory countries. The European approach in terms of immigration needs to be clarified, firstly between us Europeans, and then with the countries in the south. Fighting against illegal migratory flows and improving the organisation of legal immigration (students, workers etc.) is in the best interests of us all.

The greatest challenge facing the countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean in the longer term is regional economic integration. As declared by IMF Managing Director Rodrigo de Rato in 2005 when referring to the Maghreb, such integration would bring with it major advantages. It would create a regional market of more than 75 million consumers, [...]lead to gains in efficiency and make the region more attractive to foreign investors. And most importantly of all, the complementary economic structures in different North African countries would create possibilities for exchanges which would be beneficial to all the countries in the region (10). Developing relationships and exchanges between the countries in the region must be at the heart of Europe's projects for the region. Adopting a regional approach was indeed one of the greatest assets of the Union for the Mediterranean, even if the area

in question lacked any real geopolitical coherence. In any case, without a geostrategic European player, there can be no "great European strategy" in the Mediterranean.

Europeans facing the challenge of a geopolitical project

- > **Initiatives to pool capacities must be continued in a world spurred on by power struggles.**
- > **At the same time, European countries must define their vital interests and ask themselves how they see their role in the world and what resources they think would be required to ensure their security and defend their values, around the Mediterranean and elsewhere.**

Although the Euro-Mediterranean relationship illustrates the difficulties Europeans have in comprehending the Mediterranean and, more generally, the Mediterranean environment, from a communitarian point of view, the Libyan civil war has once again - three years after the Russian offensive in Georgia - brought Europe back to the reality of a world spurred on by power struggles. Worse still, whereas the Council of the European Union was calling for the departure of Gaddafi, many European leaders were giving the impression that we should do no more than issue verbal condemnation and take a few symbolic measures against the Libyan leader.

Europe's intervention in Libya is suggestive of setting up a geopolitical project to unite all member states around a definition of the Union's vital interests, whilst questioning the model of European power at the same time. Although Europeans built up the European Union as a "normative power", i.e. around a narrative showing a world that encourages interdependency and the norm to the detriment of *Realpolitik* and force (11), the limits of such power are obvious when it comes to the reduction of political violence and its sources. On the one hand, political violence is fairly unreceptive to normative discourse. On the other hand, although the norm is essential, it does not replace political discourse and does not generate security (12). In other words, a specific conception of mankind cannot be defended by discourse alone, since force comes in support of the norm and adds to the other tools available in the hands of the decision-makers. For Europeans, it is not a matter of disowning their values and national histories which have shaped the continent's relationship to war and the environment, but quite the opposite, they need to question their relationship with the world and confront the world they would like to see with the world as it actually is today.

In order for European countries to be able to defend a specific idea of Europe, its security, human rights and the relationships between individuals, they first need the resources to do so. Operations in Libya were marked by the limits of European capacities in terms of precision munitions, means of observation and aircraft carriers. Without the United States, the operation tempo would have been slower and the air strikes less accurate and of more risk to coalition aircraft and Libyan civilians (13). In this respect, and given the current budget situation, it appears necessary to maintain the initiatives in progress to rationalise capacities, but not without giving real political thought to the use of force. This condition is essential to ensuring the success of any pooling of capacities.

-
- (1) The data on foreign fighters in Iraq is taken from 700 records recovered by the American armed forces in December 2007 in Sinjar (north of Bagdad). These records describe the country of origin, motivations and routes taken by each infiltrated foreign Jihadist.
- (2) Jean-François Daguzan, "Un plan Marshall pour l'Afrique du Nord. L'économie, clé des révoltes du monde arabe", *Le Monde*, 17th March 2011.
- (3) When the Barcelona process was launched in 1995, the countries belonging to the partnership were: Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, the Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. Malta and Cyprus have since taken advantage of the expansion of the European Union to join, and in 2007, Mauritania and Albania became part of the Euro-Med partnership. When the Barcelona process was relaunched and the Union for the Mediterranean set up in 2008, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Monaco and Montenegro were welcomed into the partnership, which then consisted of 16 Mediterranean countries.
- (4) International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook. Recovery, risk and rebalancing*, October 2010, pages 89-90.
- (5) In 2010, public development aid granted by the 27 member states stood at a total of 53.8 billion Euros, i.e. over half of the world's public development aid.
- (6) Jean-Yves Moisseron, "Partenariat euroMediterraneann : quelle refondation ?", 14th March 2011. <http://www.diploweb.com/Partenariat-euromediterraneen.html>.
- (7) Luis Martinez, "The European Union now has a major historic opportunity in the Mediterranean", *Fondation Robert Schuman*, European Interview, no. 54, 28th March 2011. http://www.robert-schuman.eu/doc/entretiens_europe/ee-54-en.pdf
- (8) See http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/news/speeches-statements/pdf/20110308_en.pdf
- (9) Michel Foucher and Maxime Lefebvre, "L'Union européenne, l'Europe et ses voisins", *L'État de l'Union 2010*, Paris, Éditions Lignes de Repères, pages 119-127, pages 125-126.
- (10) Rodrigo de Rato, "Intégration économique au Maghreb : sur le chemin de la prospérité", *L'Economiste* (Morocco), 15th June 2005.
- (11) With regard to Europe as a "normative power", see Zaki Laïdi, *La norme sans la force*, Paris, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 2008, second edition.
- (12) *Ibid.*, p. 266.
- (13) Sven Biscop, "Mayhem in the Mediterranean: Three Strategic Lessons for Europe", *Egmont Institute*, Security Policy Brief, no.19, April 2011. <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/papers/11/sec-gov/SPB19-Libya-strat-lessons-EU.pdf>.
-

Research Programme



With the support of



Contact

info@institut-thomas-more.org

Tel +33 (0)1 49 49 03 30 – Fax +33 (0)1 49 49 03 33

Institut Thomas More ASBL © May 2011