7 Good "Democratic" Governance in the Mediterranean

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2011 will remain a very special date in the history of Arab region and for the Euro-Mediterranean area as a whole. Henceforth, mass slogans raised by Arab protestors will have a special meaning in the current political glossary. These mottoes will have a great impact, full of meaning, on the capacity to build change and overcome all the failures regarding the Arab authoritarian regimes. The Tunisian population has fulfilled its duty magnificently to expel the Tunisian authoritarian regime by an unprecedented popular revolution.

Four weeks were enough to deconstruct a strong/failed regime as a result of mass popular protests, triggered by the case of young Mohammed Bouazizi, who set fire to himself protesting against injustice and ignominy. This mass protest raised one persistent slogan: change. This is a huge signal sent to the other Arab regimes that do not respect real popular needs and expectations, much to the surprise of the political class and international public opinion. There is no doubt that the overthrow of the Tunisian President, who has served as head of state for twenty-three years, will be the most important event in the past fifty years in the Arab region. This event inaugurates a process of an internal decolonisation in this region.

However, there is a consensus among observers, as well as actors, that Tunisian people have been the ones behind this initiative and they have been the ones who obliged Ben Ali to flee from Tunisia. It was only later that the political class intervened creating fear that this revolution could be confiscated at the expense of Tunisian people.

This rapid political shift was a surprise to many, including Western research centres. A number of questions were raised. Why was it so difficult to foresee the coming of this change, despite such popular determination? What were the profound reasons for this phenomenon? And to what extent could this process be reproduced in other Arab countries?

It is worth recalling that Ben Ali's regime adopted a way of governing, consisting of "killing policy to safeguard economic development"[1], by adopting the equation of development without democracy. Indeed, Tunisia succeeded in achieving rates of growth above similar countries by attracting foreign investment and by increasing revenues from tourism. This model of development bears the support and endorsement of a West obsessed with fighting terrorism and extremism at any price. The main weakness of this model lies in the lack of legitimate institutions that can monitor public finances misused in development programs. This failure opened the door to the abuses of the incumbent regime, the waste of public money and the concentration of wealth through an unconditioned "clientelism".[2]

Among other structural reasons that contributed to reinvigorating the spirit of the Tunisian mass revolution, we find social and economic deterioration translated into the rise of unemployment among graduates, which reached 22%, and an increase in the gap between the *haves* and *have nots*. The protest unfolded easily, since Tunisia is a small country (11 million ha) with an important middle class consisting of educated people. The absence of the logic of checks and balances has pushed the incumbent regime to abuse authority, especially at the expense of opponents of the regime, among them the militants of the Islamic En-Nahda party.

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[1]This expression is of a young Moroccan scholar, see: Eddine, Abdelai Hami; Tarik, Hassan, 2011: *Constitution 2011: entre autoritarisme et démocratie. Lecture croisées*. (Tanger: Edition de la dialogue public).
[2] Beau, Nicolas; Graciet, Catherine, 2006: *La Régente De Carthage - Main Basse Sur La Tunisie* (Paris: Edition la Découverte).

In spite of the extent of grievances raised by human rights organisations all over the world, Ben Ali's regime continued to benefit from Western support obsessed with Islamophobia. The lack of freedom prevented Tunisian people from organising themselves into *intermediary institutions* that could bring people's demands to bear on state institutions. This building pressure led to an explosion. This explosion was hard to foresee in the framework of such a "police regime" which did not allow the people to express themselves.

New communication technology, internet, social chat networks, as well as satellite television, fuelled the collective conscience of the atrocities of the incumbent regime and the necessity for a Copernican change.

In fact, as regards the two successful stories of Tunisia and Egypt, many questions have to be raised and many lessons have to be drawn. First, the theory of incompatibility of Islam and democracy[3] has proven to be fragile. The Arab and Muslim *exception* is a pure illusion and thus has to be rejected. It is high time to jettison long lasting stereotypes. Secondly, if the European Union and the United States want to be at the rendezvous of history they should back the Arab mass uprisings. It is also time to reject the false dialectic between the change from "within" and change from "outside". There should be a complementary relationship between both driving forces, to respect human rights and democratic governance. In this vein, the conspiracy theory, which is common attitude of authoritarian regimes, should be put aside because it is as banal as it is pointless. It is well know that at the international level every actor has its own strategy, but the strength of a country is based on its internal consolidation around "democratic governance".

In fact, the recent Arab uprisings bring to the fore the crucial question of the kind of governance practiced in Arab countries. At

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[3] de Vasconcelos, Álvaro 2011: "The Post-Huntington Revolutions", in: *Issues,* 35 (May).

the Millennium Summit General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2000, world leaders committed to the Millennium Declaration of the United Nations that laid down the key objectives for the 21st century. The Declaration embodies an unprecedented consensus outlining a common vision of peace and security, development and poverty eradication, and the securing of human rights, democracy and good governance. Governance today occupies a central stage in development discourse, and is considered a crucial element to be incorporated in development strategy.

However, apart from the universal acceptance of its importance, differences prevail in respect for theoretical formulations, policy prescriptions and conceptualisation of the subject itself. Good governance is the term that symbolises the "paradigm shift" of the role of governments. Governance[4] is about *processes*, not about ends. Common definitions describe governance as a process, by which power is exercised without explicitly stating the ends being sought.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), good governance is, among other things, participatory, transparent and accountable, effective and equitable, and it promotes the rule of law. It ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on a broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest, and the most vulnerable, are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources.

Particularly important in the context of countries in special circumstances, is the fact that the UNDP's definition of governance encompasses not just the state, but the private sector and civil society as well. All three are viewed as critical for sustainable human development. The role of the state is viewed as that of creating a stable political and legal environment conducive

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[4] 1) Participation, 2) Rule of law, 3) Transparency, 4) Responsiveness, 5) Consensus, 6) Equity, 7) Effectiveness and efficiency, 8) Accountability, 9) Strategic vision.

to sustained development, while civil society institutions and organisations are viewed as a means of facilitating political and social interaction, and mobilising groups to participate in economic, social and political activities.

According to the World Bank, governance is "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development". In this sense, the concept of governance is concerned directly with the management of the development process, involving both the public and the private sectors. It encompasses the functioning capability of the public sector, as well as the rules and institutions that create the framework for the conduct of both public and private business, including accountability for economic and financial performance, and regulatory frameworks relating to companies, corporations, and partnerships. In broad terms, thus, governance is about the institutional environment in which citizens interact among themselves and with government agencies and officials.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the true test of "good" governance is the degree to which it delivers on the promise of human rights, namely civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. The key question is whether the institutions of governance effectively guarantee the right to health, adequate housing, sufficient food, quality education, justice and personal security.

The concept of good governance has been clarified by the work of the Commission on Human Rights. Resolution 2000/64 expressly linked good governance to an enabling environment conducive to the exercise of human rights and "prompting growth and sustainable human development"[5].

By linking good governance to sustainable human development, emphasising principles such as accountability,

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[5] Dennis, Michael J., 2001: "The Fifty-Sixth Session of the UN Commission on Human Right", in: *The American Journal of International Law,* 95,1: 213-221.

participation and the enjoyment of human rights, the resolution stands as an implicit endorsement of the rights-based approach to development. In its Resolution 2001/72, the Commission on Human Rights reaffirmed its earlier resolution by consensus.[6]

Democratic governance appears to be more relevant to our subject than good governance *per se*. At its core, democratic governance means that people's human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected, allowing them to live in dignity. It refers also to people having a say in decisions that affect their lives and holding decision-makers accountable, and that economic and social policies are responsive to people's needs and aspirations.

In fact, democratic governance differs from the concept of 'good governance' in recognising that political and civil freedoms and participation have basic value as developmental ends in themselves, and not just means for achieving socio-economic progress. Democratic governance is built on the concept of human development in the full sense of the term, which involves expanding people's capabilities, freedom and leading the life they choose. The capability to be free from threats of violence and to be able to speak freely is as important as being literate. While the range of capabilities that people have is almost infinite, several key capabilities are fundamental in human life and are universally valued; not only those capabilities in the 'socioeconomic sphere' such as health and survival, education and access to knowledge, and basic material means for a decent standard of living, but those in the 'political sphere,' such as security from violence, and political freedom and participation. Indeed, these are core elements of human well-being reflected in the Millennium Declaration. Democratic governance needs to be underpinned by a

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[6] Abdellatif, Adel M., 2003: "Good Governance and Its Relationship to Democracy & Economic Development", Paper for the UNDP- Global Forum III on Fighting Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity, Seoul, 20-31 May.

political regime that guarantees civil and political liberties as human rights, and that ensures participation of people and accountability of decision-makers.

Concerning social history, there are three interdependent components within every society a system is composed of, that are wealth, knowledge and power, and perhaps the new media.

When a minority dominates those means, progress in terms of civilisation and democracy is very slow. An example to illustrate this point is what happened in Eastern Europe. Wealth and knowledge were shared, more or less, among a large group of people, whereas power remained within the hands of the very few. The progress in the education field among population, on one hand, and the redistribution of the nation wealth in the framework of social justice on the other hand, undermined the legitimacy of the minority who dominated the authority in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Those different trajectories accelerated the need for transitional process in Eastern Europe.

With the help of this canvas (wealth, knowledge and power), it is important to consider the happenings in the Arab World. Recently the Arab World reached an appreciable level of educated people, a sort of critical mass. Arab people are becoming more well-educated. The literacy rate has increased significantly late in this past decade. This rate is 86.8% in Libya, 77.7% in Tunisia, 75.4% in Algeria, 66.4% in Egypt, and 55.6% in Morocco.[7] This increase in literacy is concentrated in the youth, who still represent a very important proportion of the population. People under the age of 25 represent 47.7% of the population in Morocco, 47.5% in Algeria, 42.1% in Tunisia, 47.4% in Libya and 42.3% in Egypt.[8]

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[7] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2009: *Human Development Report 2009: Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development* (New York, Palgrave Macmillian): 173.

[8] Behr, Timo; Aaltola, Mike, 2011: "The Arab uprising. Causes, prospects and implications", *Briefing Paper*, 76 (March), Finish Institute for International Affairs (FIIA) 4.

Increases in GDP in the Arab World, in both relative and absolute terms, have also been marked. However, the rate of unemployment remains high, particularly among youth. This information is readily illustrated by table1[9]:

Country	GDP per capita	GDP growth	Unemployment rate	Population under 25 years	Poverty rate
Yemen	2,900	6.2%	35.0%	65.4%	45.2%
Morocco	4,670	3.2%	9.8%	47.7%	15.0%
Syria	4,730	4.0%	8.3%	55.3%	11.9%
Jordan	5,240	3.2%	13.4%	54.3%	14.2%
Egypt	5,860	5.1%	9.7%	52.3%	20.0%
Algeria	8,220	4.1%	9.9%	47.5%	23.0%
Tunisia	8,620	3.4%	14.0%	42.1%	3.8%
Libya	18,720	3.3%	n.a	47.4%	30.0%
Bahrain	23,980	4.1%	15.0%	43.9%	n.a.
Saudi Arabia	22,850	3.8%	10.8%	50.8%	n.a.

Figure 7.1: GDP and unemployment in the Arab World
Source: *Behr, Timo; Aaltola, 2011: "The Arab uprising. Causes, prospects and implications", Briefing Paper, 76 (March), Finish Institute for International Affairs (FIIA) 4.*

This relative improvement in terms of knowledge and wealth has occurred, despite maintenance on the monopoly of power by a small group of elites. Ostensible stability was maintained by authoritarian regimes, at the expense of respect for human rights and the absence of fair trials for opponents of the regimes.

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[9] Ibid.

The result is that, as occurred in Eastern European countries, Arab people aspire to greater participation in defining the fate of their countries, not to mention the role that the new mass media played in rendering this process more visible on a global level.

As a result of the recent Arab mass uprisings, a new Mediterranean is emerging. In fact, until only recently the dynamic Northern shore appeared to have played a meaningful role in the evolution of good governance in the Mediterranean area. The Southern shore, in this view, is seen as an obstacle to progress. The events of the past few months reveal that the role that either region plays in the evolution toward better governance is more complex and dynamic than previously thought.

I.   The main features of the ongoing Arab uprisings

Recent popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria have brought the issue of democratic governance in the Arab world to the fore. It is important to understand what the characteristics and consequences of these movements are, and what new issues will emerge. There is no doubt that these movements serve to transform the human, political, institutional, strategic and geo-economic configurations of the Mediterranean region. A wave of social demands and their political expression have rapidly spread across the Arab region. These expressions are *sui generis* and their peculiarity comes from a number of exceptional characteristics.

They are carried by groups organised as a social network, such as Facebook and Twitter among others, expressing a new form of social organization, and consisting of urban lower middle-class youth, who are accustomed to using the internet.

Therefore, we are in the presence of an educated group with access to modern means of communication, whose members seek sociability lacking in their immediate environment-family, neighborhood, city, country. They have the ability to contrast their

economic, social, cultural, political situation with external actors (the ruling class, foreign countries, etc.) and virtual ideals. These groups exist outside the usual institutional frameworks of political parties, trade unions and NGOs that do not allow for open expression or provide accountability.

Although it is clear that demonstrations are an expression of disaffection, the purpose of these protests is not completely evident at the outset. While the uprising spreads in the Arab region, the number of demonstrators, their demands, and the reaction of governments varies from one country to another. Generally, demonstrators begin by demanding reforms of the ruling regime. The repression that follows paves the way for an increase in the intensity and nature of demonstrators' demands. As people from all walks of life escalate their demands, they simultaneously triumph over their own fear, and disregard the usual consequences of their actions, such as imprisonment and torture.

The Arab uprising was covered minute by minute by very active Arab television channels (*Al Jazeera, Al Horra, Al Arabia*), as well as international television channels, (BBC, France 24). Unlike domestic and official media organs, foreign television channels are closely followed by Arab viewers.

Policy makers in the European Union and the United States took a long time to realise the relevance of these protests. Their response has been overwhelmingly hesitant, contradictory and sometimes uncomfortable. Even worse, initial statements supported the established regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and called for moderation.

It was clearly the case of France, which offered its assistance to ex-President Ben Ali to "pacify" the situation. The U.S. was far from envisaging the quick step down of Mubarak, while Italy also initially seemed to be supportive of Gaddafi. Involvement in Western countries varied regarding the sensitivity of the geopolitical and geo-economics of the country concerned.

II.   Lessons to draw from the Arab uprisings

The Arab people, mainly urban lower middle-class youth, are more imaginative and creative than experts and research institutions think they are. Despite the wisdom offered by classical analysis of Arab civil societies, they are actually pregnant with change: a transformational change "from within."

The contribution of Islamic movements to these uprisings is a limited one. In all these protests, the Islamic agenda is lost among people's overwhelming aspirations for functioning democracy and social justice.

The actions of respective military apparatuses are key to the outcome of these processes. Thus far, three types of military reactions toward the popular uprisings have been implemented: relative neutrality (Egypt), positive role (Tunisia), negative function (Libya).

The Arab social and political landscape is markedly heterogeneous, with the one common denominator of restricted liberty. While some incumbent regimes anticipated the protests and others took longer to react, demonstrators in each country chanted more or less the same slogans, made the same demands, and even followed the same path in their struggle for freedom.

III.   Recommendations

Among the most important challenges facing Arab countries today, is the establishment of democratic institutions that guarantee a fundamental separation of powers. External assistance should focus on both institutions and actors (civil servants and civil society organisations), and more specialized topics such as development, participation, accountability. The European Union and the United States should wholeheartedly support the democratic transition in Arab countries.

It is of paramount importance that Western countries do not miss this opportunity to be on the side of the people, in establishing good governance in the Mediterranean region. They should react quickly to popular demands for more democracy, economic and social justice and freedom of speech.

- The European Union must make the promotion of democracy the cornerstone of its Mediterranean policies. Positive conditionality clauses should be a permanent component in all negotiations.

- It is urgent to start deep thinking concerning our analytical tools and conceptual ways, to apprehend the complexity of Arab reality. Because of being subjected to the dominant ideology, we have come to forge what had made societies: "individuals of flesh and bones with universal aspirations".

- It is imperative to recognise that the best bulwark against extremism is not dictatorship but democracy. Europeans and Americans should step up the pressure on autocratic Arab regimes to pave the way for stability based on democracy. They should overcome their fear of democracy and good governance in Arab countries. The prerequisite for longstanding stability is the meaningful implementation of good governance.

- We should also recognise that technical-economic projects are of less importance than political issues, such as the legitimacy of Southern policy makers. It is worth recalling that the idealistic process is the one during which all kinds of deficits (economic, political, identical) are to be dealt with simultaneously.

- The European Union should support the Arab mass uprising and the transitional process toward democracy, in order to be in a position to negotiate with legitimate policy makers. The ascension of truly representative policymakers will make it

easier to carry out regional cooperation and adopt audacious policies on a solid foundation.

- Free and fair elections are to be organised in Arab countries. The European Union should back this process and its outcome, regardless the result of these elections. Arab countries should come to terms with the ballot box verdict. This is the only way to make those Arab people aware of their current and future responsibilities.