



The Political Economy of Governance in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

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Domestic Reform

Democratic movement in the Mediterranean Partnership Countries

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Actors and discussion on democracy

The main thesis of the paper is that domestic reforms should be perceived as a process. Time is one of the essential element in reforming political systems and getting things changed is a slow process.

Some surveys says that in the past thirty years there have been no progress towards democracy in the Arab world. It seem this thesis is not correct. We may observe a series of steps that have been done in order to achieve results in the field of democratization in the Middle East and North Africa.

There are many actors, local, regional and external acting for democracy and reforms. Some of the external actors had lost its credibility or popularity in the region. Some are making efforts to build continuant reforms process. Among them are European Union, United Nations, G-8. Arab League, governments, NGOs, business communities and religious circles are among regional and local actors involved in the process. During the past few years we may rare meet an opinion that democracy is an imported idea and may not suit regional social, cultural and political environment. On the opposite: the idea of democratic reforms is discussed more often and openly. Even if there is a specific the idea interpretation, it is present in many discussion. The very fact is worth to notice and underline as it is just a step in the process.

In the scope of the discussion not only a definition of democracy should be remembered. Every region and a country, every social and civil compound has its own specificity and characteristic. Democracy in a given social and political system has its own context, so we may have different faces of democracies. Meeting “imported”, European-style idea with local meaning of democracy and democratization we may face clash of ideas. So the role of dialogue is enormously important; dialogue in a sense that EU represents – first of all listening.

The European Union position

In many EU documents there are references to strengthening democracy. We may find that in Barcelona Declaration itself and then in further documents, Action Plans, ENP documents, etc. There is no need to repeat that it is a part of a broader, comprehensive programs and a set of the objectives for the years to come. It is

indicated as one of the main condition for sustainable development, eradication of poverty and obtaining other goals of the EMP and ENP. ENPI (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument) is to provide assistance aimed at promoting and helping in obtaining that goal. In many reports¹, despite positive opinions², there are conclusions about freedom deficit, civil liberties, political rights and independence of the media, basic political rights and freedoms. Issues related to security, extremely important to the European partners could not be an excuse for the process of reforms. system and rehabilitation of terrorist-hit areas. In the JHA (Justice and Home Affairs) issues there is a program for reforms of the judicial system.

Better governance, promotion of democracy and respect for human rights are core objectives of the EU's external policies. A document prepared by Commission in 2003 (Reinvigorating European Actions on Human Rights and Democratization with Mediterranean Partners) says about maximizing the effectiveness of the available instruments. It proposes 10 concrete recommendations to improve the political dialogue between the EU and its Med. Partners. Their implementation will be enhanced by three level of complementarity:

- between the political dialogue and financial assistance
- between MEDA program and assistance under the EIDHR (European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights)
- between national and regional dimensions.³

During Barcelona VII, the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Partnership (May 2005) and other meetings some critical areas for the future of the region were shown. One (and first) of them was human rights and democracy, governance and participatory democracy and building civil society.

Actions in the scope of ENP joint conferences are held on the EMP level, sub-regional level on human rights and democratization. Increased political debates in the Arab world are also important events.

¹ UNDP Arab Human Development Report op.cit.; EC Strategy Paper on the European Neighbourhood Policy, May 2004; EC Wider Europe. Neighbourhood: a new framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours (COM 2003, 109 final), and others

² ENPI Regional Strategy Paper 2007-2010 and Regional Indicative Programme 2007-2010, p.7

³ Accorddding to Euro-Med. Partnership: Algeria National Indicative Programme 2005-2006, pp.4-6

The Arab position

The most important and basic survey on situation in the region is UN Arab Human Development Report (AHDR).⁴ It gives the presentation of the status quo and some suggestion about what should be done in particular situation. This report, mostly of Arab authorship indicates poverty of capabilities, poverty of opportunities and other deficit. In conclusions AHDR suggests reform dialogue, both within the region and internationally. The key issue was the role of Islam in Arab politics and society and the debate concerning reforms. Although there is an opinion that in the Report we may meet only Arab elites' opinions, not a wide groups of Middle Eastern societies.

Nevertheless there have been taken some important regional initiative in improving the state of wide social participation in political life. Among meetings and conferences in the past, some of them were very important and productive, for example: Rabat Colloquium on Political Pluralism and Electoral Process (October 2005). The most important and popularized declarations were:

1. Doha Declaration for Democracy and Reform (June, 3-4, 2004)⁵

and

2. Civil Forum Letter

Doha Declaration⁶ was issued at the end of The First Doha Conference on Democracy and Reform in 2004. It was organized by Gulf Studies Center at the Qatar University and supported by Qatari government. The event was attended by journalists, activists, thinkers and politicians from the Arab states. The main author of the Declaration was Egyptian reformer Saad ed-Din Ibrahim. It was addressed to both leaders and peoples of the Arab world.

Statements included in the Declaration underlined that democratic changes in the Arab world cannot be postponed and were "a nonnegotiable choice".⁷ It is worth to quote a conclusion on relations between Islam, Arab culture and democracy: there is no contradiction between them. Free multi-party systems inclusive of political freedoms are not the sole monopoly of any given culture or civilization. "Neither Arab

⁴ UNDP Arab Human Development Report 2002

⁵ Text of the Declaration is available on the website of "No Peace Without Justice" organization, www.npjw.org/node/1715

⁶ Full name of the declaration was: The Doha Declaration for Democracy and Reform

⁷ Doha International Bureau, The Second Forum on Democracy and Political Reform In the Arab Word, www.qatar-conferences.org/arabdemocracy2007/viewlastnews_first.php?id=5, p.1

culture nor the Islamic religion are in any form or shape contradictory to democratic practices and values”.

Declaration quote that the Palestinian question and necessity to resolve it, is often used as an excuse for not implementing political reforms. “Democratic practice hence becomes the primary rule for peace between nations”. Iraq and “Iraqi regime that tyrannized its own people” and “led to foreign occupation of their country” are mentioned as an examples.

Declaration called in 10 points for changes. First of all the Declaration demands changes and modification of constitutions and adopt democratic ones. It demanded the abolition of all laws restricting citizens rights, their rights to establish political parties, organizations, trade unions, professional associations and civil society organizations. Free, fair and regular elections should be hold. Armed forces should not interfere in politics. “A practical instrument” to monitor and follow up the recommendations should be created and Arab Advocates of Democracy’s (ADA) efforts should be supported.

The Second Forum on Democracy and Political Reform in the Arab World (Second Doha Conference) was hold on 27-29 May 2007. Three main issues were discussed: assessment of the current prevailing situation in the Arab world (1), What we want in the next decade: means of achieving the goals (2) and European vision on the progress of democracy in the Arab World (3).

Declaration of recommendation and final declaration were adopted.

Opinions and comments of the achievements were not very optimistic. The lack of spectacular practical results was obvious. Saadeddine Ibrahim, leading Egyptian activist said that Arabs remain eager to participate in current wave of democratization.⁸ One of the reasons may be seen in fact that the United States were the main supporter and the idea “exporter”. The very fact hasn’t helped the movement; on the opposite, in many circles democratic activists were discredited. In opinions of Arab centers US engagement on reform promotion should be quiet (yet consistent).⁹ Much more space and acceptance has been for European positions, so it is a serious role for EU to play.

⁸ The Daily Star, May 30, 2007

⁹ Amman Center for Human Rights Studies, *Promoting Middle East Democracy II: Arab Initiatives*, May/2005, p.1

The meetings are specific to some extent. Delegates are from democratic activists circles and from the governments ones as well.

The need for further progress is underlined in Tunis Declaration of 2004, a document issued by Arab countries themselves (On the Drive for Development and Modernization in the Region). Alexandria Library Statement "On Arab Reform issues" edited by Arab civil society organizations is talking about conditions for political parties activities and political reform process. Below there is the opinion on the situation in the Arab world and the perspectives edited by Arabs themselves:

"There is a broad concensus that political reform remains key to achieving sustainable security and stability in the region. The political situation in many of the countries of the region is characterized by the need to further democratic reforms, including free and fair elections and respect for the rule of law and for fundamental freedoms and human rights. While constitutions of the region often provide for freedom of thought, opinion and association. Legal provisions may also stipulate numerous restrictions, in some cases under the pretext of safeguarding national security or national unity. At the same time, the rapid rise of moderate and reformist political Islam movements as well as political extremism has put severe pressure on political regimes in the region and sometimes slowed down progress towards more political openness and pluralism. Unresolved conflicts are also perceived as obstacles to reforms".

Regional organizations for democracy

Among most important and active regional organizations are:

Regional Civil Forum
Arab Press Freedom Watch
Amman Center for Human Rights Studies
Arab Election Watch
Academic Freedom Watch in Jordan
Arab Watch for Reformation and Democracy
Terrorism watch
No Peace Without Justice

They have similar aims and programs. This part consists a deeper look into their activities.

Arab Press Freedom Watch

Arab Press Freedom Watch (APFW) is an NGO with four main goals: defending freedom of expression, human rights and promoting democracy in the Arab world (1), making records of violating these values (2), campaign for free expression of peoples' opinions (3) and educating people about their rights (4).

APFW describes its objectives as:

- promoting principles of freedom of expression and establishing free and independent press in the Arab world,
- working for removing all restrictive legislations and establishing a liberal legal work for the media that would guarantee the right of freedom of speech for all,
- watching anti-press freedom practices and to campaign against them,
- supporting individual journalists and unions against all sorts of government oppression, working for liberation of journalists,
- providing help (professional, legal, humanitarian) to journalists who became victims of violence of freedom of expression.¹⁰

Instruments to achieve above goals are:

- arranging meeting, courses, debates, exhibitions,
- monitoring violations of freedom of expression in Arab countries and to run campaigns against these violations
- publishing a regular news and an annual record of freedom of expression in the Arab world,
- communicating with journalists and persons all over the world through the website to promote the objectives of the APFW,
- working for media law reform,
- attending hearings and trials of Arab journalists in cases related to freedom of expression,
- building up a network of contacts throughout the Arab world to include union leaders, lawyers, members of parliaments, and other public figures,
- working closely with the Arab Union of Journalists, the Arab Lawyers Union and the Arab Organization of Human Rights and other Arab and international organizations to promote the value of democracy, human rights and freedom of expression.

¹⁰ Official APFW page, www.apfw.org/indexenglish.asp?fname=aboutUs/english/Aboutus.htm

Four annual conferences organized by APFW were held in:

Cairo (12-14 March 2006) on Media Freedom and Dialogue between Cultures

Rabat (3-6 May 2004), Freeing the Arab Media from State Control

Cairo (5-7 May 2003), Ethics in Journalism: Towards a Free and Responsible Media

London (1-3 May 2002), Media and Democracy: Political and Legal Challenges in the Arab World

In 2005 a conference didn't take place.

Annual Reports, available from the organization's website were on:

2004 – Freeing the Arab Media from State Control

2003 – The Fight for Democracy

2002 – Dealing with the aftermath of September 11th

2001 – The State of Arab Media

Every year conference ended with Final Communiqué underlying the most dramatic problems and appealing to public, governments and journalist.

No Peace Without Justice

No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ) is a NGO founded in 1993 that works for the protection and promotion of democracy in MENA region.¹¹ Its actions includes the promotion of democratic reform in the broader Middle East and North Africa, through constructive dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society. Its strategy is to raise awareness and foster public debate, also through the organization of key events such as conferences or seminars in cooperation with governments and civil society.

In the NPWJ scope a MENA's Democracy Program was connected with the main objective to strengthen the contribution of non state actors to the democratic process by promoting dialogue of non-state actors with decision makers and state structures. It is important to lead to the interaction (instead of confrontation) between civil society organizations and governments. So one of the objective is the establishment of a lasting system of consultation between two sides (government – NGO) but broaden by representatives of activists, academics, intellectuals, journalists and others.

¹¹ All information based on the organization Web site: www.npjw.org

The Algeria example

Do the social, independent democratic movements have had any influence on the internal situation in Arab countries? Algerian example should serve as a model. There were no radical changes, in the political aspect there have not been any substantial changes and fundamental reorientation. The pace was slow anyway some positive points may be seen in the process. Below there are some facts from the political life during last few years:

The Constitution (28.11.1996) guarantees pluralism and fundamental freedom but not in practice because of state of emergency since 02.1992. The emergency powers act restricts the actions of political bodies and civil society organizations. Act on Political Parties of 1997 says about multi-party system.

Opposition's main demand: lifting of the state of emergency

During last years some elections have taken place:

General election 30.05.2002, boycott by most of the democratic opposition parties (because of the serious deterioration of the crisis in Kabylia), won by the parties of the presidential majority, Municipal election 10.10.2002, Presidential election of 2004. On the invitation of the Algerian government a European Parliament delegation visited Algeria during legislative elections.

The adoption by the Algerian Parliament of a constitutional amendment recognizing Tamazight (the Berber language) as a national language was observed by foreign witnesses.

Presidential election 04.2004. President Bouteflika was re-elected for a second five year term. In the observers opinion the elections showed signs of improvements in terms of transparency. The election were multi-party, with six candidates (including one woman). During election campaign the possibilities for reforms are limited.

Privatization and the opening of the market to international competition are making slow progress.

The reform process have been influenced, despite political pre-election campaigns) by social discontent, natural disasters like floods and earthquakes, terrorists attacks.

Conclusions

A dialogue on human rights and democracy has remained the central instrument for partnership and dialogue. It has been initiated with several partners in the context of sub-committees of the Association Committee and the ENP Action Plans. Those concluded so far contain mutually agreed priorities for cooperation in the field of the promotion of human rights.

Opinion and conclusions on achievement in that field were not very satisfactory. "Reforms in political and administrative structures have materialized in only a few of partners and democratic convergence has fallen short of expectations. A debate has begun in many partner countries on the challenges of democratization, including the role of democratic political Islam, but so far this has been an indirect rather than a direct result of the partnership. There has been some progress (...) in progress for human rights (...), and press freedom. The legal and regulatory framework for the practice of activities by civil society has not generally improved. The fight against terrorism in the wake of September 11 has led to restrictions on civil liberties'¹²

¹² Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. Tenth Anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: a work programme to meet the challenges of the next five years, p.19