

The Political Changes in the Arabian Countries as Challenge for the Foreign Policy of the European Union (The Integration of Palestine and Lebanon as an Aberrant Move for Retaining the European Influence in the Region)

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Summary: The control over the Middle East is important for European Union. The political turmoil at the beginning of 2011 there could put this control under question. There are expectations for a development in direction liberal democracy. There is also readiness to support this development, even with military force. After the long-standing support for the authoritarian governments there this approach seems suspicious. It is possible to be established in the region not liberal, but conservative (Muslim?) democracies, which might be hostile to the Western values. One is sure, that we witness considerable changes of the political systems in the Arabian countries.

In this critical moment the European Union can master the process by an aberrant motion – through offering full membership to

Palestine and Lebanon as a means for solving the Middle East conflict and henceforth for restoring the European prestige and control over the region.

Key words: European Union, control, liberal democracy, idealistic approach, values, Muslim democracy, Palestine, Lebanon, membership.

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Geopolitical importance of the Middle East

The region of the Middle East (incl. North Africa) encompasses mostly low to middle income countries, with economies oriented largely to Europe. In this region we witness the cultural clash (and co-existence) between West-European and Muslim values. In addendum the West-

European countries are bound to this region by their historic ties, incl. by the economic interests, established since the beginning of the colonialism. Main task of the European Union there is to ensure deliveries of oil, gas together with free shipping in the Mediterranean Sea and in the Red Sea.

The lower living standard makes the Middle East a persistent source of economic emigration, directed to the Mediterranean EU-members. The annual trade deficit of the Arab countries with their EU trade partners increased from 530 mill. € (2006) to 20.4 billion € in 2010. The political concussions there periodically produce mass political emigration that the societies in the union cannot absorb anymore. The so called "Jasmine Revolutions" at the beginning of 2011 are able to hamper the control of the European Union over this important for the regional and the global equilibrium region.

The policy of European Union in the Mediterranean basin

The distrust toward Western Europe has deep historic roots in the Middle East. The modern Arabian nationalism appeared after the First World War. Due to the policy of the colonial forces (the United Kingdom, France, Italy) a great deal of the Arabian nationalists are anti-European. Most frequently this kind of nationalism has religious foundations, not too extreme though.

After the end of the colonial period the West-European countries prefer to control the processes in the Arabian world more by the methods and the means of the realistic foreign policy (avoiding direct military interventions) in search for succession and reliability in the politics of the local elites. After the failure of the United Kingdom and France in the Suez

Crisis (1956) the West-Europeans gave up their leading positions there to the USA (and to some extent to the USSR). Some cardinal problems, associated with Middle Eastern Conflict still split the positions of the EU-countries: some feel more sympathy for the Palestinian cause, other show support or at least understanding for Israel. This internal split still impedes conducting an active policy, relevant of the economic, military and political resources of the Union.

The most serious attempt to synchronize the policy toward the region so far is so the called Mediterranean Union, launched by France to promote the economic integration and the democratic reforms in 16 neighbouring countries: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, The Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunis and Turkey.

The projects are aimed at such areas as economy, environment, energy, health care, migration and culture, among them cleaning up the seaside regions, development of the transport infrastructure (railroads, ports), preparation for natural and caused by humans disasters, development of alternative energy sources in the region, technical and financial aid for small and medium enterprises etc.

The first problem of the Mediterranean Union consists in funding all this measures from the common budget of the EU. The initial plan did not envision the involvement in all members-countries. Embroiling the common budget though gave the members with positive financial contribution (such as Germany) good reason to request control on the initiative, so it involved the whole European Union. Unfortunately the current economic crisis put the financing of the measures under question. The second problem of the initiative

consists in its ideological ground. Bounding the economy cooperation and financial aid (€ 13 billion, issued between 1995 and 2013) with democratic reforms after Western standards still does not produce the expected results. Meanwhile Western Europe remains convinced in its not only technological, but also cultural supremacy, annoying so even liberal intellectuals in relative successful modern secular states, such as Tunis and Morocco. Till the beginning of 2011 Western observers and politicians shared the belief, that the Arabian societies are “incapable of democracy by virtue of their cultural traditions”¹.

Liberal democracy and universal claims

According to the **adherents** of the liberal democracy the victory of the West in the Cold War proved the **supremacy of this** social system. The historic optimist Fransis Fukuyama envisioned its gradual imposition in all countries with all auspicious consequences, the dreamed “Perpetual Peace” among them. After the wave of transformations in Eastern Europe the liberal democracy ceased to extend its geography though. Somewhere the results of these transformations caused disappointment and even giving up some liberal virtues (for example Russia). The optimistic theory of Fukuyama meanwhile gained many critics. Samuel Huntington questioned the universality of the liberal democracy by claiming that the cultural borders are insurmountable, putting stress largely on the incompatibility of the liberal democracy with the Islam.

The problem lies in the universal claims of the liberal ideology. The Cold War was a

usual geopolitical clash under the flags of two political orientations with universal claims (like earlier religious wars). The victorious ideology is expected to confirm its victory worldwide, so the logic of Fukuyama. The universal ideology goes with messianic passion and idealistic foreign policy. It belongs to the European (even more to the American) messianic tradition to help others in implementing their successful pattern of social development. Henry Kissinger describes best the so called “idealistic foreign policy”: it is a policy that protects (and imposes) outside the same values and ideas, building the foundation of the successful internal politics. (See Kissinger, “Diplomacy”, 1994)

If a country (or Union) conducts an idealistic foreign policy, it aims at worldwide (universal) recognition of its values. So it would gain supporters and allies outside and would extend influence over the countries, sharing the same values. On the other hand the idealistic foreign policy is a policy of no compromise: it defends values and ideas, not interests. A retreat from its values and ideas (even contemporary and/or partial) **arouses suspicions and accusations of lack of principles (“double standards”) and sacrificing ideals in favour of private interests. In such cases countries, conducting realistic** foreign policy appear more reliable and foreseeable partners because of the clear logic in their behaviour – guided by their interests and conformed to their capacities.

The challenge of the so called “jasmine revolutions”

The countries of Western Europe (together with the USA) consider the

¹ Hirsi Ali, “Islamic democracy: inexorable fact or oxymoron?”, <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com>, also “The fantasy of democracy in an Arab state”, Robert Fisk, “The Independent”, Friday, 13 February 2004

liberal democracy superior, compared with all other ideologies. They are ready to liberal support the liberal-democratic reforms in other countries by all means, sometimes even by military force. The so called “jasmine revolutions” in the Middle East caught their politicians and observers unprepared though and asked difficult questions. The political turmoil in the Middle East (incl. Northern Africa) has to prove the validity of the theories of Fukuyama and Huntington. In Tunis, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya large groups of the population want direct engagement in the political life and the rule of their countries. The uprising are hardly to explain by the economic crisis (prices of cereal for instance) alone.

In Tunis and in Egypt on the streets gathered mostly unemployed, well educated young people, seeking opportunities to master their own and the country’s future. Everywhere they require “freedom and democracy” and they are sincere, if we assume that democratic is each political system, based on the involvement of the whole population in political decision-making (direct or indirect – through elected representatives), according to the principle “one person – one vote”. The calls for freedom and democracy find natural support by the Western public opinion. Disappointed by the failure of the so called “flower revolutions” in the Post-Sovjet space and frustrated by the economic crisis (which the non-democratic China overcame more easily) it needs evidence of the superiority of the Western liberal-democratic order and of its attractiveness for other societies. The fact that the “jasmine revolutions” were carried out by young people, using new methods of communication via Internet, added much to the exaltation of the Westerners. The notion of the “Facebook revolution” fits excellent into the typical Western belief that the technological progress is tightly bound to the social one. But the Western excitement about

the “jasmine revolutions” seems ambiguous because of the long-standing support for the authoritarian governments there, which guaranties political stability and henceforth reliable oil and gas deliveries, together with free shipping, control over the emigration etc. The moral foundation of an idealistic pro-democratic approach seems shaky and sets limits to the actions of the leading EU-members. Somewhere the revolutions could end with success (also with external support) and emanate new political elites, but both this new elites and the population could remain suspicious of the reasons and the reliability of this support. If so, the ability of the EU to master the transition there the way it mastered the transition in Eastern Europe would be questionable.

Varieties of democracy

The suspicion of implementing “double standards” is not the only problem here. Many observers agree that the cultural differences could play the role Huntington expected. The inaccurate use of the concept “democracy” creates the impression that the only (“correct”) democracy is the liberal one, based on the ideas of the European Enlightenment. But the democracy is not necessary liberal (private property, individual rights, pluralism etc.). Not always it presupposes an “open society” (open to different minds and social concepts). Since the Antique we can count many non-liberal democracies, formal and/or informal. The Athenian democracy has been (of course) not liberal as being much older than liberalism. Today Russia is a real democracy, heavily criticized by the liberals though. Belarus is presented in the Western press as a tyranny, but it is a democratic republic instead, based on such principles as universal suffrage and regular elections for parliament and president

(even the enormous concentration of power in the presidency proceeded there according to the democratic procedures in 1994). Turkey moves from a democracy controlled by the Armed force to a "conservative" or/and "Islamic" democracy (according to Recep Erdogan). Iran formally is a democracy as well: the whole complex of mutually balanced political organs is also based on universal suffrage and regular elections. The common problem in all these cases is that the population nowhere does profess in large quantities liberal ideology.

We find weird practices even in "normal democracies". Mexico is such a democracy – no one criticized it, although the Institutional Revolutionary Party held power in the country (under a succession of names) for more than 70 years, with the only exception between 2000 and 2009. Japan is considered almost perfect liberal democracy, but for the first time a different political power (the Democratic Party of Japan) took power in 2009 after 54 years of the liberal conservative Liberal Democratic Party's rule. The liberal facade there covers a **PRONOUNCEDLY** conservative and collectivistic society.

The possible confusion comes not from the difficulty to give a definition for "liberal democracy". (Western "Conservative" or "Christian-democratic" parties are based often on liberal platforms.) The possible confusion comes in fact from the political expedience, which could create a serious moral problem in Northern Africa with long lasting political consequences. It is not certain that even the young generation in the Arab countries would prefer the liberal ideas of the European Enlightenment to the traditional Islamic values, presented by "moderate" (or "extreme") Islamists. The Turkish Islamic democracy seems to be a good model to copy. There are groups which would

prefer the "Iranian version" either and it is still difficult to predict which tendency would prevail. And if the societies are allowed to choose the model free, their choice couldn't be disputed as "wrong". Facing the political alternatives it is too optimistic to expect an establishment of "Western style" political parties, with Western funding and participation in international political federations ("Internationals") as successful as in Eastern Europe.

Islamization of the region

The least desirable possible development in Northern Africa would be towards democratic political systems, representing the wide-spread anti-Israeli sentiments. The tangles of the Middle-East conflict lies to a great extent in the involvement of religious symbols and values. While contesting such irrational values the sides engaged become irreconcilable and the unity of religion and politics is among the features, which distinguish the Islamic world from the European secular societies.

Under the conditions of free choice it is not impossible that a major part of population demand from its political representatives a firm anti-Israel and as a whole anti-Western policy. The first free elections in Gaza Strip in 2006 brought to power the fundamentalist movement Hamas whose aim is to destroy Israel and set up an Islamic state in Palestine. Although it was supported by the people by democratic means Hamas is considered a terrorist organization by the USA, Israel, and the European Union. Many Arab states have traditions not to let Islamist organizations come to power by using undemocratic means (the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, etc.) with either manifest or covert support

from the West. A Western intervention in the “jasmine revolutions” in defense of democratic values should, however, render such means illegitimate. On the other hand, the expectations that Israel-friendly liberal democratic regimes will be established in Egypt, Syria and the still feeble Palestine state which will finally end the Middle East conflict by Fukuyama’s formula (“Liberal democracies do not go into war with one another”) do not seem quite realistic.

Certainly, the political turmoil in Arab countries will bring about some crucial, in some places, changes to their political systems. After the end of that process it is not impossible that USA’s and EU’s overall control over the region will weaken due to the idealistic foreign policy that poorly matches the Realpolitik considerations compared to the times of authoritarian governments (less or more) backed by them.

EU Enlargement as an instrument of control

The so-called “Arab Spring” shows that EU is not quite ready and is unable to influence the important processes not only on a global but also on a regional scale despite the fact that all Arab countries caught up in political unrest are linked to the EU by special relations.

The Franco-British campaign in Libya is carried out independently by national states outside the institutional frame of NATO and EU provided that the Euro-Atlantic institutions were caught off guard. This is the next proof that the attempts to establish EU’s common foreign and security policy are far from a final success. As a rule, the EU countries manage to form a common position on insignificant issues which are

remote from the Union geographically and which do not demand the expenditure of serious resources while making commitments. Unanimity on important external political matters among the 27 member states which are still sovereign to a large extent seems quite difficult and by the increase of the number of member states will seem almost impossible. EU does not have its own military forces to give weight to a common policy, especially one of global claims.

The Union’s set of external political tools is commonly referred to as “soft power” as the economic tools have the major weight among them: direct or indirect benefits in exchange for a desired conduct on behalf of their addressee. The membership in the Union has a special place among the economic tools for it offers some possible advantages from the inclusion into the Common Market and the common policies in exchange for a partial loss of state sovereignty and at the price of internal transformations (political and economic) such as the case of Southern and Eastern Enlargements in 1980s and in early 21st century, respectively.

The Eastward Enlargement is EU’s biggest and most successful geopolitical project. It managed to fill in the political vacuum that emerged after the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the USSR by setting a long-term favorable perspective for development and preventing the outbreak of some possible wars such as in former Yugoslavia. This tool for EU-controlled external political and economic stabilization of a region that is important for the Union into a desired direction can and must be used also with respect to the countries from the Mediterranean a part of which may be now in the beginning of a difficult and uncertain transition to a more democratic state system.

Of course, a new enlargement of the scale of the latter one seems impossible for the time being. EU has no more capacity (governmental, political, economic) for enlargement as evidenced by the course of negotiations with the current (Turkey and Croatia) and the future candidate states (Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Serbia). EU can enlarge to such extent as made possible by the capacity of the core founding states (mainly France and Germany) to manage the union into the direction desired by them in harmony with their national interests. A perfectly seamless enlargement is possible only by inclusion of small (in terms of population) and relatively wealthy countries similar to the Northern Enlargement (1994). The success is possible also in cases of small countries functioning with difficulty which a EU membership could help get internally stabilized even, if necessary, by turning them to a de facto "protectorates." Currently, the Union gains such experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and, to a certain extent, Macedonia. This experience drains almost entirely the Union's political and financial resources, leads to the popular "enlargement fatigue" and seriously hampers the Union from playing a more active role in international relations.

In our opinion there is still an opportunity to use that most efficient external political tool. If successful, it can bring great political and, to a certain extent, economic benefits at the expense of incommensurably lower expenditure of political and financial capital. This opportunity is to propose membership (before even it is applied for) to the Palestinian Autonomy and Lebanon. (This means full membership after a short period of accommodation, "the privileged partnership" has not been tried as substitute so far, it does not even have a theoretical justification.) At first, such step could end the

Middle East conflict. That conflict has lasted for so long and for many it seems insoluble, or at least it does not seem soluble without the leading role of the USA. Finding a lasting solution for the conflict is a task suitable for EU's ambitions to play leading role in international relations. Many observers explain the failures of union's development in recent years with the missing next big, inspiring purpose after the enlargement to the East which will re-enthral citizens and release anew some serious political energy that will, in its turn, give a new impetus to the unifying processes. EU's experience in taking the lead in the fight against global warming turned out to be a complete failure: on the one hand, the very cause is quite dubious, and on the other, it revealed the limitations before the external political means available to the Union to solve such a task. In the case at hand, this task is well within the reach of the EU and this is the opportune moment: political unrest in Arab countries arouse sympathy to the demands for democracy, on the one hand, and on the other, a solution must be sought immediately, and a solution different from the case of Libya.

Inclusion of Palestinian territories and Lebanon into the EU

In the case of **Palestine** the matter at hand is an autonomy depending politically and economically on Israel. The autonomy is divided into two parts not only in geographical but also in political terms. The total population is 4 million people as one may not speak of independent economy, especially in Gaza. A major part of population is employed at Israeli economy. GDP per capita is quite low, standing at slightly less than \$2000 as one third of them come from foreign aid. EU is the biggest donor; for instance in 2008 the

aid granted was EUR 401,4 m². The trade exchange with the Union is duty-free and is governed by an association agreement. The lack of security under the unsettled dispute with Israel does not allow a normal economic development. An accession to EU and the provision of unrestricted access to Common market (first of all, for agricultural goods) and to sources of capital can solve that problem. Political stabilization, peace and tranquility can give the start of an economic development based on the realities and traditions which could bring the country's financial indices closer to Union's average. Palestine's economic stabilization would not cost EU much because given that population number the figures would be comparable to the aid for agriculture and regional development and would not exceed by much the financial aid currently given

As a highly urbanized coastal area the Gaza Strip could develop as a hub for transportation, banking, insurance and other intermediary services. Here, investments are possible in technical infrastructure (port facilities, communication networks, etc.) and in education. On the West Bank tourism, agriculture with cultures having a place on the saturated EU market could be developed. The economic prospects should reduce the radicalism among unemployed youth and offer a political alternative to Hamas or help for a positive political evolution of the movement itself. The preparation for membership should be relatively short so that these prospects could be considered real. Such preparation would assume some form of temporary political control on behalf of the Union, similar to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Under such control and in the name of the expected material wealth Palestinians would manage to set up a democracy satisfactorily covering EU's formal requirements.

The population of **Lebanon** also stands at about 4 million people, with GDP per capita at near \$10000 (roughly 1/3 times higher than Bulgaria's). Although Arabs make up 95 % of population there is vast cultural diversity. The number of different Christian groups reaches up to 40 % of population, and the most numerous Muslim community in Lebanon are the Shiites (about 40 % of population). The present political system is a difficult compromise among the different cultural constituents of Lebanese society as there is also strong influence of foreign powers: Syria and Israel.

Compared to Palestine Lebanon stands closer to a satisfactorily functioning state. Until mid 1970s the thriving Lebanese economy played the role of region's banking hub and trade intermediary between the markets of ex-metropolises and neighboring Arab states. After the devastating civil war the country recovered slowly without re-gaining its former intermediary positions, which to a great extent shifted to Istanbul. Emigrants have developed the Lebanese "trade network" all over the world. Lebanon has very high percentage of qualified work force comparable even to European countries. Traditionally, the leading branches are commerce, banking sector and tourism. Lebanon has good conditions for agriculture (water and fertile soil) but its agricultural sector attracts just 12 % of work force and its share in GDP stands about 12 %. Apples, peaches, oranges and lemons make up the major part of cultivated areas. Industry is limited to small-sized enterprises which assemble and package imported parts. The majority of workforce (nearly 65 %) is employed in the sector of services.

EU is Lebanon's largest trade partner. Trade exchange with the union is governed by an

² EU Assistance to the Palestinians, http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/westbank/index_en.htm

association agreement, a transition from European Neighborhood Policy which provides for abolishment of all barriers to free trade, encouragement of capital investments and, ultimately, Lebanon's economic integration into EU Common Market.³ If such integration is fully implemented the advantageous effects for the country and the region will manifoldly justify the invested political and financial resources. Similarly to Palestine, here political guarantees for security will also give an impetus to economic development which can restore Lebanon's former positions and make it a country of average EU economic indices. Here too the preparation period should not be quite long because the region's high conflict potential. The presence of a statesmanlike tradition would, however, make it easier for the EU to exert political control. The main difficulty would be the reinstatement of Southern Lebanon under the control of the lawful government and the pacification in some way of the Hezbollah movement. The solution could resemble the one concerning the Hamas issue. Thanks to the war in Afghanistan USA and their European allies are gaining some experience in the "socialization" (in fact, the blatant bribing) of implacable adversaries amongst the Taliban. The progress in settlement of disputed issues would, anyhow, take some followers away from the movement which, along with the "socialization" would solve to a great extent the issue of Islamic radicalism.

Consequences for Israel

In contrast to Palestine and Lebanon a full membership has not much to offer for Israel. Israel is a full-fledged state allocating some serious

resources for its security; in this regard it relies on its own forces and on the aid provided by the USA thanks to the influential Jewish lobby there. The military expenditure reaches 10 % of GDP⁴, a quite high index and the security expenditures are divided into some other items. (Only the wall separating Israel from the Palestinian lands costs the budget about \$1,56 billion⁵) It does not seem possible that the Israelis would re-consider their national doctrine and look for guarantees for their security by ceding sovereignty to the supranational institutions of a union that does not have a full-scale defense and security policy and common armed forces. Israel would, however, make use of the opportunity to reduce its security expenditure. The EU enlargement up to its borders could offer solutions to problems that neither the US patronage (the US should be persuaded to cooperate) nor their own forces could ensure.

If independent Palestine turns into a de facto EU protectorate (even if just for a while) it will be easier for Israel to negotiate political deals to gradually reduce the tension. EU has resources to ensure some monetary indemnity for refugees as well as jobs and all other advantages enjoyed by the EU citizens if they waive their claims for property taken away from them in Israel. The illegal immigration into the EU can not be stopped but a part of it could be thus legalized with all advantageous consequences thereof. The part of the said wall having been already erected has reduced the number of terrorist attacks against Israeli citizens by 90 % but the difficult access creates economic hardships in addition to the fact that the wall itself is perceived by many countries, including the EU, as illegal. If the Palestinian side of the border is taken up by FRONTEX then the access could be widened again without this happening to the detriment

³ European Neighbourhood Policy, EU-Lebanon Action Plan, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/lebanon_enp_ap_final_en.pdf

⁴ Jerusalem Issue Brief, Vol. 4, No. 11, 19 December 2004, How is Israel's Economy Affected by the Security Situation? Ezra Sadan, <http://www.jcpa.org/brief/brief004-11.htm>

⁵ <http://www.prapundit.com/archives/003091.html>

of security. Ultimately, even a solution can be found for the joint government of Jerusalem by EU and Israel and the issue could be postponed for a while but with reduced tension.

There are a number of other specific matters which would find a solution if Israel negotiates with an economically strong and politically balanced partner who does not question the existence of the Jewish state. Lebanon's political stabilization can resolve the issue concerning the security zone along the country's southern border and could also have favorable influence on the conduct of Syria, especially if it gets some real economic benefits from the possible neighborhood with the EU. The accession of Lebanon and Palestine would convince the Islamic countries that EU has no intention of developing as a "Christian club" and would dispel the suspicions of "Islamophobia" and double standards that have accumulated in recent years. A possible tide of new candidatures (e.g.

a renewed candidature by Morocco) could be turned down with the reasonable argument that the solution to the Middle East conflict requires some extraordinary resolutions and the relations with the Mediterranean countries could develop on a full scale within the boundaries of the said Mediterranean Union but under the conditions of an increased confidence in EU.

Conclusion

The political changes in Arab states from the Mediterranean put EU to a big test. It could influence the political development in the desired direction if it leaves behind a part of the methods used so far without result and tries the unusual move with the integration of Palestine and Lebanon: a move feasible in terms of the necessary resources and well-justified in principle which, if successful, can substantially increase the Union's political weight. ~~VIA~~