

**International Seminar and Meeting Debate  
Arab Spring at the time of the uprisings  
and one year after**

Madrid, June 6, 2011 and February 24, 2012

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Centre for Middle Eastern Studies  
of the  
Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture

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The CEMOFPSC considers that its fundamental mission is to serve as a centre of discussion and analysis, stimulating debate and gathering diverse opinions on matters relating to international current affairs and, in particular, the Middle East.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION TO THIS PUBLICATION

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The Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture, decided to hold its annual seminar on June 6, 2011 on "*The transition in the new Arab world: a challenge for East and West*", and on February 24, 2012 it continued with study and analysis of the same subject by organizing a meeting-discussion about "*The Arab Spring: one year later*", thereby adding to the numerous efforts devoted to a thorough review of the events.

This study is not exhaustive, mainly because it is a process that is still ongoing and whose events have unfolded very quickly ahead of any attempt to reflect. For this reason, we only wish to offer a summary of the analysis and discussions that took place during the two meetings. The Middle East situation continues to change and it is not yet known what course events will take.

Participating in these two meetings organized by the CEMOFPSC in Madrid were some of the players and witnesses in the wave of revolutions, as well as major experts on the subject. All of them offered evidence and analysis of a new situation in the Arab world that has surprised the world by its size and extension, in a context of very rapid change.

This publication is divided into two parts. The first contains the main reflections and analysis collected during the first seminar in June 2011; it is therefore an attempt to understand what was happening in the Arab world at a time very close to the beginning of what occurred. Given the speed with which the events occurred and the way these changes were taking place -causing any prior attempt at understanding to become out of date- it was deemed appropriate to hold another smaller meeting to allow reassessment of the Arab Spring in light of the new changes, and this is precisely what the second part of this work outlines.

Since last year, Arab countries are the stage for uprisings of people against their dictators. While regimes and autocratic leaders have been unseated, in each case the process of determining by what it will be replaced is not yet clear. A year after the fall of these regimes, it is not yet known what political order will prevail. Last year, the 6 of June, a

first meeting organized by CEMOFPSC, was held in Madrid, about “The transition in the new Arab world: a challenge for East and West” and brought together some actors and witnesses as well as leading experts on the matter. They offered testimonies and analysis about the waves on protests, which swept across Middle East and North Africa.

A second small closed-door meeting debate group convened at FPSC the 24 of February 2012 was meant to be a continuation to the first seminar and to intent to inform about and discuss the ongoing situation in Egypt and Syria, as well as to try to answer to the following of the many pressing questions, about the path of the new order in the Arab world:

Will the new regimes be able to dismantle the old system and build strong states and institutions that can ensure freedom, especially the religious freedom, to all its citizens and end with the Arab-Israeli conflict?

Which model of governance is going to be launched? Will it be the western secular one as promoted by the European Union? Will it be based on confessionalism giving all citizens, including religious minorities the same rights and civic duties? Will it be a new Islamic model yet to be defined?

What will the regional actors Qatar, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia do to extend their areas of influence?

Will the change reverse in the strengthening of civil society? Will these new regimes be able to bring true economic and social development to their people?

In an area where during thousands of years Christians and Muslims lived together in harmony, what is the reason for the threats and attacks against Christians?

The participants included ambassadors, journalists, and representatives of think tanks and NGOs of development.

This paper is a summary of the discussions that took place during this meeting. The following summary is intended to serve as an aide-mémoire



to those who took part and to provide a general summary of discussions for those who did not.

The following participated in these seminars: Ms. **Pilar Lara**, President of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture; Mr. **Pedro López Aguirrebengoa**, Spanish Ambassador and member of the CEMOFPSC Advisory Committee; Mr. **Nadim Shehadi**, Researcher in the Middle East Programme at Chatham House and Member of the CEMOFPSC Advisory Committee; Mr. **Giuseppe Cassini**, Ambassador of the Italian Republic and Member of the CEMOFPSC Advisory Committee; Mr. **Diego del Alcázar**, President of the Instituto de Empresa and the Vocento Group; Ms. **Arantza de Areilza**, Dean of the IE *School of Arts and Humanities*; Ms. **Hala Mustafa**, Chief Editor of *Democracy Review*, Egypt; Mr. **Mohamed A. Shehab El Din**, Political activist, consultant and lecturer in the field of conflict resolution, mediation and negotiation, Egypt; Mr. **Alberto Carnero**, Diplomat and Director of the International Area of the FAES Foundation; Prof. **Ibrahim Al-Marashi**, Professor of History and the Media at IE University, and member of the CEMOFPSC Advisory Committee, Iraq; Mr. **Nir Rosen**, American journalist; Mr. **Richard Youngs**, Director General of FRIDE and Associate Professor at Warwick University, United Kingdom; Mr. **Dario Valcarcel**, Director of the “Foreign Policy” magazine and Managing Director of “Estudios de Política Exterior”; Ms. **Ana Menéndez**, Minister Counsellor of the Spanish Embassy in Tunisia; Mr. **Isaac Martin Barbero**, Economic and Trade Counsellor of the Spanish Embassy in Ankara; Ms. **Cristina Manzano**, Director of “Foreign Policy” magazine, Spain; Mr. **Javier Martin**, Editor in Chief of the international area of the Efe Agency; Mr. **Barah Mikail**, Senior Researcher at FRIDE; Ms. **Macarena Suils Cotelo**, Director of Projects and Cooperation of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture and President of the Euro-Arab Network NGOs for Development and Integration; Ms. **Jumana Trad**, Patron of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture and Member of the CEMOFPSC Executive Committee; Mr. **Félix Sanchez**, Junior Researcher at the CEMOFPSC; Mr. **José Luis Zatarain**, Director of the Communication Department of the FPSC; Ms. **Blanca de Mesa**, Director of Institutional Relations of the FPSC.

## **2. PART ONE: AT THE TIME OF THE UPRISINGS**

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### **2.1. Analysis of the uprisings**

The attempt to reduce the “Arab Spring” to a common denominator could lead to serious errors in interpretation and, therefore, study. This is a new crossroads for the Arab world and the whole world at this time that some have dared to describe as a “new world disorder,” the latest economic manifestation of which would be the crisis that we are all suffering. One obviously has to think about this globalized world, and the consequences of this “new world disorder.”

Unfortunately, the Arab Spring has until now developed via movements, sometimes violent ones, such as the civil wars that are practically taking place in some countries, a revolution-transition in others. Everything positive about the Arab Spring depends on the meaning you want to give to each of the two revolution-transition words, and that it really is directed towards that better world that this new youth are looking for.

It is clear that Arab progress, that this new hope for justice, democracy, freedom and human rights that these young Arabs have can only thrive within a supportive environment, and the first ones that have to provide that environment are the Arab countries. It is also clear that the peripheral countries, the Mediterranean, the Europeans, in particular, have a role to play.

The great challenge is that these efforts and hopes to form democratic governments that respect individual freedom are not obstructed and that, through joint reflection, discussion, and above all, we in the north knowing, a little more about what is occurring in the South and the people in the South knowing what we think in the North, with the hope that this will help build that future.

#### **2.1.1. Background and players**

These reflections arose in the context of the so-called Arab Spring, which began just over a year ago in Tunisia, with the “Jasmine Revolution,” spread in record time amongst its southern neighbours and reached the Middle East, the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, and is still in full swing.

In some countries (Tunisia and Egypt) political transition processes have been mapped out and democratic elections have taken place, while in others (Syria) violence is rampant, and there are still some (Libya and Yemen) where what prevails is more likely confusion. The truth is that much of the Arab world is undergoing a process of decomposition of an old order characterized by lack of freedom and political, social and economic stagnation.

It is still unclear what the final product of the “spring effect” will be and perhaps, according to some experts, the uncertainty will remain for many years, but it does in any case seem safe to assert that the *status quo* existing until the end of 2010 has been destroyed.

During the course of the discussions it was noted that it involved spontaneous uprisings, without any direction from any visible political leader or group, something which has facilitated their extension, since there has not been anyone to imprison or bribe; on the contrary, this lack of leadership poses the problem, as some point out, of a clamorous lack of consensus by those who are directing the revolution towards a democratic model, warning that it does otherwise run the risk of falling into the hands of new authoritarian regimes.

The protagonists of the uprisings have been young people claiming certain freedoms, and using new technological tools such as Facebook or Twitter. New players have emerged who have achieved the unthinkable, and who have to be taken into consideration: millions of people are fighting for a new identity for the Middle East, these revolutionary movements emerged to “*overthrow*” old dictatorial regimes, and they have proved capable of it in the case of Tunisia and Egypt, thus changing the course of these countries. According to the participants, the anti-Mubarak regime activists had already risen up in 2005 in protest against the new constitution and against corruption, gaining strength in recent years until February 11, 2011<sup>1</sup>.

It was argued that the revolution was spontaneous (not planned or directed as part of a conspiracy), that it began with the concentration of dozens of people, and grew as the days passed, ending up in millions.

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<sup>1</sup> Date of the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak.

The previous events in Tunisia were followed with close attention in Egypt and were very inspiring for the Egyptians, although nobody had much confidence at first that they could be emulated by managing to overthrow the regime.

The uprisings started from some common well known assumptions: a tired population, regardless of the ideological colour or their form of State, faced with the inexistent or insufficient reformist will of their governments, with the consequent demand for the implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and social justice, and solutions to situations of precariousness that have dragged on for decades, and have been aggravated, depending on the case, by the global economic crisis.

The common denominator of the regimes is that they are authoritarian, with an economic and social system that concentrates resources in the hands of a few, and where social protection is virtually nonexistent. All the people who have risen up are united by a language, culture, religion, social structure in which there are, in some cases, Christian minorities and other religions.

The uprisings brought together people from different social classes, and were directed by the middle class, i.e. it has not been an uprising represented by the left or limited to economic issues, but, for the first time, their claims go beyond asking for "bread and work", what they want is freedom.

This has had a special impact on an urban youth who are modern and better educated than the rest, but without a future, whilst also adept in handling new technologies. These young people demand a dignified life in their own country, without being forced into emigration. They have rebelled against the paralysis of their societies, the backwardness of their countries, foreign exploitation of national resources, and the corruption of their elites. They ask to be heard and to become masters of their destiny. It is the fruit of a new generation that could not accept what previous ones had accepted. Some form part of political Islamic movements or related parties, although the latter have publicly acknowledged that they have not instigated the uprisings.

These revolutions are closely related to the cry for dignity, but they are of course closely related to the fact that there are large numbers of young people frustrated by the huge gap between expectations and reality, frustrated because they cannot access the labour market, frustrated because in a social environment where personal development is measured by their ability to start their own family, not being able to get a job makes it impossible for them to be independent to freely lead their own life.

The level of corruption and the economic situation was getting worse. In Egypt, corruption and lack of transparency in the elections of 2010 was the straw that broke the camel's back. The government and the National Democratic Party provoked the people by saying that these elections and the corruption that surrounded them was not so important, and they never acknowledged such events.

If we go back to 2005, with the new constitutional amendments proposed by Mubarak, we can observe the first signs of change. In 2008 there were serious labour protests in *Mahalla El-Kubra*<sup>2</sup> and many other places, and this was a good sign because people behaved differently, they dared to take to the street, to express themselves, to confront the police, it was the first time people could be seen protesting, removing images of Mubarak, removing him from public places. Changes were also characterized by the emergence of activist groups such as *Kefaya*<sup>3</sup> (which translates as "Enough"), or the April 6 Movement<sup>4</sup>, which began to be increasingly active, and have signalled a new course of events.

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<sup>2</sup> Mahalla El-Kubra is the most populous city in the governorate of Gharbiah in Egypt (60 km north of Cairo), known for its textile industry, and the location of the Misr Spinning & Weaving Company factory, which has about 27,000 workers.

<sup>3</sup> Kifaya (meaning Enough in Arabic), created in 2004, was one the first Egyptian popular movements opposed to the regime of Hosni Mubarak and advocating democratic reforms, and which has become known for its street demonstrations and protests against the government, especially in 2005 when the referendum and presidential elections took place, subsequently losing strength due to internal disagreements and leadership change.

<sup>4</sup> Along with other activists, Ahmed Maher created a Facebook group in 2008 called "April 6: Day of Rage" to call a day of strikes and peaceful protests in solidarity with the textile workers of the Egyptian town of Mahalla El-Kubra in the Nile Delta.

Mohamed El-Baradai<sup>5</sup> appeared on the scene a year earlier. He cannot be given credit for the revolution or the events themselves. But he does deserve the credit for throwing the first stone that would encourage people to look for change in a different way. Above all, great credit has to be attributed to the Tunisian revolution and its huge impact on Egypt.

### **2.1.2. Technology, the media and the "domino effect"**

Some of the features of the revolution have been highlighted: the human question, with its calls for dignity, freedom, individuality, and the use of new technologies, whose influence and speed have been decisive in overthrowing President Mubarak. There has also been focus on the importance of media coverage of events that acted as the main force for the Arab Spring to be extended to other countries. Facebook and Twitter were two indispensable tools in the dissemination of the facts and the spread of revolutionary sentiment which led Egyptians to concentrate in Tahrir Square.

The discussion has focussed on the following: what role have the media played in these revolutions? According to the speakers, there are three levels of revolution in terms of the media available. In Yemen and Syria, Internet dissemination and penetration is low, television and radio are nationalized and run by the government authorities with a lot of censorship. In Iran, the situation was one of huge Internet penetration until 2009, to the extent that the movement in support of the candidate Mousavi, orchestrated through the new Facebook, Twitter and YouTube media, has been the main precursor of the Arab Spring. The repression of the so-called Twitter Revolution in Iran meant a serious restriction, not only of the media, but also serious Internet censorship. In contrast, in Egypt or Tunisia, Internet dissemination and access is high.

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<sup>5</sup> He was director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (1997 - 2009), and together with the IAEA was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 2005. In 2010, he created the National Association for Change in Egypt as a political alternative. During the protests in Egypt in 2011, El-Baradei returned home to join the opponents of the Hosni Mubarak regime and offered himself as a candidate for the presidency in March 2011, only to withdraw his candidacy in January 2012.

Attention has been drawn to the importance of the media: the Revolution of Bahrain (1995-6) was not supported by Al-Jazeera and other media (Facebook did not exist), and consequently failed.

There is a difference between the media themselves and the effect they have. The media have an influence on people, whether they be Egyptian or Tunisian masses, and this is a field that has not been studied, what are the effects of the media? Do we actually consume the media that confirm our beliefs, rather than seeking media that challenge our beliefs and paradigms? In other words, it is difficult to know how many channels like *Al-Jazeera* or Facebook really had an influence on the people who participated in these democratic processes.

The mass media do not in any case reflect reality, they construct it based on the advice of local authorities. By contrast, the social networks, Facebook or Twitter, escape their control. They cannot be controlled, and that frees up a very effective way to disseminate ideas. It is well known that control of the media is vital for population control. From regional channels the aim is to keep people remote from important events and decisions, and to keep people anesthetized with exclusively entertainment programming.

In this context, Facebook and Twitter, as independent tools, have been vital in spreading the revolution. These revolutions would have occurred without them, but we do not know how, at what speed, how efficiently or how many people would have died.

Thanks to Facebook the Egyptians could communicate with the Tunisians and receive little tips from the experience the Tunisians had acquired on minor details that were very useful in the streets; for example, the subject of Coca-Cola in Tunisia: "When the Police force used tear gas, as you can't see, the first thing that comes to mind is to throw water in your eyes and the problem gets worse. So from Tunisia they sent us messages telling us that when this happens we should take along a Coca-Cola, open it and wash our eyes with the Coca-Cola, and that deals with the problem."

In the case of Egypt the organization of Facebook groups that held protests under the slogan “we are all *Khaled Said*”<sup>6</sup> was anonymous. It was a group of people who ran it from Dubai or from the U.S., all united in the aim of ensuring that there would be continuity if anyone was arrested. During the protests, the Mubarak regime organized bloggers and other groups into social networks to attack this Facebook group and discredit them.

The social media certainly exist, but is it a social media revolution? It is more likely a popular revolution that has been incredibly strengthened by social networks.

Have the media brought about the revolution, or rather, has it been the revolution that has captured media attention? In the case of Tunisia no news were broadcast about any revolutionary movements in Egypt, which still did not have any effective force, and yet the revolutionary feeling took root.

Until the Second World War, people thought that the media reflected reality. After the Second World War, the consensus was that rather than reflecting reality, the media constructed reality, and we can see both levels (the media as a reflection of reality and as reality constructors) when we think about foreign coverage of events in the Middle East and the local media who are constructing the reality. There are some examples of this: The Western media like to call these events, especially when they were broadcasting events in Tunisia and Egypt, the “Facebook Revolution” and it became a cliché that was repeated over and over again, but this was misleading. There is indeed an information revolution in the Middle East, but Facebook has played a small role in it. In terms

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<sup>6</sup> Khaled Said was a young Egyptian who died in controversial circumstances in the Sidi Gaber area of Alexandria on June 6, 2010, after being arrested by Egyptian police. The photo of his disfigured corpse was posted online shortly afterwards from Dubai, on the Facebook page “We are all Khaled Said” of Wael Ghonim, with accusations that he was beaten to death by Egyptian security forces. The page attracted hundreds of thousands of followers, making it the largest dissident Facebook page in Egypt. This was the page where the first call for protests were made on January 25, 2011, in which protesters carried banners and posters reproducing the pictures of the body of Said. It can be considered as a catalyst for the events of 2011.



of coverage and the Western media, how do they like to construct reality? By emphasizing the role of Facebook all the time and using a kind of cultural motif aimed at Western audiences: like the aspect of gender, whilst being very important, there is a bias in Western media where certain aspects are covered, such as women's clothing.

The case of Al-Jazeera has had a unique position, being a channel that is not located in its national environment, but in a Pan-Arab dimension, so here we have another paradox: we have a channel based in Qatar (an autocracy<sup>7</sup>), and which is a source of information for these different democratic movements in the region.

There is no denying that the role of Al-Jazeera in Tunisia was decisive, without its unifying role no one would have known about the Tunisian revolution. This television network proved to be more important than social media (Facebook and Twitter) in the dissemination of revolutionary ideas; in fact, many of its workers joined the demonstrations.

The Tunisian revolution was a major trigger for what would happen on January 25 in Egypt, but without the masses gathered in Tahrir Square<sup>8</sup> nothing would have happened. What happened in Tunisia, despite its different dynamics, was inspirational in the sense that, to put it ironically, the Egyptians were jealous of what happened in Tunisia. They looked at themselves as Egyptians and saw themselves as responsible for something, saying: "*We were aware that we are not only citizens, but we have very important responsibilities. We belong to this nation, and if the Tunisians have done this, if they can do it, so can we.*"

There were other triggers after the immolation of the young Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi<sup>9</sup>, which sparked the events in Tunisia. There were also a number of similar immolations in Cairo and the rest of Egypt and, at

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<sup>7</sup> The country is now ruled by the Seikh Hamad, who expelled his father from power (Sheikh Khalifa) through a coup in June 1995. It is an autocracy, a form of government with absolute power.

<sup>8</sup> Liberation Square, or Tahrir Square in Arabic, is the largest public square in the centre of Cairo, and it has been the main focus of protests in the city.

<sup>9</sup> Young Tunisian vegetable seller, who immolated himself outside the Town Hall where he lived because the police had confiscated his pushcart, his only source of income. His gesture was the trigger for the "Jasmine Revolution" in Tunisia.

the same time, there was the group that appeared later: “We are all Khaled Said”. That was a sign that people were beginning to observe and that the activists were beginning to observe, and people went out into the street thinking, “Maybe something might happen. But who was not observing closely, who was not paying attention? The Mubarak regime.”

Finally, the last triggers were the social media and how they worked. Smartphones (phones with Internet connections), blackberries, iphones, etc. have been, if anything, more crucial to the dissemination of news than the actual software itself, and to being kept up to date by the minute with what was happening, hence their strategic importance to organize in coordination and to be constantly informed.

Because if they did not have these devices in their hands, in their pockets, they could not have kept up to date and communicated with people in Tahrir Square and in many other places. Without this amazing hardware in their pockets to get up to date information by the second, coordination of the masses would not have been possible. Thanks to them it was much simpler and more flexible. Part of the success is no doubt due to these devices.

What has affected the Arab population most? What media do they most respect? The most important factor has been word of mouth. But tools like Al-Jazeera and Facebook may be crucial to a more democratic future; these media and social networks facilitate democratic access of all sectors of the population (including women).

What other countries could follow the trail of Tunisia and Egypt? How far will the Facebook wave extend? Syria and Iran already have access to cyberspace; it is only a matter of time before they are flooded with democratic ideas imported from other countries. Globalization is unstoppable.

Nobody expected what happened on January 25<sup>10</sup>, 2011. One feature of this revolution was the speed with which things happened and developed on all fronts, at a dizzying pace. During the time that there were attempts to establish communication between the old regime and the

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<sup>10</sup> The so-called *Day of Wrath*, the first day of street demonstrations in Egypt.

ordinary people, an idea or proposal would be presented by what was called the Council of the Elders, but this idea quickly became obsolete in less than two hours, because the speed with which ideas, plans and emotions developed did sometimes even lead to confusion.

There has been discussion about the perception of the Arab revolutions in the American media: they are in general afraid of the Arab Spring and the seizure of power by other players that could mean an attack on American security. The American media concentrated in the safest places, but did not follow the events in small towns. Any possible Salafi control of the new Arab governments terrifies the U.S., which fears the power vacuum (no clear Democratic leaders) facilitating the entry of Islamist groups like Hezbollah or the Wahhabis. The demonization of Shi'ism was condemned.

### 2.1.3. Conspiracy theories

Some basic questions have been asked: Was the revolution planned? Did they know what would happen?

Because many people have talked about groups and activists who had been working in the area, and here there is endless speculation, e.g. they had been trained by the CIA, by the Serbs, by the U.S., by al-Qaeda, etc.

There are numerous conspiracy theories, it is clear that activists have had training in many fields, but not as a deliberate strategy for what would happen later, but as part of their professional expertise. There is no institution in the world that has the capacity to train three or five or ten individuals to lead 20 million people towards this revolution (as in the case of Egypt). It would require incredible leadership for ten people to be able to achieve something like that.

There were people who have had training, which they talk about in their books where they recollect experiences in Serbia, and many other places, and they have met together with groups like *Kefaya*<sup>11</sup> or April<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Note 3.

<sup>12</sup> The April 6 youth movement emerged in the spring of 2008 to support the claims of workers demonstrating in the industrial city of Mahalla El-Kubra.

and shared ideas gained from various sources to deal with the most brutal police forces.

If what happened in Egypt had been planned in advance, it would have been called a revolution from the beginning, but it was a protest, a demonstration, and went in a specific direction. It is not true when some intellectuals talk and say: Yes, we knew, that was what we wanted and what we directed, what we wanted to achieve. That does not do justice to what happened.

It was not a movement organized by a specific group, it was initiated by young people and the middle class who had access to the Internet, but it was a people's revolution, which was not adopted or claimed by any specific group. Lack of leadership has been a point of strength in the Egyptian revolution, because you could not really control, buy or imprison anyone. No one wanted to stand up publicly and say I speak for everyone, people said I speak for myself, not on behalf of any group. An enormous number of people were on the street every day.

Another factor that led to the success of the revolution was the slowness of Hosni Mubarak. He was always three days behind the events. If he had been fast enough, the revolution would not have prospered, it would have failed. On January 25, events and demonstrations were going alright until 18.00 or until 19.00, then the situation became turbulent, and from 23.00 it exploded into violence.

#### **2.1.4. Post-revolution or transition?**

It has been discussed at great length whether it was a revolution, a transition or a simple rising. There has in the same way been extensive analysis regarding the objectives of the uprisings.

In the Western media it has been said that they are uprisings for freedom, it has also been said, and it is relevant, that they are uprisings for dignity, which is another different concept, but there are certainly other elements to consider.

On February 11<sup>13</sup> 2011, there was a situation of great euphoria: people celebrated the achievements with a sense of victory. The Egyptians have seen incredible political participation by the people, who said “we want to do something, something that’s different.” There were at least 30 ideas from political parties and around 600 political groups working on the ground.

So, after having got rid of the old regime, a big difference has been observed amongst those who participated in the revolution with respect to how they see the future.

It has been questioned whether the uprisings could be classed as a revolution, mentioning, on the one hand, a quote from Fidel Castro, who said “*a revolution is a struggle to the death between the future and the past,*” a fact that is not reflected in Tunisia or Egypt. It is at the same time felt that it could be considered to be a revolution, maybe later, when an outcome has been specified. For now, it is just a movement against the established order.

Civil society, destructured by authoritarian regimes as part of their strategy to stay in power, has coalesced in order to overthrow them, but without the clear purpose of remaining and becoming the new leaders. There is a dilemma between carrying the revolution to its logical conclusion, perhaps a complete break with the past, or preserving the state. Beyond this, their “political agenda” is still uncertain.

It is in the nature of types of authoritarian regime not to leave any alternative, not to allow consensus, or any other leader to emerge, i.e. the vacuum is part of the characteristics of these dictatorships. They create this vacuum in order to be indispensable and irreplaceable.

In the Arab world, the movement towards change seems unstoppable, but many questions arise; they are political revolutions with no leaders and no guidelines for political behaviour. One could consider that Tunisia and Egypt have completed the change and that what has happened is

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<sup>13</sup> The day Mubarak resigned his position of Egyptian President after 18 days of demonstrations in Egypt.

pushing the region into a new Middle East and, yet, they have only achieved stability maintained by their armies. What will their new forms of governments be?

One of the biggest pending challenges has been leadership, there was no leadership, nor any intellectual framework to bring together all the people from different policy areas. The absence of a strong leadership displaying a common vision and offering a source of inspiration capable of making the Egyptian people look for a common future together, and around which they could join together to achieve it.

Nor has there been any consensus about the direction to be taken in policies: in both domestic and foreign policy. We have witnessed large demonstrations for peace and freedom, and against some of the old policies, particularly those related to peace and relations with Israel. The focus has moved from domestic affairs to foreign affairs, especially in regard to relations with Israel.

As with all revolutionary processes, there is a rapid change, which obtains in a short time things not achieved, sometimes, in decades of supposed reformist desire and action, but which leaves an inevitable vacuum that affects all levels.

We see that despite the efforts for an orderly transition in Egypt, the accelerated dismantling of some of the pillars of power in the previous regime has upset the balance, with a certain degree of insecurity and social unrest.

This readjustment process, complex and likely to be long, has been marked by a first stage involving the dismantling of the old regime's institutions, with its tendency at times towards hasty retribution and counter-revolutionary attempts or exploitation of the situation by other players through destabilizing actions like, as in the case of Egypt, violent religious confrontation and other barbaric actions that have produced confusion and insecurity.

If the transition phases are considered to be the most difficult stages for people and societies, the scene in Egypt is even more complicated for several reasons. Firstly, due to its lack of leadership and, therefore,

absence of unity according to clear, well defined objectives; this leadership role has been taken on by the army in the transition phase, which means the old regime has not yet been removed.

There were 30 coalitions, which were self-proclaimed revolutionary coalitions; so the strength of Tahrir Square, the multiplicity and lack of leadership, turned against the Egyptian people after February 11. So many factions and ideologies were a strong point in Tahrir Square, but not so much after February 11, in fact it became a rupturing factor, for splitting into different groups, and what Egypt is now facing is a lack of clarity regarding where it is heading.

Precisely because of the void left by these dictatorships by creating the fiction of a lack of alternative to the regime, in the case of Egypt this place has become occupied by a third player that has been the army. This third player has its own guidance, its own set of values, its own scenario and visions for the future. Here is a provisional, internal authority that will undoubtedly have a major impact on the country's future.

We know how the change of regime starts, but nobody has a crystal ball to say how it will end. On the Arab periphery we already have the case of Somalia and the uncertain future of Sudan, following the referendum on secession in the South. A story that Egypt tried to prevent and whose outcome could end up upsetting the delicate balance of the Nile Basin.

In Egypt, the "*National Assembly for Change*<sup>14</sup>" led by El Baradei, created a supposed united front. The spontaneous revolution of the Internet youth seemed to give way to another political organization. The *Supreme Council of the Armed Forces*<sup>15</sup> promotes the banning and dismantling of the hitherto ruling National Democratic Party, approved by the Administrative Court on April 16, 2011. The party was in power since its founding in 1978 by the then President Anwar Al-Sadat, it was a member of the Socialist International from the following year until its expulsion from the latter on February 1, 2011, due to the uprising. At the same time, with good logic -since there had been a widespread demand for its abolition for more

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<sup>14</sup> Egyptian citizens association which aims to change the political reality of their country, Egypt.

<sup>15</sup> Governing body that ensures the transition in Egypt.

than a decade- the Emergency Act of 1981 (issued by President Sadat) was annulled, which the parliament had again extended for two years on May 1, 2010, but with new limitations. The reason given was the struggle against Islamist terrorism, but it had in fact allowed Mubarak a state of emergency for the entire period that served other political purposes.

The Egyptian military junta began modifying some of the constitutional terms after the referendum, which was followed by the constitutional declaration. They modified some laws on the formation of parties, then came the parliamentary elections, then the constitution and, finally, the presidential elections.

The framework for action already defined is very close to a “*step by step*” reform process from within the system. There is no crisis, no major changes. This action plan bears no resemblance at all to revolutionary logic or expectations to lay the foundations for a new system.

Secondly, another major difficulty in this transition process is the disintegration of parties, which remained united in the pre-revolutionary phase under a common goal: to overthrow the dictator, but which now seem to emphasize with increasing force the enormous differences, where the form and nature of the State is the area of greatest discrepancy. Many people fear that Islamists are working, indirectly, to build an Islamic state. So most political dispute revolves around the secular state vs. Islamic state debate. Of all the political groups, it is the Muslim Brotherhood and its new *Freedom and Justice* party that are best organized and able to form a majority in parliament. The result of this interim or transitional period will be different and will have to be judged case by case, and there is most likely to be a greater Islamic tendency in most of the governments formed in the future.

The Middle East is not the same as before. The question is: Is this new Middle East going to be an inflection of the American version that was promoted a few years ago by the Bush administration? So, in this new Middle East will there be more democratic societies that are more open to Western values? Will these societies be more open to the free market, to investment, cooperation between East and West? Will this new society in the Middle East reflect a peaceful coexistence between Israel and the Arab world?



Can we expect a common block to be achieved in the Middle East, bringing together all Arab countries, all the Middle Eastern countries, such as Turkey, Iran and even Israel? Will there be a more united and compact Middle East, or will there be an even more divided and fragmented Middle East in the near future?

Of all those who participated in the revolution there are many different views about the future, about the identity of the country, about how to build the constitution, the institutions; so, because of these different views, there is still no consensus about how to build all this. There is no consensus regarding the state: will it to be unconnected to religion, modern and secular? Or will it be a semi-Islamist State? Will the constitution reflect a set of democratic values or not? It is not yet resolved.

Most young Arabs revolutionaries probably do not ask to follow in the footsteps of the West, or for the West to lead that change. A good deal of them have lived and been educated in the West, and they admire its achievements, especially the economic ones, and share fundamental principles of human rights and freedoms. But they are not convinced about the goodness of its *way of life*, its relativism, its secularism, unacceptable to them, or its loss of values relating to, for example, the family, while rejecting its egocentricity or interventionist policies regarding the Arab and Islamic world. Will that change if Western policies do not change?

The list of pending reforms, in order to achieve an international community that is more respectful of international law, and more just and democratic, is long and familiar. You cannot expect international justice if, for example, the very parties to the Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) look for ways to escape potential responsibilities for the latter, or if the Geneva Conventions are not applied afterwards by its own signatories, or if the United Nations Security Council discriminates according to the political expediency of its permanent members. You cannot demand democratic elections and then, when you do not like the results, ignore them and try to impose other realities. You cannot condemn and outlaw torture, only to later look for loopholes or bring about their practice elsewhere.

We are at a crossroads and do not know whether we are moving towards a new democratic alternative; and whether Arab societies will be able to build open societies, to achieve a new, modern, truly democratic

state or, on the contrary, they will lead to radical governments. These two alternatives are possible.

According to Mahdi Redissi, a political scientist and professor of political science at the University of Tunis, revolutions are not democratic by themselves, to be so they have to have leadership and values, without this the revolution can lead to chaos or civil war, or even lead to the institution of an Islamic republic. For the implementation of a democratic regime it is necessary to have patience, tolerance and flexibility.

A redundant statement is that these movements are and express "the voice of the people." We should qualify this. They are in fact the voice of "a part of the people." Without minimizing the importance of this expression of will, which has as we have already seen led to two coups in Tunisia and Egypt, it is one thing to give these popular uprisings the prominence they deserve and even to initiate reform processes, based on the principles and policies they call for, and quite another to attribute to them all the ultimate consequences of the expression of popular will, a legitimacy that, in the democratic terms it seeks to defend, can only come from the polls. The opposite can entail, for themselves and others, acting and building in the vacuum, with the consequent errors. Even though two or three million people have demonstrated in various Egyptian capital, this does not automatically imply that they express the will of 85 million Egyptians.

## **2.2. The transition in Egypt**

How much strength does the political, administrative and judicial process initiated in the country against the former President, his family and his government (including many military figures from the highest ranks) have amongst the Egyptian Armed Forces?

After the first measures following the removal from office of President Mubarak and his government-dissolution of the legislature, banning the ruling party, political purge of the security services, purging of those responsible for alleged illegalities and corruption, repeal of the Emergency Law, which dated from the Sadat period, etc.- the Political Parties Act was amended in May. Afterwards, the Supreme Council of Egyptian Armed Forces entrusted a commission of lawyers with the

preparation of amendments to the Law on the Exercise of Political Rights (Electoral Act), already subject to successive amendments following its adoption in 1956. This amended Act shall apply to future elections planned<sup>16</sup>.

The time factor in Egypt was described as crucial by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which assumed responsibility for governing the country temporarily, according to them there is an agenda. The new parliament should have been in charge of amending the Constitution or making a new one. There were doubts and controversies about this, and the prevailing view was the one of many who thought that a new constitution can only be made by a Constituent Assembly, which incorporates representatives from all sectors of society.

The parties, such as the new Wafd<sup>17</sup> (or neo-Wafd), have accused the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces of acting unilaterally and undemocratically, whereas the Muslim Brotherhood supports the approach of the transition period. They are interested in a quick transition, which is supposed to benefit them in early elections, compared to other political forces seeking to prolong the time periods, in order to prepare and try to extend their presence in society.

One of the biggest challenges in Egypt has been political leadership of the revolution. The absence of this leadership, according to the new model, means there should be a new constitution immediately after the revolution, and not after the parliamentary elections, i.e. the constitution needs to be established first. Despite the changes that have taken place after the revolution and the changes in several laws related to political rights and elections, the social, cultural and political status quo has not matured enough to produce parliamentarians able to draft the Constitution.

Besides the difficulty of reaching a consensus on key issues surrounding the secular or Islamic nature of the state and other related issues, there are still many unanswered questions: Who will elect the Constituent Assembly to write the new social contract? Moreover, to what extent will

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<sup>16</sup> The first democratic parliamentary elections after the uprisings took place in Egypt in November and December 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Egyptian liberal nationalist party.

that assembly be free to present a new constitution, echoing the political and intellectual trends in society, and according to what kind of criteria and guarantees?

During the past 30 years there has been an overlap between the government and the de facto ruling regime and it has therefore been very easy to get rid of Mubarak, but this does not mean an immediate change in the regime and the regime structure that is still standing.

It will take some time to make these changes, things will not change in a few weeks due to the weight of the huge bureaucracy in Egypt, the state establishment, the structure of the institutions, the security forces, all this represents the old regime that is still there and it will take some time to get rid of them too, or at least change them.

“When I talked to the Egyptian authorities, up to three years ago, some of them told me there were at least a million, or even more, people who were the keepers of the regime because they were paid directly, because the system paid them”, argued one of the experts. The question is: Have these people disappeared? Where have they gone?

I do not think there is a conspiracy theory, but there are counterrevolutionary actions that are trying to stop this revolution from succeeding. Even inside the uprisings, Western support is suspect, European and American powers, as well as the leading Arab powers, lead the counterrevolution, notably Saudi Arabia and Qatar, who would like to limit and control any democracies that might arise in the Arab world.

In this time of transition, is it moving forward or going backwards? This is the great question relating to Egypt and also the region.

Egypt is a country that moves between modernity and traditionalism, a dualism that causes social confrontation. It has a modern liberal side, but also another very conservative and Islamic side, the first Islamic movement in the whole region began in Egypt in 1928, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood that started up some years after the abolition of the Caliphate in Turkey in 1922 in order to restore it. Today, there are efforts to rebuild new liberal opposition political parties, but they will take time to mature, to be able to compete with the old organized

political forces, represented by different currents of political Islam, including the Muslim Brotherhood.

There is a civil society, but it is not sufficiently active and strong, as it was in the springs of some Eastern European countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Ukraine and Georgia. The organization displays a weak social base, and it may currently be unable to compete with traditional political organizations based on religion. The political forces that succeed in the first parliamentary and presidential elections will be crucial to define the new state and the new constitution. It is essential that leaders emerge to guide the revolution and to help decide what is wanted for Egypt, a secular or an Islamic state? It was stressed that the dictator has been overthrown, but not the dictatorship: dismantling a regime that has lasted over 20 years is extremely difficult.

### **2.3. The extension of the uprisings to other countries: Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria**

The extension of the uprisings to other countries, such as Libya and Yemen, has been dealt with rapidly. Alleging that the uprising in Libya is different, it has degenerated into a civil war, with international military intervention justified on humanitarian grounds, and to defend the revolting *civilian population*, by UN Security Council resolution 1973 at the request of the League of Arab States. What is clear is that it has led to the demand to overthrow the regime and, despite the future *assurances* contained in G8 documents, the doubts have not been dispelled. The ultimate goals of the rebels are not clear and the country's tribal nature and its history of differences between Cyrenaica<sup>18</sup> and Tripolitania<sup>19</sup> leave a major unknown factor.

The overthrow of the Gaddafi regime would only be the beginning, but the end should be that the country can have a fairer and more democratic system, not for it to break up and end up being a failed state, or various. One thing is the good intentions expressed by the G-8 and another is what really happens, not only taking into account internal Libyan factors but also regional ones. It should be recalled, for example,

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<sup>18</sup> Historical region located on the northeast coast of Libya.

<sup>19</sup> Historic region in western Libya, centred on the coastal city of Tripoli.

that Gaddafi came to power as a consequence of the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War and the inability of the West and the international community to give the conflict a just solution.

In the intervention in Libya we can see the closing of a circle that began with the Suez crisis, also in the area, when France and the UK intervened independently and the U.S. reacted to it, and since then France and the UK have taken different paths. This is the first time there has been an intervention in the area where France and Britain have gone in together and the U.S. has joined in later. It is also an interesting phenomenon that will have a profound implication on development in the area.

It seems important in Yemen that President Saleh has left the country, for whatever reason, but he is out of the country today. In Yemen, where we should not forget the tribal influence and its divided past, there is also an imminent risk of civil war.

In the case of Bahrain, the demonstrators have been demanding democracy for years. Ten years ago they were promised reforms that would allow a transition in Bahrain from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. But this never happened. Due to Bahrain's Shiite majority, the spectre of democracy would at the same time mean the end of a Gulf monarchy, and a possible government formed by the Shiites of Bahrain. However, discrimination against the majority Shiite population was further increased, sometimes brutally. Bahrain's regime has been unable to stop the demonstrators, and the Saudis were forced to invade<sup>20</sup>. The conflict in Bahrain helped to obstruct the revolutionary wave, creating divisions.

Despite the protests in Bahrain (the head of government has been ruling for forty years) before the Iranian revolution, the media have succeeded in associating it with the Shiites and the regime's brutal response has managed to put the Shiites against it.

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<sup>20</sup> Faced with mass demonstrations demanding an end to the monarchy, from mid February 2011, the king of Bahrain Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa asked the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in mid-March 2011, to send troops from their common force.

On March 21, 2011, King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain said his country had prevented a foreign plot that had targeted the Gulf countries. *"An external plot has been promoted for 20 or 30 years until the ground was ripe for subversive designs"*, he said. "I am hereby announcing the failure of this plot," he continued. It was clear he meant that the thousands of protesters from Bahrain that his forces had crushed were in fact Iranian agents and the plot went back to the Iranian revolution.

#### **2.4. Future and identity of the new Middle East**

Emphasis was placed on the potential role of the West, asking it not to worry only about the threats to its safety, but also to try to support, assist and accompany the process of guiding the revolution and directing it towards the construction of leaderships that specify the achievements of revolutions in democracies.

There are currently two dynamics in the Middle East today: On one hand, secular popular revolutions led by young people and workers who are overthrowing the old dictatorships. On the other hand, the struggle between Sunnis and Shiites, which is at its peak and is likely to lead to more violence. Al Qaeda is no longer an anti-imperialist force, it is a Sunni group fighting Shiites in an internal civil war throughout the region. This is the legacy of Bin Laden.

The joint struggle against dictatorships, and for the establishment of democratic systems, could extend to the entire Arab world, which could be a very different scenario two years from now. It was stressed that the international community is witnessing the start of a process of change, and which should concentrate in the future on trying to build a democratic system, and avoiding new theocratic -Islamic regimes.

There has been a warning about the danger of sectarianism and the rejection of others, as well as its manipulation, triggering conflict and violence, although it is considered that this does not always imply radicalism. In an area where religious identity is always present, it is suggested that sectarianism has always been used to achieve power, such as, for example, after the Lebanese civil war the fact that there was only one armed political force, Hezbollah, has prevented this country from enjoying full democracy.

In historical times in which there is confusion, it is important to avoid errors, an error would involve being too optimistic or too proactive and thinking that is possible, without anything more and in the short-term, to export Western concepts of liberal democracy into social realities that are different. Another no lesser danger, and perhaps more pervasive, is relativism: thinking that humanity is not one and that there is therefore no possibility of universal values governing coexistence.

There was encouragement to pay attention to the emergence of new identities, due to the existence of a real fear that revolutions would degenerate into Islamist regimes, noting that the West has never promoted democratic regimes in the Arab world. The questions posed were whether democracy could coexist with Islam. Should we follow the Turkish model? The latter model was not considered to be a perfect system, amongst other reasons because redesign of the constitution is still pending. It has been considered very difficult to make predictions, but the possibility of the emergence of new radical Islamic movements exists and, especially, the West's reaction to this possible phenomenon is unpredictable, even military interventions cannot be ruled out, as in Irak. The advice has been to try to avoid military intervention, and encourage more dialogue between the two sides. Some have considered that if the Islamists won in Egypt or Tunisia, by democratic means, the West would have no option but to accept it.

The Muslim Brotherhood or the Islamic forces are acquiring great power in Egypt. And there is another big problem with respect to political Islam and that it is represented today by other trends and other forces, and these forces may be more traditional, more extreme; this is the Salafi trend.

The Salafists are very close to what is happening in Saudi Arabia, and they are also supported by the Wahhabites. The media have reported incidents in Egypt, where the groups threatened have been women, Christians, etc. These Salafi groups have been interfering with the social behaviour of normal people. This movement has been related to, or behind, most of this behaviour. These forces emerged after January 25<sup>21</sup>, before which they were under the control of state security forces.

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<sup>21</sup> See Note 9.



The case of the fall of the Syrian regime has been considered, warning that it could be a very bloody episode since the Alawites<sup>22</sup> could be severely punished and persecuted, and that the sectarian development of the revolution could slow the processes of secularization/democratization. There is a danger of sectarianism and the rejection of others, as well as its manipulation, triggering conflict and violence, although it is considered that this does not always imply radicalism. In an area where religious identity is always present, it is suggested that sectarianism has always been used to achieve power.

In Syria, the demonstrations began in Dar'a, a Syrian town near the border with Jordan. Now the demonstrations have spread and the government has responded harshly, killing hundreds. The Sunnis are the majority in Syria and the regime has crushed the Muslim Brotherhood (Sunnis) in the past, so that the risk of revenge and getting even with the Alawite faction in power is present. The protests spread to other parts of Syria and the regime responded clumsily and brutally, with violence and the usual allegations of foreign conspiracies. While preventable, it is very likely that a sectarian civil war will take place in Syria, with all the bloodletting of Irak.

Syria is home to major Sunni and Shiite holy places. Many Sunni Jihadists-Salafis see the dominant Alawite regime in Syria as a government of infidels that has to be challenged, and this could lead to tensions with the Shiites in Lebanon and the Irak regime. The civil war in Syria would spread to Lebanon, where tensions between Sunnis and Shiites are already at a peak. The Shiite militia Hezbollah, supporting the Alawite regime of Assad, would establish the first alliances that would immediately involve support for the large Sunni majority of the Syrian population that support the Sunnis in Lebanon.

#### **2.4.1. Regional competition for ideological hegemony: Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey**

Amongst the players, there are three that will help shape the future and identity of the Middle East. In order of their actual influence on the ground, we find Saudi Arabia, then Iran and finally Turkey.

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<sup>22</sup> Followers of Alawism, a heterodox sect of Islam, account for between 20% and 25% of the Syrian population, the current head of state, Bashar Al-Assad is Alawi.

Will the influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran block the development of these democratic movements in the region or, conversely, will it be helpful?

However important the popular revolutions sweeping the region are, they may be overshadowed by sectarian violence. Just as the Egypt of Gamal Abd-al-Nasser from the 50s to the 70s won the ideological battle in its cultural hegemony in the Arab world, we are currently witnessing the domination of the Saudi monarchy in its cold war against Arab nationalists, the result of which has led to an increase in Saudi control over culture and media production in the Arab world. While so-called moderate Sunni dictators had betrayed all the causes that Arabs have been concerned about, Iran seemed to be stealing the banner of Arab nationalism.

The popular Arab revolutions extending from Tunisia to Egypt, Yemen and elsewhere have changed the discourse. The rise of Arab nationalism and the secular and leftist movements of the opposition mean that Arab governments now could also promote causes led by Iran and Hezbollah (the ideology of resistance, including the cause of the oppressed), but with Arab support, weakening the appeal of Iran and Hezbollah. A more independent Turkey, Sunni and hostile to Israel, also means that there is an alternative to Iran. Now it is the people who are against the regimes supported by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. The prospect of Arab democracy means that Arab foreign policy will be more independent and less accommodating to Israel, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. The return of Arab nationalism and the prospect of Arab democracy terrify the Saudi monarchy.

The third actor in the region would be Turkey, which could influence the direction these movements take, as has already happened in the past, an inspiring model. Turkey is a Muslim country, but it is at the same time the only Muslim country that has achieved a very different model to other Muslim countries. It is based on secularism, which has not been achieved anywhere in the Arab region, not even in modern Egypt. Egypt has never achieved the same degree of secularization and modernization as in Turkey today.

On the other hand, the Islamic Movement in Turkey, represented today by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in power, has been more moderate and more open to democratic values, more so than any other Islamic movement in the region, including the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt.

Turkey's role has been discussed, noting that U.S. foreign policy is currently based on a neo-Ottoman vision and that Syria could be one of the early failures of neo-Ottoman Turkish politics<sup>23</sup>, as well as the flotilla incident in the Gaza Strip, which has substantially worsened the good relations that this country has with Israel.

#### **2.4.2. The role of the West: EU, the U.S. and Spain**

- **European Union**

There was a review of European Union policy in the Mediterranean: the Economic Agreements, the Barcelona Process, its policy towards the Gulf Cooperation Council, Partnership Agreements and the Neighbourhood Policy, the Union for the Mediterranean, emphasizing that Europe could not develop a proper policy framework in the area.

The Arab Spring caught Europe off guard and, also, mired in a deep economic crisis, with the euro's future in doubt and political change, due to the handing over of the still incipient leadership of France to the resurgent Germany. All in all, a background that is hardly conducive to facing up to the dissolution of a status quo that has lasted decades. However, at this point, Europe has no other choice but to react by reviewing its policy towards the Mediterranean and the Arab world in general.

Relations between the EU and the southern Mediterranean, until the Arab Spring, were based on an implicit assumption: the dictatorships in the South slowed-or at least tried to - two of the great European nightmares, namely terrorism and illegal immigration, and Europe did not put all its weight behind condemning or combating the lack of freedom and democracy, and corruption, on the southern bank. All in all, the North opted for stability over the political, social and economic change that societies in the South aspired to, not daring to support it.

The problem has arisen from the inconsistency of the Europeans: at any given time help was given to democratic movements, then they let them

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<sup>23</sup> Turkey's political ideology that promotes foreign policy involvement similar to that in the Ottoman Empire era.

fall, and they ended up in jail or tortured or killed or exiled. There is deep scepticism amongst intellectuals and people in the region, they think: What can the Europeans give us? One day they say yes, the next they say no.

It is obvious that we need a redefinition of relations with countries in the Arab region that passes through various main areas. The first of these areas is self-critical. The Europeans have tended to look at their southern neighbours from a post-colonial prism, outside from the "right" or the "left", unable to see the reality behind the stereotype. The second area is institutional, it is necessary to rebuild the institutional framework through which the EU has conducted relations with the countries of the region. The third priority is economic. In the short term, countries that are already going through a, more or less, precarious transition phase, such as Tunisia or Egypt, need to promote trade, investment and human exchanges to train professionals and officials.

- **The U.S.**

The Western world has been wrong too many times throughout its history of relations with the Middle East and the Arab and Islamic countries, since the colonial period. The fundamental alliance of the U.S. with Israel, for domestic political reasons, has too often been to the detriment of its other national interests in the area and, especially to policies perceived by the Arab and Islamic countries as double standards, in both their principles and actions. The uprisings of the Arab Spring once again placed the U.S. administration in a decade long dilemma: stability through the support of existing regimes, even though they may be authoritarian or undemocratic, or changing them by force and what in the Bush era was described as "constructive chaos."

It seems that the Arab Spring also took Washington by surprise and it had to react, quickly getting on the crest of the wave with its support for changes in Tunisia and Egypt, once it became clear that it was too late to address the situation with simple reforms, and their regimes could no longer cover up their corruption or internal errors, or accommodate the demands of their demonstrators.

It is true that the U.S. did promote the Madrid Peace Conference, as compensation for the Arab allies of the First Gulf War of 1991 against the

invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein, and then they politically appropriated the Oslo Accords between the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993, but they failed to lead them to their anticipated conclusion, with the well-known consequences. The inconclusive progress between Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak in the Camp David Accords in 2000 and Taba in 2001, followed by the Ariel Sharon leadership in Israel, ending up by leaving radical Arab spirits in despair. It is now well known what has happened to date with the subsequent peace initiatives, such as the 2007 Annapolis initiative.

Decades of oppression, the recent occupation of Iraq, and more recently with U.S. support for Mubarak until the last minute, has brought a deep distrust of many Arabs towards the U.S., which has lied to them before. The excessive use of force displayed by the U.S. led to a weakening of its hegemony and the Arab people are now exploiting their destiny. A revolt against Arab dictators is an uprising against their American sponsor as well. U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East is based on what the U.S. perceives as good for itself, not what is good for the region. But the region is fighting and winning.

Just as the memory of Saddam was purified after the U.S. occupation killed him, so some purified the memory of Bin Laden, and he was also able to become an anti-colonial icon and martyr. Only an American execution could rehabilitate these criminals. Even secular Muslims, including the Shiites, did not rejoice in the implicit colonial act surrounding his death and the publicity made of it. Americans complain when others celebrate the death of Americans, but the world saw Americans hold a grotesque execution.

Policy towards Sudan has also been a mistake. Egypt, for whom what happens in that country and with the Nile is a red line for its safety, tried to prevent the consummation of the agreement that has led to a self-determination referendum in the South and its pronouncement in favour of independence, which has breached one of the fundamental principles of the Organization for African Unity.

- **Spain**

It has been considered that foreign policy arouses little interest in Spain, especially in the Arab world, except in the case of the Second Iraq War

(2003). There lacks a strategic approach towards the inhabitants of the other shore of the Mediterranean. The intervention of Spain in the Barcelona Process has been stagnant, since the role of Spain following the transition as a bridging country has maintained a low profile in the Mediterranean, completely conditioned by its relationship with Morocco. Spain has aligned its Mediterranean policy behind the EU, but it is forced to redefine its own strategy, especially because it is in the front line.

The resurgence of Turkey has been reviewed and its role in the foreign policy of Spain, which is in part because Spain has investments in the country worth over 4,000 million Euros, being the second recipient country of Spanish exports, behind the U.S. Trade has led Spain to build a close relationship with Turkey, beyond the general tone of the EU.

It has been said that to have influence in the Mediterranean Spain's foreign policy should consider three types of incentives: economic, moral and social ones, and that the policy of Spain towards the Mediterranean to date could be defined in consideration of two components, the first and most important being financial. Independently, Spain, has increased its investments in the Mediterranean in recent years; while the second component can be defined as a "Stability pact" through which it consents to authoritarian regimes in exchange for security, or control of the terrorist threat. This pact has been found to be broken and it is facing the Arab Spring, which has taken Europe and Spain by surprise, from a financially unstable and fragile position, and so it has been recommended that it cease strengthening relations with the Mediterranean with purely financial packages, and some recommendations have been suggested in order to meet the challenges:

1. Design a new strategy. The old formulas do not work. It therefore needs a balance, to put aside the neo-colonialist ideology, yet without presuming to lecture on political perfection. There is great scepticism among the Arab population on the role of the EU and the West. However, it is urgent to act according to the real possibilities that the EU can offer and the current needs of the Arab world. A criticism was made of the current Western world, which has its own economic crisis and values crisis, and it does not demonstrate any real capacity to react, and it is in fact losing credibility in the Arab world due to the lack of clarity in its political views like, for example, the change of position, in just 24 hours,

by President Obama, regarding the recognition of pre-1967 Palestinian borders.

2. Change mutual perceptions, the South seeks to be treated as an equal (without paternalism), while the North shows huge rejection and fear of the Arab world. Current initiatives, such as the *Union for the Mediterranean*, are not starting up, and can even be considered to be dead, as most countries never felt part of the Union and did not take up the initiative.

Furthermore, the Barcelona Process never had U.S. participation, which made it unfeasible; just like the Union for the Mediterranean. These types of initiatives will never be effective until they achieve a real partnership between the U.S. and the EU, and are able to design a single policy regarding the Arab world and, more specifically, to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Similarly, the Alliance of Civilizations is also in danger of disappearing, belonging to the pre-Ben Ali era, and framed in a discourse before the Arab revolutions. The content of the Alliance of Civilizations was always a mystery, and yet, many countries joined. It was considered that it might be better not to launch any initiative from the Alliance towards the Arab Spring, and that in order to maintain good relations between Turkey and Spain it might be better to support it.

## **2.5. Some conclusions**

This seminar was planned in the context of the “Arab spring” that is shaking the Middle East and North Africa since the early months of 2011 and that it has mobilized millions of young and grown up people, citizens of different Arab countries, claiming for freedom and dignity. These revolutions have succeeded in overthrowing and shaking many of the leaders of autocratic regimes in the region. It should highlight the role of new technologies and media that have contributed to be known as the “Revolution 2.0” and has been developed on the basis of technology and globalization. All media and new social networks, blogs, Facebook and Twitter as well as satellite television, have been part of this movement which is already irreversible.

The day that the CEMOFPS seminar was celebrated in Madrid, 6 June 2011, the situation was different in each country. This event brought together some actors and witnesses as well as leading experts on the matter. They offered testimonies and analysis of this new situation in the Arab world that has surprised everyone for its fast extension and propagation.

The speakers' speeches and the debate among participants to the seminar enable us to draw the following conclusions:

Some participants argued that the old concepts have become obsolete, there has been a change in the Arab world that claims for new ways of relation. The old regime have collapsed and therefore it has to be designed a new order. The support or the acquiescence of the Western powers to dictatorships or autocratic governments have come to an end. It is time for a convergence in attitudes and democratic position between Europe and the Arab world. Others, however, stated that the positions and policies adopted until now simply have to be adapted, with the premise that development and democracy cannot be imposed.

The speakers presented the subject as it follows:

1. The diversity of sensibilities and realities within the Arab World are hindering the process of change towards democratic states, however, there is a Windows of opportunities to achieve it and put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict.
2. This diversity poses the question: Will the Arab world be able to act as a regional unit, with a single political and economic system?
3. Finally, revolutionary movements seek to overthrow dictatorship regimes and they have proved its ability to do it (Tunisia and Egypt). However, will they be able to dismantle the old system and build strong democratic institutions?, or on the contrary, will they bring a shift toward more radical regimes of religious justification, such as Iran or Saudi Arabia?

The overview in such a diversity as the Arab world is very difficult. Arab revolutions must be analyzed from within, from the Arab mind. An



attempt to reduce the “Arab spring” to a common denominator could lead to serious mistakes of interpretation.

The debate analyzed the role of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian question. Some assured that this issue is also the product of the former dictatorial regime sponsored, or at least accepted by the Western World. The collapse of it will positively affect the solutions. A new attitude toward the conflict will be decisive to move towards the transition. The new generation of young Palestinians refuses to be manipulated for the benefit of internal political problems.

Others believe that you cannot separate the Arab revolutions from the Palestinian revolution and the creation of a Palestinian state. Only the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict will stabilize the region. Meanwhile, the Arab world will continue against the policy of the West and it will be difficult for the Arabs to trust the West.

According to some experts, the approach to the Israeli-Palestinian problem after the revolutions could be a key issue, the policy should focus not on hatred of Israel, but on defense of freedom / dignity of the Palestinians. Otherwise, it may encourage hatred of Israel as either cause or consequence of the Palestinian issue without forgetting that for the Islamist movements the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will always have a deep religious connotation.

The strength of the social movement was not the only aspect of the Egyptian revolt, all political affiliations were represented with their agendas and goals for the future. At first the lack of leadership has been the main force for the success of the revolution and today it is one of the main challenges of the transition.

The transition in the Arab world is presented as a struggle between challenges and opportunities, the process is trapped between the hope of change, the fear of failure and the counterrevolution. They have overthrown some of the leaders but the establishment and the system remain.

The role of the army and security have been discussed; the audience came almost to agree with the idea that they are fundamental

components to the balance of any system of governance and adapting their roles to the new order is crucial to ensure its sustainability and avoid the counter-revolution, as it happened in Iran after 1979. Some participants recalled the clutter and chaos that Iraq suffered after the collapse of its army and security forces, following a decision by the American forces.

The army and security institutions may be well considered, respected as soon as they undergo to democratic political institutions. However, the process of dismantling these traditional institutions, heavily settled, will be long. In any case, the first step should be holding free elections.

To support the process of transition to democracy, it could be helpful for future elections in Arab countries, the presence of international observers who guarantee the transparency and democratic character of the elections. The presence of a Monitoring Committee for the elections, within the previous 3 or 4 months, would provide credibility to these processes. This is to accompany the real architects of the transition. The EU should only act as an umbrella, without participating directly in political and/or electoral outcomes.

This point of the analysis was qualified by the following argument: most of the Arab young revolutionaries do not demand to follow the steps of the West neither does the West lead that change. A good number of them have lived and been educated in the West, and admire its achievements, especially in economic realms and share fundamental principles on human rights and freedoms, but are not convinced of the goodness of its lifestyle, its relativism, its secularism, usually unacceptable to them, or loss of values, such as those relating to family, while rejecting his self-centeredness or its interventionist policies regarding the Arab and Islamic world. Will be changed this without changing Western policies?

For some, one of the true dangers of the revolution is the dominance of sectarian-religious sentiments that could lead the transition towards a situation similar to Iraq. While others warn that sectarianism is more on the eye of the beholder than real on the ground.

Some participants pointed out that Islamist and Salafi ideologies may play a role in the political future of the countries in transition; many are

identified with traditional religious elements also manipulated by some parties of political Islam as the Muslim Brotherhood. But despite this, some think that it should not be violated, under any circumstances, the fundamental right of freedom of expression, and thus Islamist discourses will circulate calling for the establishment of a traditional Islamic society. It is possible that political Islam win elections and constitute Islamic states.

Should we assume that the democratization of Arab countries will be a long process of learning and development, not without dangers?, is it the price it has to be paid for the establishment of democracy?, Should we blindly trust the system?, do we only have to wait until the societies become mature and change for themselves? There was not unanimous answer to these questions.

### 3. PART TWO: THE ARAB SPRING ONE YEAR AFTER THE START OF THE UPRISINGS

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#### 3.1. Egypt

##### 3.1.1. The current situation of the transition

After a year of the beginning of the great movements of protests in Egypt, the use of term of revolution to describe the phenomenon was not clear for all the participants, some of them prefer to call it "great movement for change" or "great protest for change." However one of the participants considered that what has happened in Egypt, in Tahrir Square, from a year ago until now, is indeed a revolution: new ideas were proclaimed by new people and replaced the old ones. Another one said that in Egypt the process was a revolutionary one but for the moment did not meet any revolutionary achievement, while in Libya we did not had a revolutionary process but a kind of revolutionary achievement, because there is a shift from a frame to another. Finally a participant, wondered if what happened is a real revolution or a *coup d'état*, covered by a revolution, it started like the beginning of a popular revolution but a *coup d'état* took place very early in silence and took advantage of what happened.

The discussion began by analyzing the actual situation of the revolutionary scene in Egypt. It was said that it is still dominated by conflicts and clashes. The revolution that started with one slogan ended with lot of divisions, and the main forces present on the ground in Egypt are adopting different agendas.

It was pointed that the main cause of the mess is that the movement lacked since its beginning a comprehensive political vision as well as a political leadership able to replace the "old regime", this situation could represent the main challenge for the future not only of Egypt but also of other countries in the Arab world.

The movement was able to bring the ruling elite down but is failing to replace the "old regime" and because of that vacuum, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) is actually ruling Egypt.

So the following question was raised: Is the SCAF administrating the transitional period or is it containing anger and protests to abort the original movement?

It was noted that SCAF is organizing alone the transitional phase, following its own time table, issuing decrees, laws and regulations, without any consultation, dialogue or consensus with any other force on the ground, so that all legislation are still coming from the top to the bottom which was typical of Mubarak "old regime". In a sense, SCAF can be considered as an extension of the Mubarak regime.

A participant said SCAF is not a mere extension of Mubarak, it is the core of the regime since the *coup d'état* of 1952, Mubarak was ruling as the facade of the military so when he was removed, the face of the real regime appeared. This might be the future dilemma of Egypt, even though Mubarak has been displaced the old regime is still there and more powerful than before with the military running the country. That is the principal reason for the repeated clashes between the SCAF and young groupings that are the real force of the revolution and protests. On the other hand SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood are using the term counter-revolution, pretending Mubarak and their entourages are playing the game and making chaos.

The other side of the image is the actual alliance between the SCAF and the Islamists, represented mainly by the Muslims Brotherhood but also by the Salafists. This alliance has been done since the first day of the revolution maybe before the set down of Mubarak. As a participant reminded, at day 1, the former vice president, Mr. Omar Suleiman, which also have been for 18 years the head of the Egyptian intelligence services, held a wide public meeting with the Muslims Brotherhood representatives, which meant their immediate recognition, to be noted that since 1954 they were never officially recognized even if they had access to the political arena.

The question was raised about why the SCAF and the army went to this path? Many reasons were given:

1. It is easier for the military to have one established, organized political force to deal with and they consider the Muslim Brotherhood as such. It

is a traditional force and not a revolutionary one. They are trying to replace the former political force, the National Democratic Party (NDP), by another one the Muslim Brotherhood, in the Parliament, these latter are acting typically like a ruling party and they actually representing "by excellence" the authority.

2. The second reason is that it is very risky for SCAF to trust and deal with the new political forces represented by the young generations, since in the Arab world today, young people are offering something different: being more open to the occidental world they have adopted a promising and ambitious "freedom agenda" speaking loudly about transparency, corruption in the army among high rank officials and good governance. The current clash between the authority and NGOs, are symbolizing their fears and skepticism about these new forces.

3. The ideological conflict between the Muslim Brothers, or the Islamists in general, and the West will give to the SCAF more influence and strength *vis à vis* of the West, they will be the sole and only force that the West in general and US in particular will deal with or will trust and will be always in need of them, specially when it comes to peace treaties or any other arrangements.

For a participant a revolution needs time, could fail and usually never takes the path the revolutionaries want it to take. The revolution in Tahrir square was against the system represented by both the Muslim Brothers and the "old regime", in this context the alliance between the Muslim Brothers and the SCAF is a counter-revolution, pointing out that the Islamic wave is part of the old establishment which builds its *raison d'être* in opposition with dictatorship and will also suffer from the collapse of the old regime. It would be of utmost importance to understand whether the Arab spring has opened the way to the Muslim Brothers to take the power, or whether the Muslim Brothers are part of the old system. This point is very important in order to understand the future of the political path of the region and specially to calibrate the minorities' fate.

A participant pointed out that commentators described the electoral process in Egypt as a fair and free process, but it was not. SCAF gave the islamists all the facilities to be able to obtain the majority. It has been

manipulated indirectly, by laws and regulations that were behind the process, as for example the law giving the right to create new parties, which was not in the favor of the new born liberal parties or the young grouping but in favor of old well-established and organized power such as islamists. As well as the rule that prohibits religious propaganda or the use of mosques in politics, it was violated without any veto from SCAF. Another example is the newest law concerning presidential elections prohibiting any appeal against the results, which was issued in contradiction with any democratic basis for elections.

A participant said that actually a deal was made between the Muslim Brothers and SCAF, giving the parliament to the first one and the presidential to the latter, so that both will rule the country.

About which political model will be adopted by Egypt, whether the Pakistani, the Turkish, the Iranian or the Saudi model, a participant said that the Turkish model is very far from being adopted because Egypt is no more a modern society anymore, like it was in the 60's, maybe the Pakistani would be more closer but most probably Egypt will reproduce a new version of the 1952 coup d'état.

If at the beginning, the military supported the revolution, it was only a strategy, to get rid of Gamal Mubarak (son of Hosni Mubarak) but after Mubarak step down, and the business community around him gone, they took over and forgot that freedom agenda. The most important decision they took was to nationalize again most of the big companies, following the typical procedure of the 1952 revolution. By then, the same alliance was also created between the free officers and the Muslim Brothers, before the coup and until 1954, in order to eliminate the leftists and the liberals, when they eliminated them, they turned against the Muslim Brothers, and they clashed as history showed us, so is history repeating itself? That is the question.

Whatever the domestic situation, whether Egypt is ruled by the military or by a much more democratic way, Egypt will try to remain a regional key element that prevails in the actual circumstance, but a participant said that he was not sure that Egypt of today is the Egypt of the 50's. The country has weakened since then, all has been said about the failing of Arab nationalism in 1967 and that this failure has allowed the Islamists trend to grow.

In this context it was noted that all the problems of the Mubarak regime are still here, the political and economical crisis as well as the sectarian crisis, that have started in the 70s and still going on with repeated incidents specially against Copts, against individuals as well as churches and communities, and with a more severe trend than before.

### **3.1.2. Political Islam and Democracy in Egypt**

Another question was raised about how strong are the links between Islamists and the military? The results of the democratic elections to the Parliament have shown that for the time being Egyptians are not yet prepared for Liberal Democracy; they did not demand it they prefer an Islamic model of life instead of western.

The Egyptian context has put the question of political Islam at the forefront. Both Muslims Brotherhood and Salafists have been elected. As for the Muslim Brothers, they present themselves, as moderate towards the West when compared to Salafists.

A participant pointed out that reading documents and studies trying to understand who voted for the *Hizb al-Nur* party (Salafists), the dominant image is that all who voted for them, showed a general ignorance about what this party really is.

But ignorance only cannot explain the reasons of the presence of Salafism in the Parliament. West should be very cautious about the results of the elections; and from the western point of view it should be very worried because something very conservative is being prevailing now, but at the same time, west has to recognize the results and not repeat the mistake made after the elections in Algeria and Gaza. The Egyptian society is very cohesive and they voted for more social conservatism, which is linked to political conservatism.

The Muslim Brothers started long time ago as Salafists, but they are now more sophisticated. Politically Salafists have no specific political agenda but they have the capacity to influence people in different areas, regions, governorate etc. they have a network of mosques and are supported and financed by Saudi, it actually is a branch or extension of



wahhabies. It is a real and new phenomenon in Egypt which cannot be neglected because it will shape its future.

For the first time in modern time, a moral police has been established in Egypt by Salafists, the *Jamaa al amr al maarouf wal nihaya*, and is interfering in people personal life, attacking Christians, as well as Muslims because they do not like their personal behavior. It is a very dangerous path, especially that the overall culture of Egyptian people has been Islamized.

Even though, the impact of the defeat of 1967 has been important to shift from the pan-arabism movement towards pan-islamism, the role of the old regime in enhancing political Islam has been neglected. Since 1952, the ruling regime fought the liberal trends and culture because of their connections to what it considered imperialist and colonialist western powers and culture.

After the defeat of 1967, the regime looked to replace the political and intellectual intervention of the west in order to survive, and bet on Islamism.

Islamists were the most important opposition block in the parliament during Mubarak era, even if apparently he was always in confrontation with them, but formerly a deal has been previously set between them and Sadat which worked until now and was based on the disassociation between the engagement with society and people and the task of ruling. Leading the society has traditionally been left to the Muslim Brothers, so that they administrated syndicate, association, charity etc. while governing was the part of the old regime. Actually there is no much difference between Egyptian and Iranian; in both cases most women are wearing scarfs.

Finally it was considered that since the assassination of Sadat by his own colleagues the penetration of the Muslim Brotherhood in the army, in the intelligence and the state apparatus, couldn't be discarded.

### **3.1.3. The policies of the U.S. and Israel and Europe's role**

A participant raised the following question mark about what will be the USA and Israel policies towards Egypt?

A participant said that non-military regime could not be possible as far as full peace is not guaranteed with Israel. The Americans are starting to talk for the first time with the Muslim Brotherhood, but it is not yet known if they will really back up the military-Muslim Brothers because Israel aims to fragment Egypt and Syria as well as all its neighbors.

In Egypt, the Americans never succeeded in establishing a democratic and strong liberal movement, mainly because they ignore the reality of the country and also because of Israel influence. They even played a terrible mistake trying to back little liberals' parties with no real public support, as for example the *Ibn Khaldoun Center*.

As a participant pointed there is not a real change concerning the USA and Israel regarding Egypt policy. After Camp David, Egypt accepted the economical aid offered by the USA, with the ratio 3 to 2 (3 for Israel y 2 for Egypt) since then this funding is key for the Egyptian economy and is a constant instrument used by the USA congress to influence Egyptian affairs. On the other hand, the regime froze the peace process, they considered it imposed on them and they never let the civil society establish any relationship with Israel, actually if anyone had a kind of relation with Israel he had problem with the security apparatus.

During the Bush administration, the Americans added to the Peace Treaty with Israel a "freedom agenda" (MENA program) causing tension with Mubarak regime. Obama adopted a mild address towards Egypt. Nevertheless Egyptians people despised Mubarak because he was playing the game of Israel and Washington against the Palestinians.

The actual military government is using the smart strategy to back Israeli security concerns and the Peace Treaty, as a mean to get recognition and support from the UN and the international community and to protect one of the main American interests in the region. They are also using the Muslim Brotherhood for blackmailing the US, the warning is: if America touches the financial aid, they will revise the agreement with Israel and the Camp David Accords, people of Tahrir Square also want the revision of the peace process.

As it concerns Europe, it is not likely to play a major economical or political role in Egypt. But as a participant said, it is important to state that both Americans and European are against the Arab spring.

### **3.1.4. The economic situation and Civil Society**

It is important to consider the economical situation in Egypt. Part of the problem during Mubarak regime, has been the weakening of the Egyptian economy, a country densely populated with 77 millions people, with high unemployment and poverty rate.

The poor rural society is mostly conservative and the Salafists are very well rooted there, so that the results of the elections are no surprise. Before the 2011 demonstrations in Tahrir Square, there were massive demonstrations around the country, as those of *Mahal al-Kubra* (industrial city) in 2006-2007, and strong clashes with the security forces. The new regime is not being able to solve the bad economical situation especially that the overall perspective for the regional area from Syria to Tunisia is quite pessimistic.

A participant related that working with Egyptian social NGOs put in evidence a deep lack of freedom concerning civil organizations, they have to consult and obtain a special approval from the government in order to be able to start any social project for needy people, the process is usually very long and causes serious delays for the project development.

### **3.1.5. Candidates to the presidential elections**

Considering Egyptian candidates for the next Presidential elections due for the end of May 2012, it was considered that names are not important for that elections, some of them would be Amr Mussa, Ahmed Chafiq, Omar Suleiman, Nabil El Arabi, Abdel Monim Abdel Fottouh, Selim Akwa etc. but what should be kept in mind is that any candidate should obtain previously the approval of both the military and the Muslim Brothers by meeting criteria that they would establish. A participant pointed out that the establishment (the army and the Muslim Brothers) will control the electoral process such as it was controlled by the time of Mubarak.

## **3.2. Syria**

### **3.2.1. The current situation**

The main question raised for Syria was if Bashar al-Assad steps down who is going to replace him? Sunnis and the Muslims Brotherhood are the

best-organized and powerful opposition group, but they have no support within the army, the administration or the regime. So it is being very complicated for them to establish a base. Comparing the situation with Libya where the rebels could establish in Benghazi, a government with its diplomacy and its army to face the Gadhafi regime, in Syria the rebels do not have a base, they only control some parts of Homs and Hama.

A participant witnessed that staying in Damascus the last weeks, he did not have the feeling of a revolution there, the opposition does not control the city and demonstrations are taking place in few neighborhoods. In Syria, both Damascus and Aleppo make almost 50% of the country population but the rebels are not able to mobilize them, so he concluded that if they were not able to do it, it would be very difficult for the revolution to succeed.

A participant argued that the problem in Syria is that there is not a unified opposition: some study said that about 56% of the Syrian population support Bashar el Assad or at least are not against the regime. The Syrian National Council (SNC), the main opposition group, has been created by Qatar, is controlled by a Syrian-French intellectual, but most of its components belong to Muslim Brothers, actually all its leaders are unknown inside the country and they lack of a correct vision of what is the real situation in Syria. Many Syrian do not feel represented by the SNC. The Local Coordination Committees and other groups such as the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change and the Free Syrian Army are called the internal opposition.

For another participant, it is a fallacy to say that a dictatorship has only 50, 60 or 70 % of the vote, because it only can stand if it has more than 90%, if not the system breaks down. Other argued that if you say that 50% is not with the opposition, that means people are not opposing the regime even if they do not support it.

Another participant said that we could not differentiate between external and internal opposition, because most of the autocratic regimes try to eliminate the opposition so they are obliged to go to exile. Besides, the internal one is usually contained and absorbed by the regime or the establishment and usually blackmailed so maybe not harsh enough to push for a real change.

A participant said that Syrian regime has reacted violently to the uprisings but on the other hand, it cannot be stated that the demonstrations were peaceful, since the beginning violence was used by the opponents to the regime and people died since last May under their bullets. Even if the Syrian regime is a totalitarian regime of dictatorship and abuses, it is not quite sure whether the demand for pacific change is dominant in the opposition.

For a participant, it is too late for any reconciliation between the regime and opposition. No one can trust the regime when offering dialogue during bloody shelling; the trust between the regime and the people has disappeared.

For another participant, there is no channel of communication between the opposition and the regime. It is a dead end issue, which may favor the regime. The referendum about the new constitution would be in favor of the regime, because no country would actually like to get stuck in the mud of Syria like it happens in Irak and Afghanistan.

For the general situation, the temptation to arm the opposition is there. If the international community agrees, as the Arab League and Saudi Arabia wish, on arming the opposition, both the Syrian regime and the opposition will radicalize with the consequent result of a bloodier scenario than what we have seen till now. But as long as there is no foreign military intervention, the regime will remain the strongest, on the other hand a military intervention will probably causes much more casualties.

A participant argued that in Zeineddine Ben Ali fell in one month fall, Hosni Mubarak in few days, while in more than a year Bashar Al-Assad is not falling because part of the Syrian population is supporting him not because they like his regime, but for two main reasons, on one hand because they are afraid of a new Irak, a kind of fragmentation that would serve the Americans and Israel interests and on the other hand because the alternative would be renouncing to the front of refusal<sup>24</sup> built by Hafez el Assad and to the Syria- Iran-Hezbollah coalition.

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<sup>24</sup>The refusal front (*Front de Refus*) is composed of countries and political groups against the peace agreements with Israel. Its origin dates back to the years of Hafez Al-Asad, which joined together those countries and groups that supported this front.

### **3.2.2. Some reasons for the uprisings**

Contrarily to Tunisia and Egypt, when the revolutions started in these countries, the problem was mainly economical, the social economical situation was very bad, but it is the opposite in Syria, due to the recent liberalization of the economy, in 2010 the Syrian economy was growing 3,5%, in 2009, 7,5%, and from 2004 until 2010, the economy was steadily growing an average of 5,4% every year.

So that the motivations that led to uprisings in Syria are different from those of Egypt and Tunisia, where the socio-economic factor have had a measurable weight. It all started in the village of Deraa (South Syria), with the protests riots of parents denouncing the disappearance of their children; they did not know where they were. Actually they were claiming for freedom and denouncing the abusive practices of imprisonment in Syria for those who contested the regime, as well as the brutal way the Syrian secret services deal with its people.

A participant argued that we should not ask ourselves why people want to get rid off a family who has been ruling for more than 40 years. With the departure of Bashar Al-Assad, a political culture that has dominated the region the last decades will finally disappear. This political culture was managed by crisis; the regimes created the problems, mediated for them and were part of the solutions in order to be considered as indispensables.

A participant said that thinking about an Israeli or Islamist conspiracy in Syria is a fallacy created by the Syrian regime, as well as the fear for the outbreak of a civil war. The regime is a Mafia-like style, and is playing the game of the illusion and every person dying in Syria from now on would be the responsibility of the international community. And he added that authoritarian regimes do not release peace agreements, they only know how to blackmail and that the past years politics of engagement with Syria was an error.

### **3.2.3. The regional context, the West and the uprisings**

For many participants, it is impossible to understand the Syrian conflict without understanding it regional geopolitical framework and the Syrian conflicts core should be considered within a this framework rather than

the domestic one. This regional framework is actually being dominated by the Saudi Arabia Islamic power, rather than the Turkish model, all over the MENA region, the Islamists are gaining power such as Annahda running Tunisia, while Abdelkarim al-Haj, a radical member of Al Qaida, have measureable control of Libya, and finally in Egypt, the Muslim Brothers and Salafists won the elections.

It all started in 1979, the Iranian Revolution which consequence was to start a sort of competition with Saudi Arabia to take over the religious model to be imposed over the whole region. So in order to understand the real scope of the extension of Islamism, it should be stated that Saudi Arabia would like to corner Iran while Iran is intending to influence Middle East. Iran started giving support to the Palestinians when they realized that by backing them they could influence the Arab World.

Within this framework, in 1981, Syria decides to take the side of Iran during the First Persian Gulf War (1980-1988) against their common enemy, Saddam Hussein. At that time, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists, both funded by Saudi Arabia started preaching publicly in Homs and Hama. Actually, they constitute the bulk of the opposition to Bashar Al Assad regime.

Iran created Hezbollah in Lebanon with the help of the Syrian regime and then extended the corridor Syria-Iran-Lebanon towards the Palestinian Territories in December 1991, when it started to fund, help and support Hamas, whose leader in exile, Khaled Meshal, is actually living in Syria and travelling monthly to Teheran.

For Saudi Arabia, Syria is a key factor for extending their influence in Middle East, breaking the corridor would isolate Hezbollah from Iran and corner this party inside its national agenda in Lebanon.

One of the participant said that both Russia and Turkey are supporting Al-Assad regime because both need Iran: Turkey receives 100% of the oil consumes from this country, while the main Russian naval bases in the region lies in the Port of Tartous (Syria).

About a foreign military intervention, a participant said that the Russian and Chinese vetoes in the security council of the United Nations do not

represent a real problem, when the USA went to war with Irak in 2003, they did not need a resolution for it. But the actual main problem of Syria is the lack of a coherent and strong opposition alternative, as president Sarkozy stated it. The United States will not be satisfied with a Sunni coalition with an open relation with the Saudi government and the Hariri family from Lebanon, because they do not want the emergence of a new pole in the region. Turkey also is not favoring an armed intervention as long as they have the Kurdish problem. Finally NATO declared also that it would not intervene. On the other hand, the Arab League led by Saudi Arabia and Qatar is in favor of a foreign military intervention in Syria.

For another participant, Syria issue cannot be separated from the issue of Israel and USA, Hafez Al Assad took the power as a result of the defeat of the 1967 war while the Syria Accountability Act law established the framework of relations between Syria and the USA. Israel does not want Bashar Al-Assad to disappear, they want him to be feeble and they want the Iran threat to disappear. They want US-Israeli interests to dominate the Middle East.

A participant pointed out that the West is perfectly aware of the facts that Al-Assad regime will leave, but what keeps him in power is the fact that if there is democracy in Syria, the change will not be good for Israel. The USA succeeded to make a mess from Irak, but it cannot anymore intervene. They want to do something similar with Syria and they do not want a complete democratic change, because it will logically turn against Israel. There is a wider global phenomenon, related to a crisis of the state, a crisis of international role and of code of conduct. Europe has lost its traditional and references ending by breaking the family. Previous pope made it very clear that religion is not like a self-service it is a whole. Ideology is somehow a religion, you cannot pick what you want, and the western world cannot be a model for anything because of its lack of coherence. When it will regain a certain morality, than it will be able to regain friends from southern countries. West should finish with double standard and apply the same rule to everybody. European cannot say to any Arab state what to do, because they have nothing to tell, they are dominated by the American and NATO and have renounced to play a political role.



There is one thing worse than having America as your enemy is having America as your friend. Because some parties European are driven by anti-American slogan, specially the socialist, they prefer to support dictators rather than support the friends of America. Few years ago (2007-2008) at the times of the Lebanese crisis after the death of Prime Minister Hariri, the European were asking Bashar Al Assad to solve it. There are many situations in the Arab world that the Americans are incapable to understand.

### **3.3. The role of Saudi Arabia and Qatar in the region**

A participant explained that the Arab Muslim world passed through three phases, the first phase was the liberal age of the Arab countries (around early 20's until the early 50's), the second phase from early 50's until now could be called *Pax Arabica*, from now on, we will witness for the next 20 or 50 years a new era, *Pax Islamica*. This region will probably be governed by an Islamic pattern. The question was raised about if there was any kind of conspiracy or if it was planned by Saudi Arabia or if it is just taking advantage of the revolutions. Participants agree on asking why Saudi Arabia is succeeding in transforming the so-called Arab Spring into an Arab Autumn?

A participant said that concerning Saudi Arabia, we are witnessing its growing role in Middle East and to explain this role is quite complicated since we know very little about this country. Its structural problems are even more important than in Tunisia and Egypt and the gap between the ruling class and the rest of the society is very important.

As the participant stated, there is a wrong extended idea that Saudi Arabia is a rich country. Actually, it is not, the unemployment rate is very high; the population is suffering very poor conditions of life, in addition to a complete lack of social live. Many tribes left the desert and are now living in slums around the big cities. The country has important economical problems, with a growing population of 27 millions people, that could attain 50-60 millions in 2020.

The royal family, when the uprising started immediately injected a huge amount of money, to improve the living conditions of the marginalized suburbs. Even though, the problem is that Saudis families do not like to

live in flats, because women have to use elevators with men, have to live in small area and segregate with men and this render life more complicated.

The ruling family in Saudi Arabia is actually sustaining its power over two weak pillars:

1. A difficult and complicated alliance between them and the Wahhabis clerics. Many reforms are being stopped by clerics, but the ruling family (the Al Saud) cannot break the knot between them because their legitimacy lies over this alliance.
2. The economy of the country is oil-based but this income is likely to disappear in less than 50 years with the emergence of alternative sources of energy.

So their only way to survive is to extend their ideological (religious) influence all over the Middle East. For these reasons Saudi Arabia and its ruling family is struggling to become an important actor in the region, in order to guarantee for survival. Without the oil revenue, an increasing population, radicalized either by religion or by liberalization, the situation may be much worse for the ruling family.

Since one decade, Saudi Arabia has been trying to undermine the role of the League of the Arab States, which traditionally is headed by Egypt (6 of the 7 secretaries generals were Egyptian), so they promoted the creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), in an intent to replace it. The first conference of the OIC was held in Rabat, and its first decision was about Palestine. The OIC is now based in Jeddah, and is mostly funded by Saudi Arabia. Currently, they also have a unique opportunity to lead the League of the Arab States.

The role of the League of the Arab States before the Arab spring and during the Arab spring was examined. A participant said that it has always failed to adopt a common position about the problems of the region. A participant stated that at the beginning of the uprisings, it was almost absent, and suddenly following Saudis and Qatar leadership they started to react in Libya and then in Syria. A participant stated that

either the European have decided to let the League of the Arab States play a role that would justify later the political line they followed concerning both countries but, another question mark was raised about if the Arab League is becoming an instrument of the European or the Americans?

One participant thinks that the leadership of the League of the Arab States may pass to Qatar, but another participant does not believe it possible. While the question mark about if in the future, Egypt will recover its role in the Arab League, was left without answer.

About the USA, another questions were raised about if there is any conflict about shaping the future of the region between the American and the Saudi? Or whether they are working together for the first time? A participant stated that the great Middle East project promoted by Bush has been put aside by the actual American administration, which is adopting the Islamism point of view about Middle East.

The rising role of the Golf Cooperation Council (GCC) has also been examined; it has been created by Saudi Arabia in the 80's as a mean to influence the other Gulf countries, which are playing in influential role right now at the expense of the traditional role of Egypt or Syria. The whole regional equilibrium is changing, the actors are changing, and small countries are actually having the main role in the regions as for example the meeting of the *Friends of Syria*, held in Tunisia the 24 of February which has been funded by Qatar.

Within the GCC, as a participant pointed that Kuwait has no political role, Bahrain has internal confessional problems with their Chiia and Sunni populations while the United Arab Emirates only do not care about building an economical empire.

So that only the gulf state of Qatar is interested in increasing its influence and created Al Jazeera for it, in order to gain the battle of ideas in the Arab world. In the 2000- 2010 decade, many of the ideas of the Arab society arisen from Al Jazeera. SCAF in Egypt cleverly used al Jazeera cameras to show what happened in Cairo, they were broadcasting for 24 hours and the message of huge riots urging Mubarak to go, was sent all over the world.

On the other side, the Syria amateur videos images taken with mobile phone by the opposition are far from attaining the same impact. If there were an Al Jazeera cameraman broadcasting from a neighborhood of Homs with forces of Al Assad boMuslim Brotherhooding on the population, the influence of the images would have been stronger. Such as the 2009 revolution in Iran, where nothing could be seen, there was no TV, the journalists were in Teheran, writing but could not take pictures; writing has much lesser impact than images. Twitter or Internet cannot compete with TV; very few people have access to Internet in the Arab or Egyptian rural areas. Most people sending images and comments by Internet are either from abroad or middle class people.

### **3.4. Conclusions: Political Islam, democracy in the Middle East and the Christian minorities**

As for a broader regional picture, a question was raised about how the situation in the Middle East could be assessed one year of uprisings? Is the region becoming Islamic? Where are we in the Arab spring, in the beginning, or at the end of the process? Will the situation in North Africa affect the Middle East or will it fail to do so?

If we examine the past political models in the region, we can see that they have extended much further national boundaries, as for example when the region shifted from liberal pro western regimes after the mandates to military regimes inspired by the Ataturk model and followed by the Free Officers<sup>25</sup> *coup d'état* in Egypt. It has been adopted by Afghanistan, the Iran shah, Pakistan, Algeria, Tunisia, Syria, etc. So the change had very far-reaching boundaries.

As for the *Arab Spring*, it still is unknown if it is the beginning of a new process of change, or the continuation of the military-ruled regime. Egypt role will be key to understand the course of the future of the

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<sup>25</sup> The Free Officers Movement was the Egyptian military underground organization founded by Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar El-Sadat after Egypt's defeat in the 1948 war with Israel. Its aim was to save the honour of the army and overthrow King Farouk I, whose government had the support of the United Kingdom. A coup was carried out on July 23, 1952, by which General Muhammad Naguib became the President of the Egyptian Republic.

region and the political model that will prevail there will most probably extend to the rest of the countries. It will be particularly crucial to know if the Islamism is part of the future or part of the past (the counter revolution).

On the other hand a participant said that Irak has been the political democratic model that the Americans had tried to implement and offer as an alternative for to the Middle Eastern autocratic regimes, they established themselves the new state, creating new Iraki institutions, written a new version of the constitution, dealt with ethnic and religious diversity and they removed their troops last year because they considered that the process was completed. What they left behind is neither convincing nor hopeful for the other countries of the Middle Eastern states to follow: a fragmented Irak, unstable, shaken by everlasting ethnical and religious conflicts, a constitution which does not respect religious freedom and the local Christians minority slaughtered and kicked out of the country. Most probably that is the most serious reason why part of the population in Syria is still following the horrid dictator, they are just afraid of a fragmented country where no one can leave in security and peace.

A participant said that Islamism control all aspects of the social life in the Arab world, but now they have a chance to come to rule, even in the plural Egyptian society with a large minority of Copt Christians. Another participant argued that the term Islamism in politics, should be used rather than political Islam, because if they will not meet the people social and economical demand and aspirations, they will turn back against them. When ruling, they cannot depend any more on religious slogan or emotions of people.

For many participants, the west lost an opportunity to understand the change in 2006, when the islamist Hamas won the elections in Palestine, the west did not recognized it and blocked all possibilities to understand how Islamism in politics will work. The same happened in 2005 in Egypt, and before in Algeria.

What will be the standard of democracy in an Islamic model of governance? Especially concerning local Christian populations considered by Islamists as crusaders.

A participant argued that, since the XIX century, Christians always pay for the western politics in Middle East. Some books relate what happened to Christians Arabs in the XIX, pushed towards emigration and things had not change much since then. Twenty years ago, Palestinians were seculars and all of them wanted their land, now they are divided religiously. In Sudan division of the country was accepted and still the exchange of populations have not taken place yet, and it will surely be dramatic. The USA either did not know what they were doing or they knew it too well while European countries followed blindly. The entire evolution of Sudan has been a building up of the various occidental powers, the problems all started when the English overthrow the sultanate that managed peacefully the ethnical and religious diversity of the country, and so far until now no effective replacement has been found, and this is what has happened throughout the whole Arab world.

The models of government that will be adopted by Middle Eastern countries after the uprisings will be different for each one, but they will all have as a basis Islamic ideology.

**CENTRE FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES  
OF THE FOUNDATION FOR THE SOCIAL PROMOTION OF CULTURE  
(CEMOFPSC)**

[www.cemofpsc.org](http://www.cemofpsc.org)

*The Centre for Middle Eastern Studies of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture (CEMOFPSC, Centro de Estudios de Oriente Medio de la Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura) was created in 2006 to promote research into and analysis of matters relating to the Middle East (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Egypt and Jordan), and with intention of contributing to a better understanding of the different cultures and peoples and, therefore, to peace-building.*

*Its international nature and multidisciplinary approach aim to facilitate reflection, analysis and the exchange of opinions among intellectuals and experts from such diverse spheres as sociology, history, economics, communication, ethics, law, politics, cooperation for development, in order to help spread a better understanding of the constituent elements of the social reality of these countries, and to offer proposals which, from an apolitical, impartial and balanced perspective, favour the search for peaceful solutions that promote social and human development and focus on dialogue and reconciliation.*

*The people and institutions that form part of the CEMOFPSC or participate in its activities share a vision of society and the individual based on justice, on a profound respect for freedom of thought and on the desire to contribute to social progress, understanding among peoples, peace and the common good of mankind*

## ORGANISATION

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The CEMOFPSC is an institution sponsored by the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture (FPSC). Its small and flexible structure corresponds to its multidisciplinary nature and its aims of promoting and spreading a better understanding of the aspects that make up the reality of the countries in the Middle East region.

The Centre for Middle Eastern Studies comprises an Advisory Committee, an Executive Committee and a group of Middle East experts.

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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The High Level consultative body is made up of representatives of institutions and important personalities in the different areas of activity of the CEMOFPSC. Its mission is to advise the Executive Committee on how to define the CEMOFPSC's courses of action and how to carry out specific actions.

- **Nadim Shehadi**  
Associate Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House. United Kingdom.
- **Riad Malki**  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Palestine.
- **Youssef El Khalil**  
Director of the Department of Financial Operations of the Bank of Lebanon. President and founding member of the Association for the Development of Rural Capacities (ADR). Lecturer at the American University of Beirut. Lebanon.
- **Pedro López Aguirrebengoa**  
Ambassador of Spain
- **Giuseppe Cassini**  
Ambassador of Italy
- **Ana Menéndez**  
Ambassador Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations and International Organizations in Geneva.
- **Ibrahim Al-Marashi.**  
Assistant Professor of Middle Eastern History at the University San Marcos of California State.



- **Mark Singleton**  
Development Cooperation Consultant. Holland.
- **Catholic University of America.**
- **American University of Beirut.**
- **Bethlehem University.**

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## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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This body is directly responsible for defining and executing the CEMOFPSC's work programme.

- **Pilar Lara**  
President of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture. (FPSC).
- **Macarena Cotelo**  
Trustee of the FPSC. President of the Euro-Arab Network of NGOs for Development and Integration (READI). FPSC Project Director.
- **Jumana Trad**  
Trustee of the FPSC. Honorary President of the READI.

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## OBJECTIVES

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The CEMOFPSC's priority objective is to *educate and inform* experts, academics, communication media, politicians, development agents and civil society from Madrid, Spain and international, in general on matters relating to the Middle East and the creation of a multidisciplinary network of experts on Middle Eastern issues that share the vocation of CEMOFPSC to "educate and inform."

This task is based on a commitment to share together a vision of society and the individual based on justice, in deep respect for freedom of thought and the desire to contribute to social progress, understanding between peoples, peace and the common good.

## ACTIVITIES

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In order to achieve its objectives, the CEMOFPSC organises various types of activities:

- Expert meetings. Dinner-debates, round-table conferences, work sessions, congresses, seminars and conferences. Specialists from various academic disciplines meet to discuss important issues in the Middle East.
- Post-graduate education. The CEMOFPSC supports international postgraduate programmes in the field of social development, international cooperation, the political and social sciences, etc. It also sponsors and promotes the training of young researchers and academic experts in their specialist fields.
- Alliances. The CEMOFPSC establishes alliances and partnerships with internationally renowned institutions and people in order to achieve common goals.
- Publications. The CEMOFPSC devotes special effort to publishing and disseminating the work carried out in its different spheres of activity. The publications will take the form of: work documents, expert papers, and the conclusions of debates and expert work sessions.

*The contributions of speakers and guests to the various working sessions of the CEMOFPSC are "off the record" and the contents will only be publicised for their communication and publication, without personal or nominal recognition. The texts of the papers are published on the website only with the specific authorization of the author.*

*The dissemination of these interventions will be made through the Web site (with versions in English and Spanish) [www.cemofpsc.org](http://www.cemofpsc.org), to consult the contents of both CEMOFPSC and other research and relevant papers, as well as other publications of CEMOFPSC.*

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