



**VII CEMOFPSC SEMINAR:
The transition in the new Arab world: a
challenge for East and West**



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PEDRO LÓPEZ AGUIRREBENGOA

Spanish Ambassador

The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture has chosen to dedicate its annual seminar on “The transition to the new Arab world: a challenge for the East and the West”, adding to the many efforts dedicated to deep analysis on the events. I am convinced that with the efforts of the organizers and the prominent speakers and participants, in their two meetings and the ensuing general debate, we can make a contribution to a better understanding and treatment of this issue, particularly as regards the attitude and contribution by Europe and more concretely by Spain. I appreciate the invitation to participate in this seminar, which proves CEMOFPSC constant attention to the Middle East and Arab issues, from the beginning of these cycles in 2006 and have been for me a beloved annual event.

The organizers have prepared a summary that I share broadly. Given the limited time of this speech, I merely point out some points that I consider of interest:

1. The so-called “Arab spring” has focused on Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria, but has had an effect on other situations, such as the Palestinian unity effort, or the intensification of reform in other countries in the area. The common ground has been: fatigue of the population, regardless of ideological colour or form of State, in the absence or failure of reform will of their governments, with the demand of human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy, justice social and solutions to precarious situations, dragged for decades, aggravated recently by the global economic crisis. Urban youth, more educated than the rest but with no future, want to



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have a dignified life in their own country, without being forced into emigration. This youth has rebelled against the paralysis of their societies, the delay of their countries, foreign exploitation of their national resources or corruption of their elites. They ask to be heard and want to own their destiny. It is the result of a new generation that could not accept that others had accepted earlier. But there is a dilemma between taking the revolution to its extreme, perhaps with a complete break with the past, or to preserve the State. Beyond this, their political agenda is still uncertain.

The last international analysis on the issue is contained in the extensive “Declaration on Arab Spring” of the G8 (Dauville 26 to 27 May 2011), completed by some of the points from the long “Declaration on renewed commitment to freedom and democracy”, which specifically refer, in paragraph VII. “Peace and Security”, to Libya, Syria, Yemen and Iran, as well as the increasingly imperative need of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Declaration supports the statement made by President Obama in his speech of 19 May. On Gaddafi, in particular concludes: “He must go.” It should be noted the presence in Dauville of the prime ministers of Egypt and Tunisia, the Secretary General of the Arab League, and the Presidents of Ivory Coast, Guinea and Niger (the first time that African leaders attended a G8 meeting).

The “Statement on the Arab spring” includes an aid plan, through the “The Dauville Partnership”, which in turn is intended to strengthen earlier initiatives for the region, such as the United States MENA that the G-8 endorsed at the meeting in Sea Island, and the Euro-Mediterranean process (Barcelona, European Neighbourhood Policy, Union for the Mediterranean, etc.). The aforementioned “Partnership” is based on two pillars: a political process to support the democratic transition and reform, and an economic framework for a comprehensive and sustained growth. I found no reference to the Alliance of Civilizations.

I hope a further analysis of the above mentioned documents will be an issue in the seminar sessions, along with other relevant recent position on the regional scene, including: 1) the speeches of President Obama in the Department of State (May 19) and to AIPAC (22 May), 2) the speeches of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to AIPAC (23 May), and to the U.S. Congress (24 May), which came to be answers to the above, insisting on Israel’s rejection of key aspects of Obama’s position on the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process (no return to 1967 borders, not the division of Jerusalem, etc.), and speeches on the occasion of the visit of President Obama to the UK, where the continuity of leadership demanded by the western United States. The last EU perspective is found in the Conclusions of the Peace Process in the Middle East, adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council held in Brussels on May 23.



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2. Each expression of the “Arab spring” is different, but the initial process was the same: demonstrations and popular assemblies that are started peacefully in symbolic spaces seeking, through the pressure of that street presence and media coverage, to impose reforms or overthrow and replace their governments or political regimes. The organization profile is known and, at least in the beginning, runs outside previous political channels and is a product of the new instruments of mass communication and media globalization, which provide the movement with great development speed. The regimes affected were not prepared for such an opposition.

3. Almost nobody has not been able to anticipate and evaluate this factor, although it had a major impact before: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the system led by the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991; the Serb activist movement Otpor (Resistance), that obtained in 2000 the resignation of President Slobodan Milosevic, or the uprisings in Ukraine or Georgia. The Otpor symbol, curiously, was adopted by the Egyptian Youth Movement on April 6. In 2008, a group started on Facebook Cairo solidarity action all over the country, because of the strike in Mahalla al-Kubra to protest food shortages and low wages, getting 70,000 fans. Seven activists of the movement travelled to Belgrade in 2009 for training of veterans of Otpor in non-violent revolutionary tactics.

4. Another common feature: civil society, unstructured by authoritarian regimes as part of their strategy to stay in power, has coalesced in order to knock them down, but without clear purpose to remain and become in the future new political parties or leaders. This seems to be the tendency, but we are still at the beginning of the journey.

5. An attempt to reduce the “Arab spring” to a common denominator, beyond what has already been noted, can lead to serious misunderstandings and, consequently, of treatment. If this is true in regard to the countries concerned, it is much more in regard to third parties.

6. A redundant statement is that these movements are and express “the voice of the people”. In fact, they are the voice of “a part of the people”. I do not want to play down the expression of this will, which as already led to two coups, in Tunisia and Egypt, and a civil war in Libya. In the case of Tunisia and Egypt the “revolution” has taken place within pre-existing state structures, both substantially democratic in theory, but distorted by their regimes. But one thing is to give these popular uprisings the importance they have, and even initiate reform processes, based on the principles and policies they demand, and quite another to give them the ultimate consequence as an expression of will of the majority, a legitimacy that, in democratic terms, can only come from the polls. Otherwise, it may entail, for them and others, to act and build in a vacuum, with possible mistakes.



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In the case of Egypt and Tunisia, there seems not to be an insurmountable contradiction between his new revolution-transition and the constitutional bases of their respective States. What need to be changed, as is happening, are the legal additions that have undermined their democratic content. Some supporters agree with his vision, but others criticize it as inadequate and oppose the interim government measures. One example is, in the case of Egypt, the continuation by the Transitional Government of the frequent policy (since de 1952 Revolution) of nominating senior military commanders for the post of provincial Governors.

My point is that, two or three million people demonstrating in various Egyptian capitals, does not automatically imply they express the will of the 85 million Egyptians. The first consultation at the polls, after the start of the uprising on January 25 and the resignation of President Mubarak on 11 February, was the March 19 referendum, organized by the Supreme Military Council, which assumed state power, and the Transitional Government on changes to the Constitution relating to various aspects related to the election of the President and his mandate. This referendum was the scene of a curious paradox: the Muslim Brotherhood and the at the time still legal National Democratic Party (illegalized in April) voted in favour of the amendments, while the majority of the smaller secular opposition parties preached abstinence, arguing that the procedure was not consistent with what is desirable to allow a re-articulation sufficient political civil society. What was the vote of the members of the Movement January 25th? Forty five million citizens over 18 years (excluding the military, members of law enforcement and the judiciary) were summoned to the referendum, held under judicial supervision. The turnout was 41.19% (18537000) and voted in favour 77.2% (14,192,000), with 4% of the votes not valid. All perfectly legal and valid, but the final result is that 60% of the census, 64% with the spoiled ballots, did not approve the amendments in spite of the fact that it was supposed to be the first really free and clean vote in decades. What does de majority feel about the other legal changes adopted by the transitional powers. We will have to wait for further consultations to find out, an for the National Council of 25 January revolutionary to sharpening their approaches and programs, and eventually consolidate into a new political formation.

Although the referendum was apparently well received and celebrated by the majority, these same questions were formulated by the Egyptian media. For example, at No. 863 of Al Ahram Hebdo article Sabah Sabet entitled *Le oui triomphe mais by Quelles raisons?*, Pointed to the “satisfaction” of the Islamists and the “sadness” of the Movement of January 25 and other political parties. The latter felt that if the result would have been negative had to be a Constituent Assembly to draft a constitution ex-novo, which would have required a period of two years and therefore a longer transition before parliamentary and presidential elections, something the Supreme



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Military Council did not want. Furthermore, some believed that the proposed reforms were simple patches that did not guarantee that no one could return in the future to an authoritarian regime. Those who voted yes argued that amendments were sufficient and wanted a quick return to stability in the country, that is, reforms yes but without breaking the system.

7. In Egypt, the “National Assembly for Change”, led by El Baradei, created a “united front” that still has to prove to be such. The Supreme Military Council urged the banning and dismantling of the National Democratic Party, sentenced by Administrative Court on April 16, 2011. The party was in power since its founding in 1978 by then President Sadat, and was a member of the Socialist International from the following year and until expulsion in February 1, 2011, due to the Egyptian revolt. The Emergency Act of 1981 (President Sadat) was also cancelled. This had been a widespread demand for more than a decade but the previous parliament had again extended it for two years on 1 May 2010, although with new limitations. The reason given was the struggle against Islamist terrorism, but in fact it served other political purposes during the previous regime.

But who are, in addition to its president, Marshal Tantawi, the most influential military? The list seems headed by the Chief of Staff (since 2005), General Sami Anan. Also notable is General Mahmoud Mowafi, who took over as Chief Minister of the Information Services after the dismissal of General Soliman. Mowafi has continued its contact with the Palestinians and Israelis, one of the tasks that Mubarak had entrusted to his predecessor. What degree of strength is there in the Egyptian Armed Forces for the political, administrative and judicial processes against the former President, his family and his government, including many of the highest military graduation?

Following the first steps after the cessation of President Mubarak and his government - dissolution of the legislature, outlawing the ruling party, political purge of the security services, treatment of suspected illegal political leaders, corruption, repeal of the Emergency Law, which dated Sadat’s time, etc. - a month ago the Political Parties Law was amended. Afterwards, the Supreme Military Council has appointed a Commission of Jurists making amendments to the Law on the Exercise of Political Rights (Electoral Act), expected to be approved shortly by the Interim Government. The Law was previously the subject of various amendments since its adoption in 1956. The parliamentary elections will be held in September and are expected to return the country to political normality which in turn will advance the reform process. Presidential elections are expected by early 2012, although there are voices calling for a delay in the process initially set by the Constitutional Declaration of the Supreme Military Council.



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The new parliament will be responsible for drafting an amended Constitution, or a new one. The Supreme Military Council stated that a Commission of 100 specially qualified members of the new parliament would receive this task. On this there is doubt and controversy. Many people think that a new Constitution can only be drafted by a Constituent Assembly, which incorporates representatives from all sectors of society. Some parties, like Wafd and the Union, accuse the Supreme Military Council to be acting unilaterally and in a non democratic way. In contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood supported the approach of the Supreme Military Council on the transition period. They are interested in a quick transition, and early elections, which are supposed to benefit them in comparison with other political forces which aim to prolong the time to prepare themselves and try to extend their presence in society.

8. Something different is the uprising in Libya, which has degenerated into a civil war, with an international military intervention justified on humanitarian grounds and to defend the “civilian population” revolt, by resolution 1973 of the UN Security Council, at the request of the Arab League. What is clear is that the aim is now to overthrow the regime, despite the “assurances” for the future of the country, contained in documents of the G8, and the doubts have not disappeared. The ultimate objectives of the rebels are not clear and the tribal nature of the country and its history of differences between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania leave open important questions. Just a few days ago it was disclosed that a United Nations Report charged not only the Gaddafi regime but also the “rebels” with crimes against humanity. The overthrow of the Gaddafi regime would only be the beginning but the end should be that the country can have a system fairer and more democratic, not to break and end up being a failed state, or more. One thing is the good intentions expressed by the G8 and other what may happen in reality, taking into account not only internal factors but the regional Libyans. It should be recalled, for example, that Gaddafi came to power as a consequence of the Arab-Israeli War Six-Day and the Western stand, as well as the inability of the international community to give the conflict a just solution.

9. In Yemen, where we should keep in mind the tribal weight and divided past, there is also an imminent risk civil war, after failed attempts at mediation by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), not being accepted by President Ali Abdallah Saleh, May 22, the proposed terms of the Transition Agreement, prepared by the GCC with the opposition, including the resignation of the President within a month.

10. As with all revolutionary processes, there is a rapid change that can achieve what decades of alleged reform will could not provide. But this inevitably leaves gaps, which affects all levels. Taking again the Egyptian model, we see that despite the efforts for an orderly transition, the accelerated change in of some of the pillars of the previous regime’s has upset the balance, hopefully temporarily, and plunged the country in a certain degree of instability, insecurity and social unrest.



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We face a complex adjustment process that is likely to be long, marked by a first stage of dismantling the institutions of the former regime, with its sometimes abrupt biases, account settings and counter-revolutionary attempts, or exploitation of the situation by other actors, through disruptive actions, such as, in the case of Egypt, the intensifying religious confrontation and other violent actions that have produced confusion and uncertainty. A revealing episode has been, for example, the “battle” between demonstrators and the army and police forces, at the Embassy of Israel on the night of May 15 (Israeli National Day), with more than 353 injured according to Al Ahrām. The Embassy of Israel, heavily guarded and isolated as required, had not undergone a similar protest in recent years, during the Mubarak regime. The marchers, commemorating the 63 anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba (disaster), demanded the expulsion of Ambassador and the breakdown of relations. Tempers were running high because the new strong Israeli repression of Palestinians in the West Bank on the occasion of such celebration.

11. Both Tunisia and Egypt, the economic impact is still substantial, as shown in the estimates of GDP decline, and it will take at least a couple of years, if all goes well, to restore the balance.

In the case of Egypt, its rate of growth, that despite the international crisis remained at 5.2% in 2009/2010, is expected to drop to 1 or 2% in 2010/2011, before returning to 4% 2012. But the reality is that the country needs to grow by at least 6% in order to meet job demand resulting from population growth rates. The most affected sector is tourism, the main foreign exchange earner for the country. Foreign currency reserves have descended from U.S. \$ 36 billion on 31 December 2010, to 28 billion in April, a pattern that is expected to continue in the coming months due to increased public spending and deficit (expected to be 9.4% of GDP this year), along with reduced production, but not yet reached a crisis point. Everything will depend on whether we will or not to restore the authority of the State, political stability, social peace and security.

12. The West, led by the United States, has been wrong too many times throughout its history of relations with the Middle East, since the colonial period. During the Cold War some attitudes could be more justified by bipolarity, but for example, its position in the Six Day War opened to the Soviet Union the doors of Arab countries and the Mediterranean. The fundamental character of the alliance of the United States with Israel is understandable for domestic political reasons, but not always reasonable or fair, and has led to an interpretation too often harmful to its other national interests in the area and, with policies perceived by the Arab and Islamic countries as double standards, regarding both principles and actions. Even their most loyal friends have



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been affected by these contradictions. Something similar can be said about certain European attitudes.

A couple of reminders. Developments in Iran since the coup against Mohammad Mossadegh, the Iranian Prime Minister, who in 1951 had nationalized oil and claimed for a secular democracy in the country, a story which ended with the Shiite revolution in 1979. Could this have been avoided by other policies? Something similar happened with the policies towards Ethiopia, which ended with the Emperor Haile Selassie overthrown by the communist coup of Mengistu. In both cases, one of the western strategical regional policies had been to obtain from their regimes a political backing of Israel, from the periphery of the Arab world. It is a matter of guessing whether Bin Laden would have taken the virulent Islamist, terrorist, and anti-Western turn if, after acting as ally in the expulsion of the Russians from Afghanistan, the United States would had taken a more active and even handed policy towards a just peace in the region.

The United States, it is true, led to the Madrid Peace Conference, as compensation for the Arab allies of the Gulf War of 1991 against the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam Hussein, and then took over the supervision of the Oslo Accords of 1993, but failed to bring their to their expected compliance by the parties, with the known consequences. After the important but inconclusive Camp David and Taba negotiations in 2000, the mandate of Ariel Sharon in Israel and his policies eventually brought despair to the Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims. Then we know what happened so far with subsequent peace initiatives, such as Annapolis.

I believe that the policy towards Sudan also incurred in mistakes. For Egypt what happens in this country and with regard to the river Nile is a security red line. Cairo worked in order to prevent the inclusion in the 2005 Navaisha Comprehensive Peace Agreement of the self-determination referendum in the South that last January voted for independence, opening the door for an uncertain future in the region. One of the main principles of the Organisation for African Unity, the respect of borders inherited from decolonisation suffered a severe blow.

The riots of the "Arab spring" faced once again the West with a decade's long dilemma: the stability by supporting existing schemes, even authoritarian or undemocratic, or changing them by through what in the Bush era was described as "constructive chaos", by political, socio-economic or military means. The first option included efforts for inducing democratization through successive initiatives, such as the Eizenstat plan for the Maghreb, or variants of the MENA. The second choice was reinforced after the S11, with the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. President Obama wanted to turn the tide with his speech at the University of Cairo, which raised many hopes in the Arab and Islamic world, but the fact is that two years later in some things seemed to have returned to previous philosophies, more characteristic of Bush's neoconservative



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period. It seems that the “Arab spring” came as a surprise and Western capitals had to react quickly catching the crest of the wave by supporting changes in Tunisia and Egypt, once it became clear that it was too late to address the situation with simple reforms of regimes that could no longer cover up their corruption or internal errors, and curtail the demands of protesters.

Western intentions have been the object of analysis, doubts and alerts, not only in the Arab and Islamic world but also in the Western media or even in Israel itself. I recall, among other articles, the one published in Ha’aretz on 22 March, Yitzhal Laor, under the suggestive title: “The return of the colonial Theology: What The West is allowed the natives are not “. Another of the same date, by Akiva Eldar, argued that it will be difficult to explain the international action based on Gaddafi’s oppression against his people and the need to defend its population, when nothing serious has been done to curb the actions of the Israeli leadership against the occupied Palestinians. Others, like Le skepticism est de rigueur, by Agnes Eissa, in Al Ahram Hebdo No. 863 (March 22 to 29) points to the different treatment given to Bahrain and the intervention of forces from Saudi Arabia and UAE to quell demonstrations in that country, or what happens with Yemen and Syria.

13. Most young Arab revolutionaries probably do not demand or want to follow in the footsteps of the West, nor the West to lead their change. A good number of them have lived and been educated in the West, and admire its accomplishments, especially economic, and share fundamental principles of human rights and freedoms, but they are not convinced of the goodness of their “lifestyle”, its relativism, its secularism, sometimes unacceptable to them, or loss of values, for example those related to family, while rejecting the interventionist policies or egocentrism with respect to Arab and Islamic world. Are you going to change this unless they change Western policies?

14. As for Israel and its neighbours, the “Arab spring” is being the subject of extensive debate. Its initial bias was expressed by Prime Minister Netanyahu, with his caution against the Mubarak regime’s demise, seen as the regional leader and more convinced of the need to preserve the heritage of the peace accords at Camp David in 1979. The Egyptian revolution could close one stage and open the way for a reconsideration of the Egyptian foreign policy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in a way no longer so closely rooted to the dominant relationship with the United States. Jordan, another major partner of Israel in peace, has been so far relatively immune to the contagion of the “Arab spring”. The seizure of power by the Egyptian military, strongly linked to the U.S. from which weapons, logistics, training and financial support depends largely, came to relieve that Israeli feeling.



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Mubarak continued to give the Palestinian issue a priority. In fact, the backing of that cause had been the constant that allowed to overcome the negative consequences that the “separate peace” of 1979-80 with Israel had on the relationship of Egypt with the rest of the Arab countries. The slow recovery of the role of Egypt within the Arab world during the Mubarak period and the legitimacy of the regime itself as heir to the revolution of 1952 was associated, from the perspective of the majority of the Egyptian and Arab opinion, to the defence of the Palestinian cause.

The Camp David Agreements established a framework for the “autonomy” of the Palestinians, that Egypt has sought to develop, but negotiations were interrupted by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Then, Egypt acted boldly to development of the Oslo Accords as it did in the negotiations at Camp David and Taba in 2000, which the coming to power of Prime Minister Sharon, left unheeded. Egypt did the same with subsequent attempts, including the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. After the democratic Palestinian elections of 2006, Egypt had even moments of openness to Hamas, despite its connection with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. But Israel, with support from the U.S. and EU finally managed to achieve political ostracism of Hamas and Egypt had to accept the blockade of Gaza measures. This create Mubarak problems with the Egyptian domestic opinion although, somehow, the regime managed to make their adjustment to Israeli and American politics compatible with a patient work and mediation role with the Palestinians, in favour of their political reunification. But we can assume that a good part of the Egyptian revolutionaries in Tahrir Square felt a growing detachment from the attitude of the regime towards the American-Israeli intransigence.

This trend was picked up by the new Egyptian foreign minister, Nabil Al Arabi, a veteran career diplomat, as its predecessor, the deposed and unpopular Ahmad Abul Gheit. The new minister, who was Ambassador to the UN and has worked at the International Criminal Court as a recognized expert in international law, remained briefly in his post, having been appointed on May 16 as the new Secretary General of the Arab League, to succeed also Egyptian and former foreign minister, Amr Mussa, who had reached the end of its mandate and is billed as the strongest candidate to date for future Egyptian presidential elections. His attitudes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have also been always more demanding. The new Foreign Minister, Samir Radwan, maintains similar attitudes.

It is significant that in the midst of the turbulent domestic scene transition Egyptian authorities have managed to mediate and obtain an inter-Palestinian agreement. It is also significant the Egyptian decision to end the blockade of its border with Gaza, and start a cautious approach with Iran. All this suggests a rethinking of the regional foreign policy more in keeping with the desires of the Egyptian people. We will also



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see a warmer approach to relations with Turkey. Israel, the U.S. and the Europeans must be aware that in the new regional situation it will be no longer possible to continue delaying just solutions for the peace process and other issues or applying double standards. Hamas and other Palestinian militants have probably realized that their situation was beginning to weaken because of the liberalization in the area as a consequence of the “Arab spring”, as reflected in the difficulties faced by Syria. The May 13 rally in Tahrir Square in Cairo, with participation of the Muslim Brothers, was again a significant “national unity” event with two objectives: to denounce the inter-confessional violence, and support the Palestinian cause on the occasion of the anniversary of the creation of Israel and the Palestinian Nakba, on 15 May.

As for Syria, since the cease-fire that followed the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the Baathist authoritarian regime, led by Assad, was, in fact, despite the periodic tensions and firmly maintaining their claim to the Golan Heights, a faithful guardian of peace on its border with Israel, even when Israel took some limited military action against Syrian targets, as was the case with the attack on alleged nuclear facilities. Syria has maintained a cool head and there have been episodes of bilateral negotiations to resume the peace process, as with the Wye River talks and the subsequent Turkish mediation. The Syrian-Israeli confrontation has continued in Lebanon since its Civil War. A regime change in Syria, with the end of the secularized Baath, can bring into power a populist nationalism, more influenced by radical ethnical or religious factors, and more demanding towards Israel.

The disparition of Mubarak from the political scene, the last of three former heads of their respective air forces, together with Weizmann in Israel and father Assad in Syria, who were also Heads of State, means the end of a generation who fought successive wars but also had a capacity of contact and was important for peace, as was the case with Weitzman at Camp David.

The “regime change” is known as a start, but nobody has a crystal ball on how you can stop. In the Arab periphery we have already the case in Somalia and the uncertain future of Sudan, following the referendum for secession of the South. A story that tried to prevent Egypt and whose outcome may end up upsetting the delicate balance of the Nile countries.

To end this part of the analysis y refer to the article by Shlomo Ben Ami recently published under the title “Behind the Times”. I read it in the Prague Post (25-31 May). With his clear perception he underlines that everybody seems to back the “Arab Spring”, except Israel, a clear contradiction with the its long standing argument that peace with the Arabs will only be possible when they embrace democracy. Ben Ami points out that Israeli leaders were at ease with their relations with Arab neighbours



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ruled by autocracies. Now they fear their policies will be closer to the feelings of their peoples. Mubarak had become the best ally of Israel in the war against Hamas in Gaza and in curtailing Iran's drive for regional hegemony. A democratic Egypt will have more credibility in backing the Palestinian cause, and pushing other demands, such as Israel signing the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty. Egypt feels especially concerned with the future in Libya and Sudan.

15. The "Arab spring" requires all kinds of assistance. It has to be provided with a comprehensive solidarity, encouraging, demanding the promotion of shared general values, but never imposed, or seeking to replace their distinct identity. This has been recalled by the G8. Will the interests of the various external actors allow this to become a reality? Is the Western world and specifically Europe prepared to provide a convincing example?

16. This whole scenario is not new and was, for example, clearly perceived by the European Community with its Economic Arrangements, the Barcelona process, its policy towards the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Association Agreements, the Neighbourhood Policy and. Finally, the Union for the Mediterranean, seeking a global relationship with the area, from a balance consensus with its partners in North Africa and the Middle East for the development of the chapters political, economic and social-cultural-human. But the Barcelona process was born with a broken leg. The evolution of the regional political situation did not allow to unlock decisively the political chapter (it produced a draft Charter for Peace and Stability would never be adopted), and the will of the United States, not a member of the process, was not in favour of allowing Europe to develop its own political framework in the area. It's the same philosophy that the U.S. applied to the Peace Process in the Middle East. Only when Washington decided, in some periods, to leave the political scene, the European Union was more likely to develop its own policy in the area. The Arabs have not lagged behind in assessing the "division of labour" and, although they have frequently called for the good political offices in Europe, in critical moments of crisis, and developed the cooperation on other levels, they have always given priority to relations with Washington, from the frustrated hope it was the only one able to "convince" Israel to accept a relatively fair peace.

However, European efforts have been and are important, and have had important positive effects with their support for freedoms, democratization, political reform, rule of law, good governance, etc. This has been a European contribution, which has made progress that should not be underestimated, both politically, at least at the conceptual and normative level, as well as socio-economic development.



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17. It is not easy to encourage the “Arab spring”, if not accompanied by a revitalization of international law and a moral rearmament that will put a remedy to the current “new world disorder”, fuelled by globalization and whose latest manifestation is the economic crisis. The problem is not so much with the commonly accepted principles, which are wide and clear, but in the circumstances and interests that influence their random interpretation and enforcement. You can not expect international justice if, for example, the actual parties to the Statute of the ICC seek a way to wiggle out of any responsibility towards it, or if the Geneva Conventions are not applied by their signatories. Nor should the United Nations Council of the UN Security discriminate according to the political and veto power will of its permanent members. You cannot demand democratic elections and when you do not like the results ignore them and try to impose other realities. You can not condemn and outlaw torture, and then look for loopholes or derive their practice to elsewhere. The list of “reforms” pending, in order to achieve an international community more respectful of international law, fair and democratic, is long and familiar.

I referred to the above, not by a desire to open old debates, but because I believe that in order to answer to the question of what the Western World and Europe, as part of it, must do to help the “Arab spring”, the first thing is to try to remember past mistakes to avoid repeating them and modify behaviours so that we can preach and lead with our example. It would be really tremendous that when, at last, the Arab World has awakened with a desire to seek a better future in all areas, more in line with the international environment and the shared values and challenges of humanity, the West would react the wrong way and, instead of helping to build, finish by doing the opposite. Either we do with the true spirit of partnership and the will to understand and respect each other, or that “spring”, which will have considerable difficulty in itself to expand and consolidate, may end up in the hands of authoritarian or radicalized currents. In short, we are at a crossroads, no one more but one in a context of globalization that can produce dramatic effects for its authors and for all.