

EU VALUES AND THE ENP: TOWARDS A TRANSFORMED CONDITIONALITY

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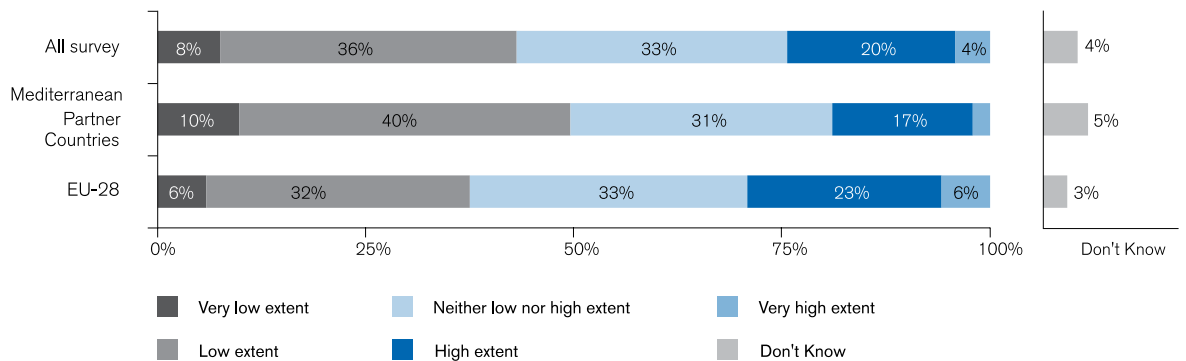
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Introduction

The Arab uprisings have highlighted not only the EU's lack of means to react decisively to the events occurring in its neighbourhood but also its inability to consistently promote its values outside its borders. Indeed, the results of the Survey show that a relative majority of respondents both from EU countries and from Mediterranean Partner Countries agrees that EU values are not applied in the ENP context. Actually, 44% among them think that these values are applied to a low and very low extent. This proportion is higher among respondents from Mediterranean Partner Countries (50%) than among EU respondents (38%).

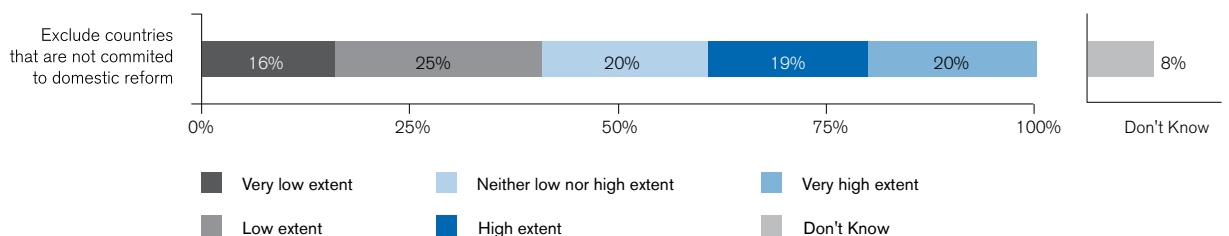
Graph 1: To what extent are the EU values applied through the European Neighbourhood Policy?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 6th Euromed Survey/Question 7

When it comes to the question related to the exclusion of the countries that do not commit to reforms (part of question 14 of the Survey), 41% do not support this exclusion notion (to either a low or very low extent) and 39% encourage it (to a high and very high extent) while 20% do not seem to have a clear position about exclusion (but do not reject it either).

Graph 2: In developing formats, instruments and criteria of cooperation with partner countries, to what extent should the exclusion of the countries not committed to reforms be privileged?

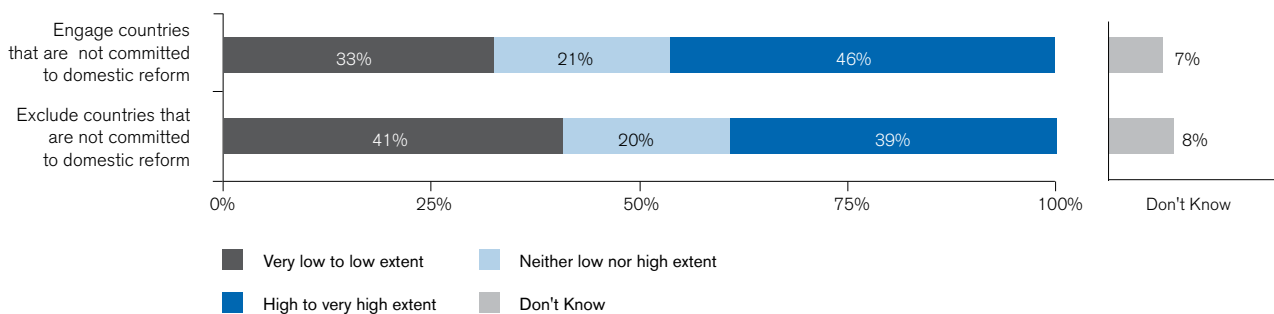


Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 6th Euromed Survey/Question 14

The analysis of the results shows that some of those who argue that these countries should be excluded would advise dealing with the civil society instead. In this case, they would tend to push the EU to revise its agreements with countries that are breaching the human rights “clauses” in the Association Agreement.

Other respondents would rather advise the EU to dedicate less attention to reforms and to focus only on trade, security and energy, or, in other words, they would think that strategic interests should dominate over democratic and sometimes impossible economic reforms. The reason that was sometimes provided here is that partner countries should manage their internal affairs as they wish, since not all of them already have the structural ability to adopt a western democratic style. Nevertheless, the general tendency of the whole Survey encourages the engagement with the countries that are not committed to domestic reforms in order to encourage them, at least in the longer term, to adopt the latter. A relative majority of 46% encourage the engagement with those countries (see graph 3).

Graph 3: In developing formats, instruments and criteria of cooperation with partner countries, to what extent should the following be privileged?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 6th Euromed Survey/Question 14

Hence, we will next emphasise and discuss the four main tools that the analysis of this Survey suggests for the EU to deal with those partner countries that remain reluctant to implement reforms, as follows:

Increasing Dialogue and Trickle-Down Effect Cooperation

Dialogue and cooperation in areas of common interest can open the door for a deeper cooperation in political reform areas, whereas exclusion will only push the reluctant regimes to make connections with authoritarian countries such as Russia and China. However, the results of the Survey stress two elements that need to be taken into consideration while cooperating with partner countries: (a) cooperation should be based on research on the ground that leads to a deeper understanding of the problems that partner countries face, the rationale behind their resilience toward reforms, and a better understanding of what can motivate them to implement reforms; (b) this cooperation should be based on a more strategic orientation. Thus, European countries should identify the areas of cooperation, which are not only considered as fields of common interest but that can also lead to a trickle-down effect in terms of domestic reforms. Providing training for the judiciary sector or even the state administration can be considered a concrete example here. Hence, the mutual transfer of know-how and technical capacity building is supposed to lead, in the longer term, to deeper political, yet gradual, reforms.

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Nevertheless, while the work on capacity building of the state institutions is a tool that can guarantee the support for democracy and efficiency, the EU should take into consideration at least two points: (a) following up on the implementation of its programmes and benchmarking

the latter. This is especially because of the political instability that occurred in most of the partner countries in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. The latter have hindered the implementation of several EU programmes despite the fact that the EU had already provided funds and support for them; (b) the EU should not only give support in areas of common interest but also needs to establish an efficient carrot/stick system that can push rulers to go further in implementing reforms – a fact leading us to the following point.

Conditioned Incentives

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The results of the Survey suggest that access to the EU market, investments and financial assistance should be linked to some conditions guaranteeing good governance, i.e. progress in institution building, the fight against corruption and for progress in political and civil rights. With a view to engaging even with those regimes that remain reluctant to reforms, a more-for-more approach should be adopted: the latter should not apply “nothing for no commitment” but “less for no commitment”.

However, for these conditionality measures to be efficient, three points need to be taken into consideration by the EU: (a) the implementation of conditionality requires, as Balfour notes, a similar understanding of sovereignty and external interference in the internal affairs of the state (Balfour, 2012, p. 17). While western European interference was welcomed by Eastern Europe before the big enlargement of 2004, this is not the case for the EU Southern Neighbourhood partner countries where European interference triggers nationalistic feelings, such as in the case of Egypt. Unfortunately, those feelings are easily exploited by the regimes to harm the credibility of actors seeking the promotion of European values of liberalism and democracy. Anti-liberal measures can be supported by segments of the society helping the regime to consolidate its authoritarian rule; (b) to be effective, the EU needs to think of attractive carrots. The problem lies in the fact that the ENP has imported much of the logic of enlargement without taking into consideration the differences between eastern partners and the Southern Neighbourhood partner countries. Unfortunately, the incentives incorporated into each of the EU's policies towards the Mediterranean do not constitute carrots for the countries in the southern Mediterranean. The EU has offered neither full access to the single market nor the free movement of labour to the Mediterranean countries, which is what they are seeking the most (Elmola 2009, pp. 11-12); (c) related to this, to be effective, conditionality requires an asymmetry of leverage and influence tilted in favour of the EU. However, the EU influence in the region, as Balfour notes, is by no means comparable to that of a traditional relationship between donor and beneficiary, nor to the case of the accession process in Eastern Europe. The change of power dynamics in the region with the emergence of regional actors who try to play a political role, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other global powers that are working on shaping economic ties such as China and Russia, decreases the EU's capacity to exert influence (Balfour, 2012, pp. 29-30).

Building Infrastructure for Democracy and Revising the EU's Economic Approach

The results of the Survey suggest the need for increasing exchanges and training experiences with the societal organisations such as the universities' staff or NGOs; and with institutional authorities such as legislative institutions or the judiciary. These exchanges that promote the values of accountability, good governance and democracy, when reaching a critical level, will in the medium or longer term create lobbies that will exert internal pressure and thus push for reforms. In the same vein, the increase of investment in human capital (health and education) and the work on issue-based programmes that have developmental aims can build a certain infrastructure for democracy in the respective partner countries.

Indeed, the lack of infrastructure for democracy made itself evident through the choices that have been made by several segments of those societies during the post-revolutionary period. Social and economic needs pushed segments of the population to support authoritarian options. Thus, for the EU, building an infrastructure for democracy in the partner countries would mean focusing on financing development projects, which can develop human capacities and socially empower people. However, while supporting such activities, the EU needs to refer to a rights-based approach. In other words, development projects linked with a rights-based approach should be one of the main targets of the EU. This would mean that the EU should condition the receipt of funds to the promotion of a culture of accountability among the beneficiaries of the funds. The target groups should not only benefit from funds that develop their capacities and empower them but should also learn to ask for their rights and push the government to be more accountable. This behaviour will prevent the EU from offering funds that promote stability instead of democratisation.

On the other hand, for the EU to be consistent and credible in these steps, it should reconsider its economic agendas: especially because neo-liberal reforms have led to a more unequal distribution and thus to the increase of social protests over the last two decades in most of the partner countries (Huber, 2013, p. 107). In this perspective, the principle of economic liberalisation as a prerequisite for political reform should be revisited. The proof is that the liberalisation of the economy in several partner countries was accompanied by a political de-liberalisation.

Supporting Civil Society

The Survey's results suggest that providing support for civil society should be a priority for the EU, so that pressure can occur from within. This would concretely mean, on the one hand, assisting civil society organisations (CSOs) and, on the other hand, supporting youths as part of the broader civil society, universities, and so on, through providing exchanges of experiences and scholarships, for instance.

Nevertheless, the EU should not fall in the trap of a non-calculated optimism regarding the CSOs. In fact, as Teti remarks, not only has a considerable body of academic literature confirmed the limitations of civil society as a democratising or even as liberal force, but also the authoritarian government's practices aiming to control dissident CSOs (through controls on registration, financial monitoring, co-option, etc.) make it difficult for the latter to "check government excesses" (Teti, 2015, p. 18). More importantly, the CSOs working in the field of human rights remain elitist and mostly disconnected from the wider society. They are unable to reach the grassroots and thus unable to counterbalance the state's authoritarianism. In this context, it should be noted that in most of the partner countries the birth of these organisations working on civil and political rights was not the result of a social dynamic. On the contrary, their proliferation is more a strategy of the authoritarian regimes to allow a sort of controlled liberalisation. Some organisations are completely dependent on foreign funds and thus at least partially dependent on the donors' agenda. These factors result in the formation of an elite that is seeking to promote liberal values among elitist segments of society while being completely disconnected from the wider society; and therefore unable to mobilise it. Hence, the EU notion of civil society needs to be more inclusive to include other major constituents of civil society in the Arab context, such as professional associations and syndicates: while organisations focusing on civil and political rights receive considerable attention, trade unions and other organisations working on socio-economic rights remain absent (Teti, 2015, pp. 18-19).

Support for civil society should be a priority for the EU. Assisting civil society organisations (CSOs) and supporting youths as part of the broader civil society can make pressure occur from within the countries.

Conclusion and Recommendation

While the EU certainly needs to find a balance between preserving its security and promoting its values, the EU's policy in terms of democracy assistance needs to be consistent and the EU needs to set its priorities. In this perspective, it also needs to focus more on extending the infrastructure of democracy in the Arab countries rather than on promoting an elitist human rights agenda. Hence, development projects linked with a rights-based approach should be one of the main targets of the EU. Therefore, the target groups should not only benefit from funds that develop their capacities and empower them but should also learn to ask for their rights and push the government to be more accountable. Moreover, the EU has to adopt a different strategy in a new geopolitical context: it should thus base its policy not only according to its strategic interests but also according to the new challenges that the partner societies are facing, whether on the economic, institutional or security level. Hence, the EU needs to shape specific programmes and policies for each of the partner countries. These programmes should take into account both European interests and the political conditions of the partner countries as well as their specific needs. They must take also into account the new actors that are emerging, such as youth groups or new trade unions. However, in the current situation where activists or societal actors cooperating with foreigners are discredited internally in several Arab countries, the EU needs to currently focus more on long-term projects that build an image of the EU as a partner in the process of economic development and institutional building.

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