



North-South Centre of the Council of Europe



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS



The 2011 Lisbon Forum

"The Arab Spring: a major step towards
making universal human rights real"



CONCLUSIONS

AKDN

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The 2011 Lisbon Forum brought together some 200 participants from over 50 countries on the theme "The Arab Spring: a major step towards making universal human rights real". In addition to the co-organisers, the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, and the host organisation, the Aga Khan Development Network, many relevant international players participated in the forum, such as the European Union, the League of Arab States, the Union for the Mediterranean, the African Union, UNESCO, the International Federation of Human Rights and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network. It provided a unique opportunity to gather together government representatives, parliamentarians, local and regional elected representatives and members of civil society, in accordance with the "quadrilogue" principle that governs the functioning of the North-South Centre and thanks to the synergies developed with the meeting of the "focal points" of the Alliance of Civilizations.

The discussions aimed both to identify common features that could be deemed characteristic of the "Arab Spring" and to determine the specificities of and the differences between the countries that had experienced major political upheavals since early 2011. Particular emphasis was placed on three countries, regarded as positive examples of change: Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia.

The plenary sessions made it possible to examine the political developments that had caused differing degrees of disruption throughout the Arab world, the relationship between democracy and development, the role of women as agents of change, the importance of citizenship for upholding and promoting human rights and the role of the media and of the social networks during and after the revolutions. Specific workshops were held to analyse in greater detail the situation in the three above-mentioned countries and consider the outlook for co-operation between these countries, the Council of Europe, the European Union and the Alliance of Civilizations.

A number of findings surfaced concerning the conceptual frame within which future developments should take place:

- firstly, the fact that the Arab revolutions form indeed an interconnected whole. Their common features are a deep-rooted demand for dignity, a (very widely shared) preference for non-violence, the rejection of clan-mindedness and corruption, claims to fundamental individual freedoms and also to economic and social rights, the mobilisation of young people and women, and the role played by the Internet and by social networks. The term "Arab Spring" met with some objections, and many participants preferred the expression "Arab season", as used by President Jorge Sampaio, a season that commenced in the early winter and seemed to be bearing fruit in mid-autumn;
- nonetheless there is no single phenomenon affecting the Arab world in a uniform manner, since each country is different and the situations vary greatly: in Tunisia the revolution has overthrown not just a dictator but an entire system; in Egypt the army, a key political force for the last sixty years, has so far continued to play an essential role in the transition, while confirming its intention to cede power to an elected civilian authority; in Morocco the reform process initiated by King Mohammed VI on acceding to the throne has been speeded up since March 2011; in Libya a civil war has cost a tyrant his power - and even his life - thanks in part to international military action; in Syria the popular uprising, albeit non-violent, has been ruthlessly repressed;

- although future developments are hard to predict, it is clear that the "Arab season" of 2011 will lastingly constitute a major historical event, like the fall of the Berlin wall or the decolonisation wave after the 2nd World War. There will be a "before" and an "after" this event, and, as Deborah Bergamini, the Chair of the North-South Centre, said, a new paradigm is emerging in international relations. Far-reaching changes are taking place not only in the societies of the countries concerned, but also regarding the potential for co-operation between these countries and the rest of the world (with Europe having a special role to play on account of its geographical and cultural proximity and the intensity of its economic and human exchanges with these countries);
- the multi-faceted events that have taken place in the Arab world constitute not just a political but a social revolution (to cite Bernardino Leon). Although each era is unique and must be linked to its historical context, there are similarities with the democratic changes in southern Europe in the 1970s, in Latin America in the 1980s and in central and eastern Europe in the 1990s, which could serve as sources of inspiration but not as models. As Miguel-Angel Martinez has said "In the democratisation process we are all juniors, and those who claim to be veterans do not look themselves in the mirror".

In these circumstances the main international players' capacities to react and to adapt have been severely put to the test. The United Nations has permitted international action in Libya, founded on its duty to protect the people, but it has not succeeded in adopting a position on Syria. The League of Arab States has been very active, supporting the peoples' aspirations to change their countries and, very recently, bringing its full weight to bear in an attempt to calm the situation in Syria. The European Union, although confronted with severe internal difficulties, has offered the countries concerned a "partnership for democracy and shared prosperity" and radically revised its neighbourhood policy. The UN Alliance of Civilizations adopted a regional strategy for the Mediterranean even before the Arab revolts began to unfold. The Council of Europe itself is in the process of devising its own "neighbourhood policy" whereby it could enable interested countries to benefit (on the basis of clearly expressed requests) not only from its expert assistance in matters of democracy, human rights and the rule of law but also from its experience of accompanying democratic reforms in central and eastern Europe, an experience amassed since the Berlin wall came down.

The Arab uprisings are bringing about a profound change in the image people in Europe have of the Arab countries and the Muslim world in general. This constitutes a historic opportunity for genuine interaction between Europe and the Arab-Muslim world founded on a partnership of equals. We are being offered a unique chance to revitalise our relations through promotion of the three principles of knowledge, understanding and co-operation. If we seize this chance, Europe and the countries on the southern rim of the Mediterranean can envisage their shared future with confidence, as was pointed out by Youssef Amrani, the Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean.

The role of Islam in societies to the south and east of the Mediterranean remains a key issue. Here a distinction must be drawn between Islam as a religion and Islam as a political project, or even an ideology. The Muslim religion is not incompatible with democracy or secularism, as can be seen from Turkey's example. In the Arab countries the transformation of religious movements into political parties could constitute an advantage rather than a threat, as it leads to the establishment of a pluralism of opinions in circles hitherto tightly closed: by definition a political

party is open to all citizens who share its basic aims and no one should be excluded from it solely on account of his or her religion. The bottom line is respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and there is a need to trust in the democratic choices of the peoples concerned, as was underlined by Khemaies Jhinaoui, Tunisia's State Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Another essential question is the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The "new political reality" emerging from the Arab revolutions will undoubtedly offer opportunities that must be taken following so many missed opportunities in the past. If a solution can at last be found to this conflict, that will certainly in no way answer all the political, economic and social problems confronting the Arab peoples and countries, but it would be a powerful catalyst to aid the emergence of a new era of confidence and co-operation between Europe and the Arab world, bringing to an end the widespread feeling of frustration and injustice in Arab public opinion ("double standards"). In this connection, the participants called on the European Union to reinforce its action to relaunch the peace process, in co-operation with the League of Arab States, and to supplement its financial assistance with a more resolute political commitment. Reference was also made to the recent efforts to have Palestine recognised as a full member of the international community, and in this context the granting of "partner for democracy" status to the Palestinian National Council by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was welcomed.

The future of the Arab countries is above all in the hands of their peoples: they must be the masters of their own destiny - which is what they desire. At the same time, there is a "duty of assistance", to borrow the term used by Latifa Akharbach, State Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Morocco. The Arab revolutions have provided a historic opportunity to breath new life into regional co-operation, whether within the Maghreb or the League of Arab States. "All our regional problems are soluble through democracy". Indeed, only democracy, backed by human development, can guarantee the stability of the Arab region and of the Euro-Mediterranean area in general.

It is in the best interests of Europe and the Arab world to make the most of their complementary advantages, in particular in economic and demographic terms. States and international organisations have a key role to play, but ultimately our shared future will be built by citizens themselves. Hence, the importance of local and regional authorities and organised civil society, who work in the field. The role of education (including non-formal education) is vital here, particularly education for democratic citizenship, education for human rights, intercultural education and education for development and world citizenship. There is also a need for open teaching of each country's history and culture in relation to its neighbours and to the rest of the world. Three ethical principles which guided the international community's action in the wake of the Second World War must again be brought to the fore and be applied in the Euro-Mediterranean area and elsewhere: reconciliation, compromise and "talking true and fair". In societies having to contend with a number of fears - sometimes exploited for political ends - and with uncertainties about the future, empathy and solidarity must also be rehabilitated.

The new technologies, in particular the Internet and the social media, have considerably changed our societies. They confer a new power on individuals and offer completely new possibilities of collective action that are not reliant on traditional organisations (political parties, trade unions, associations). Like all technological revolutions, this involves as many threats as opportunities. These new technologies clearly played an important role in rallying people to action and constituted an effective means of countering official propaganda. The more traditional mass

media nonetheless remain powerful communication vehicles, as was shown by the influence exerted by the Al Jazeera television channel.

The lessons to be drawn from the Arab revolutions go well beyond the confines of the geographical area in which these events took place. A high level of education together with high unemployment among young people, mistrust of elites (whether political or economic) and the lack of future prospects are a combination that constitutes a "Molotov cocktail" which could also inflame other parts of the world. This is illustrated by the growing force of the "indignant" protest movement ("los indignados", "les indignés", the "anti-capitalist protesters", etc.) in Europe and North America. The "Arab season" can accordingly be considered to tie in with the more general context of the global crisis, here construed in keeping with Antonio Gramsci's definition: "The crisis consists in the fact that the old world is dying and the new cannot be born".

Against this background a number of key elements were identified, which could form a foundation for future action:

- the importance of economic aid, as successful democratic transition is closely linked to an improvement in the living conditions of the inhabitants of the countries concerned;
- the social justice imperative and the fight against all forms of inequality, discrimination and corruption, both within societies and between countries or regions;
- an in-depth review of the European Union's migration policy, which has for far too long been dominated by an "obsession with security". There is a need to progress from a "timid partnership" to a "generous partnership" (Sophie Bessis);
- resolute support for the role played by women, in particular in politics and in the economic sphere: women, who have been agents of democratic change, are at risk of finding themselves marginalised in the post-revolutionary period;
- the crucial role of local and regional authorities as grassroots democratic bodies closest to the needs, expectations and interests of citizens;
- a reinforcement of civil society, as an essential precondition for the lasting establishment of democracy in the countries engaged in the transition process;
- co-operation in the youth field, through the facilitation of exchanges between Europe and the Arab world, in particular in higher education;
- media pluralism and freedom of expression and information, along with freedom of religion, which constitute the cornerstones of a free, pluralist, democratic society;
- access to new information technologies, in particular the Internet and the social networks, which have played a major role in the transition process and are key means of breathing life (or new life) into democracy;
- allowing democratic citizenship to take root, as genuine democracy can exist - and develop - only through citizens' awareness of and attachment to their rights and their obligations;

- history teaching, since the common future of the countries on the northern and the southern shores of the Mediterranean will be built on knowledge and awareness of their shared past;
- the vital role of education, in particular education for human rights and democratic citizenship, which is both a matrix and a vector of democratic change.

The participants called on the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe and the UN Alliance of Civilizations to ensure, in co-operation with all the partners concerned, that an appropriate follow-up was given to the Forum's conclusions and recommendations and to those of the conference on "Women as agents of change in the south of the Mediterranean region" held in Rome on 24 and 25 October. The next session of the Lisbon Forum, in 2012, could be an opportunity to take stock of the progress made.

REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP ON EGYPT
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The Workshop on Egypt was moderated by Ms. Helena BARROCO from the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the panelists included:

- Amr ESSAM, UN Alliance of Civilizations Focal Point for Egypt,
- Alistair MACDONALD-RADCLIFF, World Dialogue Council;
- Amr ELSHOBAKI, President of the Arab Forum for Alternatives (Egypt);
- Mona SHASHIEN, Tahrir Lounge (Egypt);
- Amany ASFOUR, President of Central Egyptian Business Women Association (Egypt);
- Ghada KHALIL, Responsible for External Relations and Communication, Asociacion Nexos Alianza (Spain);
- Waleed RASHED, Tahrir Lounge (Egypt).

A lively debate took place in the workshop, with an active exchange of views with the audience.

It was underlined that changes in Egypt are key for the impact on the democratic developments in the whole Arab world. These changes are perceived as irreversible. The participants called for seizing the historic chance for a genuine partnership and dialogue with Europe.

Six main points have been discussed and the findings and recommendations can be summarised as follows:

1. **The upcoming elections** should be free and fair and constitute a starting point for the transfer of power to the legitimately elected authorities in the peaceful way. People in Egypt are enthusiastic about free elections to be held, which have particular importance for the future, not least for the adoption of a new democratic Constitution. A proper legal framework for elections is expected (electoral law already amended 3 times). It is important to ensure that the issue of registration is adequately addressed (it is estimated that 23 million of voters are expected to vote for the first time). The political parties share their vision on a wide range of problems confronted by Egypt. However doubts have been expressed regarding preparedness of the political elite to respond to huge expectations created following a particularly massive popular uprising.
2. **Moderate Islamist movements** should be given a chance on the political arena. The role of Islam should not be stereotyped, both in the Egyptian society and abroad. In this regard awareness raising and education are important. Muslim Brothers, apparently the most organised political force, enjoy a certain level of popularity, despite some disillusionment of recent months (due in particular to controversial proposals regarding tourism, which constitutes roughly one third of the national economy).
3. **The role of the military** for democratic transition was underlined. Some prefer to rely on the military for protection against fears of an Islamist victory at the polls, while others are afraid that the military itself could obstruct the democratic transition. The power should be handed over to the civil administration in a peaceful way immediately after the elections.

4. **Concrete action and tangible outcomes** are required to address the major concerns of the population, including unemployment, insecurity, corruption and poverty. Egyptians asked for dignity, social justice, eradicating poverty and development. Egyptian people are the biggest asset of the country and empowering people is of utmost importance. Targeted programmes for economy are needed to empower women and young people, invest in energy projects, science and technology. In this respect the assistance from Europe can be appreciated. But assistance programmes should be formulated and implemented in the transparent way, with a follow-up and impact assessment. Ownership for these programmes should remain local. The solutions for Egypt should be home grown to have lasting effect. Democracy is perceived as much a tool to foster change as a goal in itself.
5. **The challenges ahead** have been mentioned, in particular poor economic conditions, poverty and a high rate of illiteracy. The economic problems are perceived as a main priority to be addressed for the realisation of human rights, promoting development and creating conditions for a better life. The economic concerns should be given their space in the public debate to formulate the appropriate responses. The participants warned about risks of failure in addressing the economic problems. At the same time the Egyptians will probably need to survive some disappointments and a certain “fatigue” is already palpable. Political parties, the civil society and the authorities go through a complex process of “learning by doing”. It is absolutely necessary to preserve an intercommunity peace and to guarantee the respect for the freedom of religion and for minorities’ rights in Egypt in order to ensure stability and democratic development of the country.
6. Considering **the impact of the Palestinian question** on the domestic policy, the international community should not spare efforts to find a Middle East peace solution, important not only for Egypt and the whole Arab world but also for Europe. Europe's image could be improved through enhanced efforts in this matter, countering the frustration about the so called “double standards” and incoherence in the approach to the Palestinian issue.

REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP ON MOROCCO
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The workshop was moderated by Dr. Alicia CABEZUDO, Member of the North-South Centre Think Tank, and the panel participants were:

- Latifa AKHARBACH, State Secretary to the Minister of foreign affairs and cooperation in Morocco and United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Focal Point for Morocco
- Nadia BERNOUSSI, Professor for constitutional law and Member of the Committee for the Reform of the Constitution, Morocco
- Aziza NAIT SIBAHA, Journalist specialised in international politics, France 24
- Amina BOUAYACH, President of the Moroccan Organisation for Human Rights (OMDH)

As the whole North African region, Morocco is making its way to deep changes that will transform the political and social structures as well as the citizen relation with the State and the promotion of a democratic culture.

Today the foreseen democracy is built through changes in the mind of the social and political actors - very active in the process - and through the reform of the Constitution that should settle and ensure these envisioned changes in its body and articles.

It is also relevant in this process the assumption that while the efficacy of any democratic system depends on the existence of well-structured and smoothly-running institutions, democracy in everyday life depends on the knowledge and practice of specific skills, attitudes and values which have to be supported and built by all members of the society and guaranteed by the State.

The panel focused on the present challenges when developing the present democratic process; the role of the different players and the on-going changes happening in the country towards the *consolidation of the Rule of Law by a renewed Constitution*.

Panel presentations and the emerged interactions with workshop attendants showed interest in the main problems appearing in the transition. Hence innovative perspectives and solutions were discussed for building a definitive Rule of Law and political stabilization in the country.

In general, all panellists agreed that although there has been a progressive path of reforms in Morocco since the 1980s, there is at the moment a real “turning point” which gives civil society incredible energy to move things forward. The “Arab Spring” was even compared to the fall of the Berlin Wall due its impact, consequences and outcomes - as well as the further development and non predictable events that were arising in the whole region along the process.

The presentations addressed four main themes in the workshop and led to an interactive discussion between participants and attendants:

1) The first issue discussed was that of **democracy in Morocco**, looking at both its **strengths and weaknesses**. The Arab Spring of Morocco was not as recent as in its neighbouring countries, since Morocco already experienced **political alternance** since the year 1980 - and this alternance of government could be considered as the first step towards democracy. Morocco was also described as a country in movement, in constant evolution, with a strong and energetic **civil**

society which dynamics fed the participative mood of its members towards a democratic renovation in the country.

Several examples of the role of civil society in bringing changes to legislation were presented, such as the current debates led by the Moroccan civil society on the difficult issue of legalizing abortion and on the abolishment of the death penalty.

Finally, the **link between human development and democracy** was discussed, looking at the differences between urban and rural areas and the need to invest more in education and to combat corruption - highlighting the need to coach the transition period with sensitive economical decisions towards a fair cover of basic needs done by public policies and democratic governmental decisions.

2) The second presentation stressed the importance of the **Constitution** as the fundamental framework for the consolidation of democracy and social transformation. The following considerations were set forth on this point: a) the existence of a constitution is not a guarantee of the existence of democracy; b) a constitution should be both stable and progressive in nature; c) the legitimacy of a constitution depends to a great extent on the way in which it was drawn up.

The reform of the constitution was looked at from two angles: as a continuity of the existing law and as a rupture with the past. Looking at *continuity*, it was stressed that in 2011 Morocco did not come from a juridical “no man’s land”, but had already accumulated legislation, norms and institutions, which provided a solid basis for the revised constitution. The *rupture* came first from **the process of reform of the Constitution in Morocco** and particularly **the process of elaboration of this reform** which was a participatory one - where civil society representatives, trade unions, political parties and experts were invited to collaborate.

The appointment of a **Constitutional Commission** formed by constitution experts and politicians was set in order to transfer the decisions taken by all these sectors in formal writing. Rupture was also evident in the **content of the constitution**, based in popular legitimacy that showed a new spirit, new rights for the individual and new institutions. Particularly new are the recognition of fundamental rights such as the civil rights, political rights, right to good governance, women rights, rights to foreigners, positive discrimination, transitional justice and the principles of deliberative democracy associated to Municipal Local Assemblies. The right of petition and the principle of no discrimination were particularly highlighted as new constitutional elements in this Reform.

3) The third presentation expanded on the **role of the media in Morocco**. It was stressed that the quality of democracy depends on that of its information. And that the degree of citizen participation in civic life is in proportion to the quality of information. It was discussed how the “Arab Spring” also became the “Spring of the media”, where individuals can suddenly become journalists with the use of the internet.

Although the current context of freedom of expression is applauded, there was a lively discussion in the workshop on some of the limitations experienced by journalists. For example, many journalists tend to leave Morocco to work abroad (brain-drain) or limit themselves through “self-censure” as the government often tends to prefer to highlight the positive aspects of the country rather than have a hard look at the weaknesses.

There was also a discussion on the links between power and economy and the issue that many newspapers and TV channels are in the hands of people close to power. It was pointed that pluralism of information is weakened by the formation of media groups and the media industry has to answer important questions today, such as the role played by the interaction between the median and advertising markets as well as the effect of this interaction on media content.

4) The last issue presented was **the impact of the Arab Spring on building citizenship and strengthening human rights**. Here the focus was essentially on the new **freedom of expression** which allowed for an effective participation of civil society to the public life. It was also stressed the need of **the practice of active dialogue** between social actors and political power as an effective instrument for agreements and also as a way of guaranteeing inclusion in the decision making process.

In Morocco, public manifestations and protests were not concentrated geographically but spread out all over the country in over 100 cities. This extended participation in urban and rural areas showed the grade of implication and awareness on the need of changes and political transformation that the whole population has - related to political, social and economical issues.

It was highlighted the need to support initiatives promoting education in human rights and democratic values in formal and informal sectors and the reinforcement of actions between civil society on the one hand and local authorities on the other, in order to favour networks and the convergence of synergies and actions.

The **upcoming elections** were also discussed in this context, characterized by an enthusiastic civil participation. The elections are seen as a valuable exercise of freedom and as an useful learning process for the whole population and the authorities of the country.

Elections work also as a mobilisation motto towards democracy. For the first time there will be 60 women and 30 young parliamentarians elected among the 379 Parliament members. And there is a real challenge for the Assembly that will be elected on 25 November since this Assembly will be responsible for implementing the new elements of the reformed Constitution.

In conclusion, it is important to point out the expression used by one of the panellists - who said that the countries of the Arab Spring, and in particular Morocco *did not have a revolution as such, not even an evolution but rather a "mutation"* - which was the result of immense efforts and pacific struggles from the society. Mutation that implies a deeper development of "old existing elements" in the political body and the society as a whole and renewed or new elements that bring transformation to the country under "refreshing" winds of freedom, guaranteed human rights and democracy.

REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP ON TUNISIA
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The workshop was moderated by Mr. Murat DAOUDOV, Member of the North-South Centre Think Tank, and the panel participants were:

- Sophie BESSIS, Deputy Secretary General of the International Federation of Humans Rights (FIDH)
- Hasni ABIDI, Director of the Studies and Research Centre for the Arab and Mediterranean World (CERMAM)
- Mohamed KAMOUN, Euromed Youth Trainer (Tunisia)

The most relevant points of discussion between the panellists and participants of the workshop on Tunisia can be summarised in four main points:

1. First of all, the participants agreed that **Tunisia offers a unique experience** of *a*) a purely popular revolution *b*) realised without foreign involvement *c*) which have resulted in full demise of the regime. In this point of view it is different from other countries' cases where just the dictator has been removed without that the regime incurs major change or where strong foreign intervention took place. Tunisia is a real laboratory for the whole Arab world as it will first govern the transition. As it was said in the Lisbon Forum, "Tunisia has helped to change the century".

The Tunisian case has provided three pioneering examples: 1) it was the country where the revolution started and sparked to the whole region; 2) it has been the first country to step to the post-revolutionary phase as it has successfully organised democratic elections; 3) it is there that for the first time "Islamically-oriented" movements, which have long been used as an excuse for dictatorial regimes, have gained power democratically.

The importance of the Tunisian example is also stressed by the fact that the newly elected parliament has clear agenda and mandate: It goes about a Constituent Assembly elected for one year term, which has the task to elaborate a new constitution. The new government will be also formed to take care of the country during this year, after which the Tunisian voters will return to the polls. (From this angle, this is a much clearer framework for transition than for example in Egypt, where the forthcoming assembly will not compose a new government and which has no clear deadline for drafting the new constitution.)

2. In the new period two major challenges await Tunisia. The first of them is the "**democratic test**" that the country will face. With the new political composition in the Constituent Assembly, the political leadership will have to build strong and pluralist institutions, to elaborate the new constitution maintaining the country's secular basis and safeguarding the achievements on women rights etc. Such pluralist institutions will secure the stable future of the country; otherwise there will be the risk to fall into authoritarianism, a fate that many transition societies faced in the past. On the one side, the "Islamically-inspired" political classes are now involved in the "democratic game" and they will (have to) learn its rules and adapt themselves to the realities of the modern Tunisian society. On the other side, the opinion is divided on whether the experience of Turkey with a "conservative-Islamic" government in a secular state may provide a model, with arguments that the cases of the two countries differ considerably.

3. The second major challenge for the new government will be the **“economic test”**. The **“Tunisian miracle”** has revealed itself to be rather a **“mirage”** or at least a very fragile economic structure. Social pressure is a source of major concern, with unemployment and lack of opportunities for youngsters. High scores in elections also mean high expectations of people and ultimately constitute a burden of high responsibility for the ruling party. And the new government will not have an easy task, as the major potential partners for redressing the economy, such as the EU or USA, themselves face serious economic problems. Here the example of Turkey, which succeeded to evolve from a collapsing economy to the current growth boom, may offer some lessons from inside the region.

4. The **“youthquake”** that has shaken the Arab World is of particular interest. The youth has been a major actor in the change that happened in Tunisia. The social media and the mobility of youth have played crucial role in their mobilisation. However, this role of the youth should be preserved for the good of the country, as the youth has been only barely represented in the recently elected assembly. The political parties should take it more into consideration; however the youth should also keep actively involving and exercising pressure on the political parties so that they are properly represented in the political structures. Hopefully, next year they will have a new opportunity, at the occasion of national and local elections, and they should fully seize it. They should get involved actively in the political life and especially the local democracy may be a good starting point for political involvement of many of them.

Additional comments on the context after the elections in Tunisia

The panel presentations and the debate that followed devoted significant importance to clarifying the purpose of the last elections in Tunisia and the present political context. The elections of October 23 had the aim of electing a constituent assembly that will draft the constitution of the Second Republic of Tunisia. Within a year, new elections will be held, presidential or parliamentary.

On October 23, for the first time the Tunisian population had the opportunity to express itself freely in an election, with a very high electoral turn out in the polls, 60%. The balance of power is now of 41.47% and 90 seats in the new assembly for the Ennahda Party. To the question whether an Islamic party can address the democratic needs of the country was answered by the panel participants with the views that it will depend on the democratic conscience and maturity of its leaders, capable or not to resist to the pressure of the more radical sectors in the party.

Despite the temptation to compare the Tunisian case with Turkey, the important distinction between the respective Constitutions was stressed. In Turkey, secularism is enshrined in the Constitution, and in order to comply with the Constitution the AKP had to become secular, whereas in Tunisia the Constitution does not offer limitations on non-secularism.

Several examples were highlighted, displaying the fragility of the Tunisian economic situation such as the high unemployment rate (23% unemployed, one fourth of them highly educated), and the fact that a significant part of economical and intellectual elites live out of the country.

The transition in Tunisia requires sustainable economic conditions, leading to the shaping of democratic institutions, political pluralism and a renewed body of legislation that secures democratic alternance and multipartism.

In conclusion, in Tunisia the changes refer to the collapse of a system and regime rather than the collapse of the state. It is essential for the transition period to rely on the existing social bases. Despite positive hopes and aspirations following the elections, one has to remain cautious and prudent regarding the possible consequences of the elections during the transition period, as the return to authoritarianism - although undesirable - has been witnessed before.

Europe has a duty to respond to the changes in the Southern Mediterranean region, taking into account the significance and consequences of the Arab spring. The Northern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean have a common future, with shared universal values. The North does not have the monopoly of democratic values and human rights.

Examples of good practices of cooperation between the European Union and the Maghreb countries, such as the *Euromed Youth Programme*, were mentioned, highlighting the contribution of these exchanges to intercultural dialogue, youth awareness on human rights and democratic citizenship. The need for the reinforcement of such programmes is a priority for the region, mobilizing the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations by involving youth from the region in their programmes and emphasizing the role of youth cooperation, civil society and the role of women as actors of change.

The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe can play a relevant role in providing assistance in the constitutional reform, following the recent cooperation with the Tunisian authorities in the electoral process and the observation of the elections.