



North-South Centre of the Council of Europe

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Lisbon Forum 2012 Outcomes

“The Arab Season: from change to challenges”

3 - 4 December 2012

Ismaili Centre, Lisbon

In partnership with:



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Strengthening democratic reform in the southern Neighbourhood

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BACKGROUND

Created in 1994 by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe (NSC), the Lisbon Forum is a platform for dialogue and sharing experiences, expertise and good practices between Europe and other continents, especially countries on the southern rim of the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Africa.

The 2011 Lisbon Forum was dedicated to the theme **“The Arab Spring: a major step towards making universal human rights real”**. It acknowledged the historical importance of the changes which have been affecting Arab countries since the beginning of 2011, and the prospects they open for a renewed cooperation between Europe and those countries. Through this connection, participants welcomed the prospect of bringing the Council of Europe - with its unique expertise in the fields of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and its wide experience of accompanying democratic transition processes in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall – as a new player into a region which has a direct impact on Europe.

The 2012 Lisbon Forum was a follow-up to the 2011 edition, under the theme: **“The Arab season: from change to challenges”**. It was held on 3 – 4 December in the framework of the new Joint EU/Council of Europe Programme “Strengthening democratic reform in the southern Neighbourhood” by the NSC, and in partnership with the Alliance of Civilisations of the United Nations, the Aga Khan Network and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Portugal.

The Forum aimed at taking stock of changes taking place since the beginning of the Arab Season in January 2011, covering the whole region of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, in particular Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt, but also Algeria, Lebanon and Palestine. Four workshops covered the issues which are at the heart of the Council of Europe’s mandate: constitutional and justice system reforms; freedom of expression; political reforms, including the reform of local self-government; women’s rights. The Forum formulated proposals aimed at streamlining the reform agenda in the Arab countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean and at reinforcing cooperation with the Council of Europe.

Relevant international actors actively contributed to the event in particular, the League of Arab States, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, the International Federation for Human Rights – FIDH, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), as well as the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Committee of Regions and the Council of Europe bodies, such as the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the INGO Conference and the Venice Commission.

As usually the Forum provided an opportunity to gather together parliamentarians as well as representatives of governments, local and regional authorities and civil society - following the "quadrilogue" principle that governs the functioning of the North-South Centre. This was a useful opportunity for interaction and networking of more than 200 participants from both the North and the South of the Mediterranean. The Forum provided a rare occasion for the southern and eastern Mediterranean participants to gather and compare experiences. Active involvement of representatives of the new political order, youth, women activists and journalists/media professionals added a more interactive feature to the programme. Rich and varied presentations deeply rooted in respective national realities fed the Forum’s work and conclusions. They often casted diverse and even divergent perspectives on the recent and current developments, adding

viewpoints from civil society, parliamentarians and representatives of central and local governments.

The Forum's plenary sessions and workshops were followed through live streaming in more than 30 countries including Albania, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Cape Verde, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Mexico, Morocco, Portugal, Qatar, Spain, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The reforms process is a gradual long term process and systemic changes require commitment and inclusive participation.

The Arab Season¹ is characterised by a variety and complexity of transformations.

Despite very specific national contexts, **common features** were outlined:

- We continue to live through a process of transformations with many challenges,
- The degree of citizens' participation has increased considerably,
- Socio-economic problems, marginalisation of certain groups of population, gender inequality, lack of opportunities for the young, high level of frustration continue to impact the transformations,
- There seems to be a need for an increased capacity to deliver on the ground.

One year after the beginning of the Arab Season some **achievements** were reported but also some **alarming setbacks**. Some approaches towards dealing with human rights issues raise serious concerns. Challenges include among others:

- the development of a sense of belonging,
- the promotion of national cohesion,
- the building / modernisation of public institutions,
- the consolidation of democracy,
- the maintaining stability,
- the fight against corruption;

There is a sense of urgency in addressing the situation of women and young people. **Women's rights** are under attack in some areas. Gender equality and women's empowerment are very essential for successful reforms in the Arab region. It is in fact a matter of democratic legitimacy. **The situation of young people** is of equal importance. In view of the proportion of the young population, its key role in popular uprisings and its relative fragility as well as high youth unemployment, targeting young people in the region should also be a matter of priority. In this respect, education, both formal and non formal, plays a key role in securing lasting change in the future.

Considering the **situation in different countries**, **Morocco** emerged as an example of a country that launched important reforms, in particular the constitutional reform, in response to the demands of the society. At the same time, emphasis was placed on the need to improve the implementation of the constitutional principles of participation and non-discrimination in practice. **Tunisia** and **Egypt**, where the authoritarian regimes were toppled through popular uprisings are still undergoing major periods of instability. In these countries a conflict between liberal / secular and conservative Islamist approaches, is observed. There should be a meaningful and continuous dialogue to overcome polarisation and to find a model that can ensure respect for universal rights and freedoms and recognises the religious and cultural particularities of each country. Minorities

¹ The participants supported the use of the term "Arab Season", proposed last year by President Sampaio, Chair of the Lisbon Forum.

should have the possibility to voice their concerns and have their rights respected. The existence of a strong civil society capable to obtain concessions from the government is seen as a positive key asset for the reforms. In the case of **Jordan**, popular calls for reforms match the aspiration to maintain political stability. **Algeria, Lebanon and Palestine** were affected to a lesser degree by the Arab Season, each country for its own specific reasons. The countries rich in natural resources like **Algeria** have the capacities to play down the “demands of the street”, but reforms would be welcome to provide long term stability. Sectarian tensions continue to characterise the situation in **Lebanon**. The drama in **Syria** has direct repercussions on the situation in Lebanon. Syria’s condition is marked by gross human rights violations. It remains a matter of great concern and requires greater engagement by the international community.

Currently the protracted conflict between **Israel and Palestine** contributes to feed persistent tensions and divisions in the region. A comprehensive two-state solution should be implemented requiring mutual concessions and recognitions, with clear borders and commitments to respect minorities. The historical decision to grant Palestine the status of a non-member observer State in the United Nations should contribute to resume meaningful negotiations in the short term.

Participants emphasised the view that **democracy is home-grown**, and the need to act on the principle that the people owns democracy. Support for democracy should be dynamic, flexible, responsive, and contextualised, while discussions about democratic reform should embrace the acceptance of differences of opinion and political contestation, and a willingness to both listen and learn. It was also agreed that there is no end game in democracy, and no single path to democracy.

During the popular uprisings people demanded dignity, respect, freedom and social justice. The **aspirations for universal values** deconstructed the so-called “Arab exceptionalism” completely. The demands of the people demonstrate that socio-economic and civic and political rights are connected and interdependent.

The **priorities for the national reform processes** should include the need to conduct constitutional reforms through an inclusive process, to guarantee the independence of the judiciary, to respect fundamental rights and freedoms, in particular the freedom of expression and to conduct local government reforms.

The discussions underlined the importance of an **enhanced and inclusive dialogue in each country**, to listen to all voices within societies and take the concerns of all parts of society into account when designing and implementing reforms. Building inclusive and empowered societies is the best precondition for stability and social cohesion in the long term. Societies in the South of the Mediterranean as in the North are diverse and in some cases fragmented. There is a need to further promote national and social cohesion, and bridge polarised views. Dialogue should be increasingly used to overcome social divisions.

The Arab Season coincides with a **crisis period in Europe**, marked by anxiety and uncertainties. There is an urgent need to put the issue of solidarity high on the agenda. Solidarity within societies, in Europe and trans-regional solidarity is more relevant than ever. Solidarity is required to ensure a higher respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and overcome the current difficulties.

Participants emphasised the **need for a reinforced, open and sincere dialogue between the North and the South of the Mediterranean** to tackle common major challenges, which are often highly interconnected, and involve both the North and the South. The level of interdependence has increased significantly. The principle of solidarity and partnership of equals should contribute to feed the renewed cooperation. Facilitating exchanges especially among young people should help to deconstruct prejudices and stereotypes and improve mutual understanding. The role of education and enhanced intercultural dialogue are key in this respect. More efforts are required to overcome religion-related bias. It was underlined that efforts should be made in order to better understand Islam, as well as other religions from the southern Mediterranean countries.

The participants welcomed the **new opportunities for increased cooperation** between Europe and the southern and eastern Mediterranean, in particular the ones offered by the ambitious EU/CoE Joint programme “Strengthening democratic reform in the southern Neighbourhood”, providing for a targeted cooperation based on the demand-driven approach.

The Council of Europe’s instruments and mechanisms have the capacity to contribute to the progress of the ongoing transformations in Arab countries – within the framework of the **Council of Europe policy towards its immediate neighbourhood** – a policy proposed by the Secretary General and approved by its Committee of Ministers. Both the European Union and the Council of Europe adapted their responses to the changes in the southern and eastern Mediterranean and reinforced their cooperation, creating synergies and using the added value of the Council of Europe’s instruments and mechanisms. Accession to the Council of Europe partial agreements such as the North-South Centre, the Venice Commission and the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) offers opportunities for targeted assistance and cooperation in the fields of intercultural dialogue / global education / youth, constitutional and electoral reforms and reforms to support good governance and fight corruption. Principles and standards included in the Council of Europe’s legal instruments which are not open to non-member states (such as the European Convention of Human Rights) and the work carried out by Council of Europe’s bodies (such as the European Court of Human Rights or the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance – ECRI) could provide inspiration for the reform processes. The seeds of success of the reforms are found in the respective countries and contextual realities. But sharing experiences of successes and shortcomings of transitions in Central and Eastern Europe, can bring useful perspectives and elements for designing and implementing reforms. Portugal’s experience of transition is equally interesting in this respect. The Partnership for Democracy Status with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe offers a framework for sharing experiences of democratic reforms between parliaments.

Concerning more particularly the **North-South Centre of the Council of Europe** it was emphasised that the principles of dialogue, solidarity and partnership, as well as the promotion of universal values are core to the mandate of the NSC. The North-South Centre’s action on intercultural dialogue, education and youth is an essential asset to be further developed in the future.

The participants underlined that creating **synergies and complementarity between the activities of partners** is vital. Considering their recognition and expertise acquired, the North-South Centre and the Alliance of Civilizations, should further enhance their cooperation, joint action and synergy in the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. The United Nations’ Alliance of Civilisations’ actions in the Mediterranean through its regional strategy on intercultural dialogue and cooperation, should be further supported and developed. The work of the Alliance of Civilizations

and the personal contribution of President Sampaio, Chair of the Lisbon Forum were highlighted with particular appreciation.

The participants underlined that the northern and southern Mediterranean countries share common universal values and their future. The diversity should be celebrated and respected, creating more opportunities to discover each other. The walls of fear are being destroyed, but trust needs to be built and cooperation further enhanced by increasing the level of engagement.

WORKSHOP 1

“Promoting the rule of law, in particular through constitutional reforms and justice system reforms”

Moderators:

Mr Gianni Buquicchio, President of the Venice Commission;

Ms Magda Zaki, Director, Minister Plenipotentiary, Department of the Dialogue among Civilizations, League of Arab States

Rapporteur: Ms Amira Yahyaoui, Founder of Al Bawsala, Tunisia

Round table:

Mr Mohammed Auajjar, Former Minister of Human Rights, Morocco

Mr David Baragwanath, President of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon

Mr Andrew Bradley, Director, Office of International IDEA to the EU

Mr Alberto Costa, Lawyer and Politician, Portugal

Ms Dragana Filipovic, Permanent Representative of Serbia to the Council of Europe

Ms Fatema Khafagy, Alliance for Arab Women, Egypt

Ms Amira Yahyaoui, Founder of Al Bawsala, Tunisia

This workshop analysed the **different aspects of democracy, human rights and the rule of law**. It made clear that there is **no single model of democracy**. Furthermore, the discussion highlighted the importance of **local ownership through participatory approaches** on all levels. It was underlined that the real political capacity of the society is key for creating sustainable democratic institutions. **Constitutional reform** is of central importance for the democratisation and it needs to be inclusive and participatory.

Following a juxtaposition of the pros and cons of bottom-up (essential for efficient democracy) and top-down (important for short term stability) approaches in bringing about political change, the workshop examined the relationship between Islam and human rights. Highlighting the diversity of Islam the workshop confirmed its compatibility with human rights, but stressed the importance of guaranties for minorities and other religious and non-religious beliefs. The participants underlined the need to respect the results of democratic elections, independently of political preferences. The following **recommendations** were formulated:

1. To further develop and support cooperation in the implementation of democratic reforms, in particular the constitutional reforms and justice system reforms.
2. Constitutional building processes should be inclusive and participatory; there should be a local ownership of the process and specific attention should be given to the context in which the process is taking place.
3. To develop rules and mechanisms to ensure the implementation of constitutional provisions in practice.
4. To take into account the experience of constitutional reforms in other countries.
5. More efforts are required to overcome religion-related bias and promote knowledge and better understanding of Islam as well as other religions from the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries.

WORKSHOP 2

“Freedom of expression, countering hate speech and discrimination - the role of new IT and social media”

Moderator: Ms Helena Barroco, United Nations Alliance of Civilisations

Rapporteur: Mr Nacer Chrif Tayeb, El Sahwa Association, Algeria

Kick-off reflections by: HRH Princess Rym Ali, Jordan

Round table:

Mr Nacer Chrif Tayeb, El Sahwa Association, Algeria

Ms Fatima El-Issawi, Researcher, London School of Economics, Lebanon

Ms Suhair El Qarra, Researcher, Jordan

Mr Mohamed Kamoun, Euro-Med Youth Trainer, Tunisia

Ms Lamia Radi, Director of Cooperation and Cultural Action, National Focal Point of Alliance of Civilisations, Morocco

Ms Samira Sitail, Deputy Director of 2M channel, Morocco

The workshop tackled the issue of the **freedom of expression as a constituent element of democracy and a tool to promote human dignity**. The participants discussed in particular the line between conflicting freedom of expression and freedom of religion. They considered that the dialogue between hardliners on both sides was difficult. The idea of shifting the attention from the speaker to the listener was brought up: to focus rather on the listeners’ perception of others’ speeches than on the freedom of expression of one individual.

Finally, the **role of the media**, social media and ITs– was discussed. Recognizing that social media can be both “the best friend and the worst enemy” of the freedom of speech, the participants analysed the Facebook revolution in Egypt. In addition, they analysed the freedom of journalists vis-à-vis the power of owners and agencies on editorial policies.

The following **recommendations** were formulated:

1. To promote education on all levels as a key point for proper practice of freedom of expression.
2. To reinforce democratic citizenship education and intercultural dialogue.
3. To support training and capacity building on Media literacy.
4. To promote ethics and framing of ethical codes for journalism.
5. To provide training for journalists (assuring the long term commitment and sustainability to those trainings).
6. To promote the development of unions intended to support and to protect journalists.
7. To take measures to counter extremism and hate speech in the media.
8. To support multiperspectivity in teaching history, using best practices.
9. To promote transition from state TV to public TV and to ensure that the voices of minorities are heard.
10. To promote a better understanding and civilized debates.
11. To create a global media observatory.

WORKSHOP 3

“Addressing the challenges of democratization: political reforms, including the reform of local self-government”

Moderator: Mr Murat Daoudov, Adviser at the Union of Municipalities of Marmara and Member of the Think Tank of the North-South Centre, Belgium/Turkey

Rapporteur: Mr Younes Sekkouri, Parliamentarian, Morocco

Round table:

Sir Roger Gale, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Mr Tarak Mahdhaoui, Member of the ISIE (Independent High Body for Elections), Tunisia

Mr Atef Rawahneh, Mayor of Lab-wa-Mleeh, National Coordinator of United Cities and Local Governments, Jordan

Mr Philippe Receveur, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Mr Christophe Rouillon, Member of the Committee of the Regions of the EU

Mr Younes Sekkouri, Parliamentarian, Morocco

Prof. Lotfi Tarchouna, President of the Tunisian Association of Studies and Research on Democracy and Local Affairs, Tunisia

The workshop addressed the **challenges of democratization through political reforms** at central and local levels. Discussions emphasized the need of the government to represent the people and to reform the **mechanisms of participation** in order to involve citizens in the process as much as possible. In addition, **decentralization and devolution of power to local levels** were identified as key elements in the reform process, in order to provide enough space for citizens' participation. The need to solve socio-economic disparities and implement **development policies** was highlighted as a priority to avoid regional disparities. Finally, it was advised that Europe strengthen its development cooperation and external action.

The following **recommendations** were formulated:

1. To properly address the institutionalisation of local government in the constitutions of the Arab countries in order to stress its importance.
2. To create a clearer separation in the state's overall architecture between sovereign/national and local powers in order to enable complementarity and clarity between different levels.
3. To support shifting of relations between central and local powers from close tutelage to empowerment; to transform the control of opportunity into a control of legality *a posteriori*.
4. Local governments should be consulted systematically by central powers regarding all national policies that affect local authorities' competencies.
5. Local governments should be provided sufficient financial autonomy, through an increase of local revenues, increase of tax revenue shares and appropriate mechanisms of transfers for a more cohesive development of territories. Thus, regional disparities should be tackled through balanced regional and local economic development policies.
6. Local governments should be able to form their associations, for better representation of their interests and better coordination.
7. Popular participation in local life should not be restricted to the election processes; various mechanisms of participatory democracy should be promoted.

8. To ensure equality and gender balance at local level and to take into consideration specific needs of social groups, in particular, those of minorities.
9. To promote and respect the principle of subsidiarity; central governments should transfer competencies with sufficient resources to local governments. Thus, countries should seek for an appropriate equilibrium between decentralization and deconcentration.
10. To give a clear legal and financial framework to the status of a local elected official in order to allow the good exercise of local responsibilities.

WORKSHOP 4:

“Centrality of women’s rights in the transition to democracy “

Moderator: Ms Mbarka Bouaida, Member of the Think Tank of the North-South Centre, Morocco

Rapporteur: Ms Hoda Badran, Alliance for Arab Women, Egypt

Round table:

Ms Latifa Akherbach, Research Professor at the Institute of Information and Communication in Rabat, Morocco

Ms Hoda Badran, Alliance for Arab Women, Egypt

Ms Farah Barqawi, Movement “The uprising of the women in the Arab World”, Palestine

Ms Wiem Melki, United Women for Peace, Tunisia

Mr Abderrazak Morjani, Moroccan Centre for Civic Education, Morocco

Ms Raja Mrad, Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, Tunisia

Ms Karima Rhanem, President, Moroccan Association for Development & Parallel Diplomacy, Morocco

Despite important differences and specific challenges, the workshop members observed **similar developments** in the situation of women in various countries of the region, especially in Egypt and Tunisia. The **exception was Morocco**, which was perceived by the participants as a particular case giving the involvement of the King, Mohamed VI, in the integration of the principle of equality in the new constitution.

Women’s issues were often marginalized during the uprisings of the Arab Spring. However, the period after the revolutions witnessed an **erosion of women’s rights** through restrictive interpretations of Islam. The rising influence of Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists and the under-representation of women in constituent assemblies resulted in constitutions that do not adequately protect the rights of women. At the same time incidents such as violence against women and sexual harassment as well as child marriage are on the rise.

On the positive side, **mobilisation efforts** to counter the discrimination and marginalization of women are taking place and **regional networks** have been established and are expanding.

The main challenges to gender equality include restrictive interpretations of Islam, the current economic crisis, and the internalisation of gender discriminatory concepts and values by women.

The following **recommendations** were formulated:

1. To support the change of discriminatory values and attitudes of the society as part of the culture.
2. To support reinforcement of women’s movement at the national and regional levels.
3. To support solidarity across genders and regions (not just between women, but also involving men, and a solidarity extending to the outside of the Arab region).

4. To encourage the countries which ratified the CEDAW – UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – to ratify all the Convention’s protocols and ensure a proper implementation of these legal standards.
5. To promote increasing the industrialised countries’ contribution to development and in particular for the projects to empower women.
6. To take measures to raise the awareness of the general public and of the decision-makers on women’s issues, using in particular the media. Awareness in particular should be raised at grassroots levels on discriminatory rules and laws. Women’s rights should be high on the agenda of relations and cooperation between Europe and the Arab countries.
7. The agenda of cooperation between Europe and the Arab countries should consider women’s rights as a priority and the assistance supported by donors should take into due account the need for empowerment of women.