DAHRENDORF FORUM
Debating Europe

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF EURO-ARAB RELATIONS
Dahrendorf Symposium, Thursday, 26th of May 2016

Dahrendorf Working Group 'Europe and the MENA-region'

Arab-European relations after the Arab Uprisings

Since the 'Arab Spring' of 2011 the MENA region has been undergoing rapid, complex and contentious processes of change. The political upheavals have deepened fragmentation along many fault-lines and ignited the region's latent contradictions, turning them into open, sometimes bloody conflict: between religious and secular social forces, Sunnis and Shiites, rich and poor, men and women, state and non-state actors and, overall, between an authoritarian elite and a younger, more dynamic and forward-looking generation. As people claim the newly won political spaces, they are confronted with growing repression and authoritarianism. All this is taking place on top of the intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict and amid the ongoing self-serving involvement of external powers in internal regional dynamics in a manner that has exacerbated the region's volatility thus making it a major security and humanitarian concern for the immediate neighbours to the North.

The European Union is ill-equipped

The European Union, in turn, is ill-equipped to cope with both the humanitarian and the security dimensions of these regional transformations and conflicts. On the institutional level, Euro-Mediterranean relations suffer from overtly complex organizational structures and weak performance. The political responses to the uprisings of 2011 have been limited both in scope and depth. They reflect rather pluri-bilateral approaches (EU and individual ENP/Barcelona states) than a coherent approach to the region. Being caught in their well-known 'democracy-stability-dilemma', most of the time, European actors opt for stability. Moreover, the EU and its member states have great difficulties to exert their political leverage in the context of the presence of other external actors such as the US and GCC member states.

The rise of Islamophobia and the enduring 'refugee crisis'

European countries themselves are caught in their own protracted economic, political and social crises with lasting impacts on their welfare states. European societies are witnessing a rise in racist and xenophobic attitudes – including Islamophobia – that might translate into stricter anti-migration policies. These dynamics are further intensified by an influx of refugees from Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Libya, Iraq, Somalia and South Sudan – all countries which suffer from conditions of precarious statehood. At the same time, political violence by Islamists in Europe is fuelling the anxieties and prejudices of Europeans.

What's next?

The social, political and economic dynamics on both shores of the Mediterranean are closely linked. The uprisings in some parts of the Arab world have had, and will continue to have far reaching consequences for the MENA region, and for its economic and political relations with Europe. In light of this, the panel is guided by the question: ***What are the challenges and prospects of the political, economic and social relations between Europe and the MENA-states?***

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

What emerged in the Working Group over the year is that the political developments and dynamics in the EU's bordering regions have overwhelmed the state-capacities of both regions. Key lessons and solutions include:

1. Fortress Europe is not a solution. The 'refugee crisis' must be understood as a humanitarian crisis. It demonstrates the massive failure of the international community. The crisis is here to stay. On a long-term basis, t**he EU and its member states need to tackle the root causes** – elimination of the reasons for leaving –, **reform Dublin II** – develop a comprehensive re-settlement agreement – **and pursue a robust policy of integration on the national levels** – full integration of refugees.

2. The EU is much more successful than is generally perceived. Yet, **the EU needs to take local actors seriously and be more responsive to local and societal needs.** It needs to invest more in terms of acquiring knowledge on the ground and engaging systematically and closely with non-state and civil society organizations both in Europe and the Arab World. National and European politicians need to strike a better balance between security needs and citizen's rights and freedoms. Caught between terrorist threats and right-wing populism too many European governments are ready to limit freedom.

3. A solution to the Syrian conflict is key to stabilize the region**. On a long-term basis the EU needs to develop a comprehensive plan of action**, taking into account local actors and sub-regional dynamics. **On a short-term basis the EU needs to provide more funding to the UNHCR and the World Food Program** and increasing protections for persons who are fleeing. This could imply the establishment of a 'humanitarian corridor' in border regions.

The Panel: To take stock and critically asses the future relations between two interlinked regions, the WG invited practitioners and academics from both regions.

CHALLENGES & PROSPECTS OF THE EURO-ARAB RELATIONS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

CHAIR & MODERATOR
Cilja Harders, Professor for Political Science, Director of the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Politics, Free University, Berlin; Co-chair of the Dahrendorf Working Group 'Europe and the MENA-region'

PANELISTS
Annette Jünemann, Professor for Political Science and International Relations, Helmut-Schmidt University, Hamburg

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The panelists will critically review
- current European and Arab approaches to inter-state and intra-state conflicts such as Syria and Libya
- modes and forms of cooperation in Euro-Mediterranean relations, including the role of private-sector, non-state, and municipal/local-government actors in shaping inter and intra-state relations
- Europe's classical 'democracy-versus-stability' dilemma in light of the 'refugee crisis' and ensuing policy option s;
- the strategies of reform that are needed in Europe and the Arab world to address current challenges
- rival strategies of European and non-European external actors (US, GCC member states, others) in the MENA region