



# CAN THE “ARAB SPRING” PRESENT A REAL THREAT TO EUROPE?

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*The paper aims to summarize the roots of the “Arab spring” in North Africa as well as to give an overview of the events in order to offer possible answers to the question in the title, namely whether the “Arab spring” poses a real threat to Europe or not. Having its main focus on Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, three core countries of the subject, gives the best opportunity and probably the most suitable examples of showing the nature and the unique dynamics of the “Arab spring”: Tunisia as the starting point of the revolutions, and Libya and Egypt where the stable dictatorships that were thought to be everlasting collapsed in a relatively short time, eventually resulting in different outcomes. As a conclusion, the study offers not only its own findings, but also raises even more questions to be answered. The single act that was done by a “nameless” figure in a rural Tunisian town changed the history of the country, then by starting a domino effect, beginning to shape the whole region and the Arab World though the real outcome still remains a question.*

**Keywords:** “Arab spring”, terrorism, North Africa, Libya, Egypt, Tunisia.

## Introduction

In the past three years a large number of articles and studies have been published on

the phenomenon branded as “Arab spring” or “Facebook revolution”<sup>1</sup>, although its real nature is not clear for many. In my article, I make an attempt to identify the causes that triggered the “Arab spring”, what is currently happening in the Arab world, and what the consequences can be for Europe, including Hungary.

The series of increasingly violent demonstrations sweeping across North Africa and the Middle East were the results of interconnected processes. The situation was partly shaped by economic and social causes. Nearly all of the heads of states ruling the Arab countries until 2011 came to power in the ‘60s and ‘70s, after having overthrown their ineffective and corrupt predecessors<sup>2</sup>. However, after a while they became similar to their predecessors and created their own kleptocracy. That time, the revenues from freshly discovered oil deposits seemed endless therefore nearly everybody received a share from them. However, this system was impossible to maintain for long and the public became fed

1 Rebeca J. ROSEN, “So, was Facebook responsible for the Arab Spring after all?”, in *The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/09/so-was-facebook-responsible-for-the-arab-spring-after-all/244314>, accessed on 22.10.2013.

2 P. R. KUMARASWAMY, *Uprisings in the Arab world, options for GOI*, pp. 3-6, [http://www.idsa.in/system/files/IB\\_ArabWorld.pdf](http://www.idsa.in/system/files/IB_ArabWorld.pdf), accessed on 23.10.2013.

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up with the completely corrupted regimes unable to prevent the pauperisation of the middle class, which came into being between the '60s and '80s, as the continuously decreasing national revenues were spent on maintaining the ruling elite's own welfare and that of their vassals. Consequently, masses protested in the streets and, when authorities responded in the wrong way, people became aware of their power. Problems affecting these countries include overpopulation, the increase of proportion of young generation (15-25 year old) to the active labourers, growing unemployment rate, desertification, lack of potable water and food, all aggravated by the global economic crisis. Economic reforms initiated by political leaderships proved unsuccessful. Moreover, they increased society's financial polarisation<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile, funds transferred from abroad by Arabic guest workers decreased as many of them lost their jobs. Initially, demonstrations were generated mainly by economic and social troubles then well-organised Muslim radicals appeared superseding larger groups (e.g. the Coptic Christians in Egypt) and turned into government actors<sup>4</sup>.

Naturally, other factors also contributed to the escalation of events, e.g. tribalism, as leaders of existing regimes have kept away nearly all tribes from power, except their own ones. In North Africa, policy-making is based on tribal and clan interests instead of common political platforms or values; there "the winner takes it all". Besides, interests of great powers and other nations also appear in these conflicts.

The world is not bipolar anymore and the America-centred world order is also over as regional powers like Turkey, Brazil, China, India,

or Iran are increasingly able to represent their own interests – even against the USA. In Libya, for instance, Italy and China lost their positions due to the changes in the country, while UK and France influences seem to be stronger. Muslim organisations are gaining power although they joined the demonstrations with some delay, but then they took them under their own control. Previously, such organisations were not allowed to legally operate, but movements starting as food riots provided them with opportunities to break out and, even more, to come to power. This is what happened in Tunisia and Egypt, where they became government actors. Also, persons with connections to terrorist organizations or direct involvement in previous terrorist acts got leading positions.

After the initial uncertainty, the West had a positive attitude to the events, but later it became clear that most demonstrators did not really have pro-Western emotions<sup>5</sup>. Naturally, no unified scheme can be applied to the countries involved in the demonstrations as the processes influencing them were very diverse, but a part of the problems were similar. For this reason, it isn't possible to point out a single main cause laying at the basis of the "Arab spring", as its break out was triggered by a cluster of existing problems. Media had an indisputable role in the demonstrations, as they were able to influence both the course of actions and the public opinion<sup>6</sup>. However, there are many who overplay this role, forgetting the fact that Muslim masses are much more affected by their social relations and religious leaders than media<sup>7</sup>.

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3 \*\*\*, *Spring Tide, Will the Arab risings yield democracy, dictatorship or disorder?, A report from the Economist Intelligence Unit*, pp. 25-27, [http://pages.eiu.com/rs/eiu2/images/Arab\\_Spring\\_Tide\\_Whitepaper\\_Jun2011.pdf](http://pages.eiu.com/rs/eiu2/images/Arab_Spring_Tide_Whitepaper_Jun2011.pdf), accessed on 23.10.2014.

4 Maria Cristina PACIELLO, *The Arab Spring: Socio-economic Challenges and Opportunities*, pp. 2-6, <http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iai1115e.pdf>, accessed at 23.10.2013; Marie MOELLER, *Economic Voting and Economic Revolutionizing? The Economics of Incumbency Changes in European Democracies and Revolutionary Events in the Arab World*, pp. 17-20, <http://econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/52733/1/678816808.pdf>, accessed on 23.10.2013.

5 P. R. KUMARASWAMY, *op. cit.*

6 Philip N. HOWARD; Aiden DUFFY; Deen FREELON; Muzammil HUSSAIN; Will MARI; Marwa MAZAIID, *Opening Closed Regimes*, [http://pitpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/2011\\_Howard-Duffy-Freelon-Hussain-Mari-Mazaid\\_pITPI.pdf](http://pitpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/2011_Howard-Duffy-Freelon-Hussain-Mari-Mazaid_pITPI.pdf), accessed on 22.10.2013.

7 Sara REARDON, "Was the Arab Spring really a Facebook revolution?", in *New Scientist*, <http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg21428596.400-was-the-arab-spring-really-a-facebook-revolution.html>, accessed at 22.10.2013; Ben FLANAGAN, "Facebook revolution 'a myth' critics say", <http://www.thenational.ae/business/media/facebook-revolution-a-myth-critics-say>, accessed on 23.10.2013.



### 1. “Arab spring” consequences and the generated responses

The events of the “Arab spring” evolving from the “Jasmine revolution” took the entire international community aback and spread euphoria all over the Muslim world. Authoritarian regimes having ruled those countries for decades were regarded as solid pillars and founders of the stability in the region collapsed overnight. Initially, all demonstrations of the Arab spring began from inside and did not have anti-Western or anti-Israel feelings: the population of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and other countries had got fed up with the impotency and corruptness of their leaderships and took the aim at making social reforms in the framework of internal regime change. Some of the authoritarian leaders were toppled – sooner or later – while others were forced to make concessions as the world was eagerly watching the performance of the revolutionary enthusiasm.

In Algeria, peaceful demonstrations took place and they could have easily gotten more radical, but the government managed to outmanoeuvre the radicals, thus, currently, the country is peaceful. The rest is greatly dependent on who the armed forces would choose as the successor of President Bouteflika and on his policymaking.

A similar situation was shaped in Morocco too, where the King remains at power after giving some concessions – minimal changes in the government. In Tunisia and Egypt, the previous governments were overthrown as a result of peaceful demonstrations, but in the aftermath of these events, the two countries took different courses.

In Tunisia, although there was a fear Islamist parties would gain ground, managed to establish some stability with the use of governmental means.

Egypt was not so lucky. The forces previously united against President Mubarak fought each other and Islamist political parties, having taken not only the presidency, but also 70% of the seats in

Parliament, thought they can do almost whatever they wanted to<sup>8</sup>. The rest of interest groups did not accept such a situation and organised one demonstration after another against Mohamed Morsi and his allies. Even though President Morsi was backed by Muslim Brotherhood and offered dialogue in order to establish peace and stability, mass demonstrations were held against him till the army stepped in, removed Morsi from power in a coup d'état early in July 2013, only a few days more than a year after his election as president. The following days, an interim government was installed – surprisingly, without the involvement of high-ranking military officers – with Adly Mansour, President of the Supreme Constitutional Court as acting president until a presidential election can be held. Even though the reason for Morsi's removal was to bring stability and to bring an end to street riots and armed clashes, Morsi refuses to accept the current situation and considers himself the only legitimate president. Mid-January 2014, Mansour government enacted the new constitution that had been previously supported by 98.1%, even though at a quite low turnout – 38.6%, but still almost doubling the number of supporters compared to “Morsi constitution” of 2012.<sup>9</sup>

In Libya, after J. Christopher Stevens, the US ambassador to Libya, was killed in mid-September 2012, the elected Prime Minister, Mustafa A. G. Abushagur, backed down following the second failure to get the parliament's approval for his government. A week later, on October, 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012, the General National Congress (GNC) chose Ali Zeidan, former GNC member, to be prime minister and approved him and his cabinet<sup>10</sup>.

8 Charles KRAUTHAMMER, “The Arab Spring is no Facebook revolution”, <http://www.humanevents.com/2012/07/12/charles-krauthammer-the-arab-spring-is-no-facebook-revolution/>, accessed on 23.10.2013.

9 Sarah EL DEEB, “Voters Overwhelmingly Back New Egypt Constitution”, [http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2014/01/18/world/middleeast/ap-ml-egypt.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2014/01/18/world/middleeast/ap-ml-egypt.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&_r=0), accessed on 22.02.2014.

10 Ghaith SHENNIB; Marie-Louise GUMUCHIAN, “Libya congress approves new PM's proposed government”, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/31/us-libya-government-idUSBRE89U18O20121031>, accessed on 23.02.2014.



Subsequently, political consensus seemed to be supporting the country's political stabilization although the performance of the government has been rather poor and many experts have envisaged the division of the country into several parts.

The fundamental issue – and the core of disagreements – is the way of state-building in North Africa. External factors have a decreasing influence in shaping internal structures which seem to be consolidating and the lack of results in Iraq or Afghanistan questions what success a process like this would promise. Meanwhile, internal actors are bogged down in seemingly endless power struggles, therefore the functioning of these states is far from optimal. However, Tunisia could be a counterexample in a way, because Ennahda is clearly in favour of the secular state and against the Sharia as the only source of legislation. Political stability is shown by the adoption of the new Constitution at the end of January 2014, bringing changes to the country, on the one hand, giving more rights for women and, on the other hand, declaring that the Tunisian President should be Islamic<sup>11</sup>. Also unique to the country and the Islamic World as well is the fact that more than 20% of the members of both chambers of parliament are women, in a political system of more than a 100 parties. So, tendencies can be seen as leading to the right direction, even though Chokri Belaid, leftist opposition's leader and harsh Ennahda critic, was killed in early-February 2013.

## **2. The coming to power of Islamist political parties and their impact on regional and Euro-Atlantic security**

For decades, USA and the European states have been trying to assist the democratisation of North-African Arab nations through preventing Islamist groupings from gaining power. However, the events of the recent past indicate that these efforts were futile, and even more, after the overthrow of the previous governments – supported by

11 George SADEK, "The Role of Islamic Law in Tunisia's Constitution and Legislation – Post-Arab Spring", <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/tunisia.php>, accessed on 22.02.2014.

the West – former illegal or semi-legal Muslim parties became government factions<sup>12</sup>. Therefore it is not the possibility for the Islamist political parties to come to power that should be analysed, but its impact on the regional and Euro-Atlantic security. Several political analysts hold the opinion that neither the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, nor the Ennahda in Tunisia will radicalise and that they will make compromises with Western powers instead. Such opinions are based on the fact that both organisations are much more moderate than radical Salafists and are willing to cooperate with us. Alas, I cannot fully agree with this and my position is supported by the history of the Muslim Brotherhood or that of the Ennahda, and the events in the countries affected by the "Arab spring".

A part of Islamist organisations operating in North-Africa can be linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, established in Egypt, which supports the one-party system and the introduction of Sharia<sup>13</sup>. However, for various reasons, these parties were emphasising the importance of democratic reforms, the division of power, and of establishing of independent jurisdiction in the early '90s<sup>14</sup>. This was partly meant to distinguish themselves from suppressive "pro-Western" governments and gain popularity among those social groups having opposed the regime for some reason. Meanwhile, they tried to keep their conservative supporters by highlighting that, despite their support to democratic programs, they did not turn liberal or provide support to extending women's rights, and made no concessions related to religious rules.

12 Tobias SCHUMACHER, "The EU and the Arab Spring: Between Spectatorship and Actorness", in *Insight Turkey* Vol. 13, Number 3, 2011, pp. 107-119.

13 Raymond IBRAHIM, "Muslim Brotherhood: Impose Islam 'step by step'", <http://www.meforum.org/2995/muslim-brotherhood-impose-islam>, accessed on 21.10.2013; Winston Pickett; GARDNER Mark, "The book and the sword: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe", <http://www.axt.org.uk/HateMusic/Pickett%20&%20Gardner.pdf>, accessed on 21.10.2013.

14 The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *The Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world and Islamic communities in Western Europe*, [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF\\_11\\_049\\_2.pdf](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF_11_049_2.pdf), accessed on 24.10.2013.



Interestingly, both target groups believed this populist propaganda, consequently the support to Islamist political parties and organisations have significantly increased in the recent past. In order to calm the West, the rhetoric was focused not on the importance of establishing an Islamic state, but on the founding of a “civil and democratic state on Islamic grounds”, where mosque and state (Islam and democracy) are independent from each other (but politics and religion are not). Of course, if they had taken a government role, they would have represented another ideology, as both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Ennahda tried to come to power in some way. This must have been the reason why, at the beginning of demonstrations, Islamist parties only watched the events and joined the movements later, but then they took leadership relatively fast<sup>15</sup>.

### 3. The issues of democracy, stability, expectations

Despite various media attempts to present the revolutionary character of the “Arab spring” and the democratic commitments of moderate Islamic parties, some facts should be given consideration. For example, what do Muslims consider to be democracy and what do Europeans take for that? How much will Islam influence our future relations? How stable will the new regimes be and how much will we be able to cooperate with them? Will they want to cooperate with us at all? Apart from providing financial support, what role can the European Union play in North African countries? Will our current economic relations maintain? Can they be further developed? Can the energy dependency of European countries be used, and what security risks does the emergence of new players in local and regional policy-making pose for us? These questions can only be answered if certain facts about the Muslim world are accepted without idealising them.

Let us begin with the *Arabs' commitment to*

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15 Cynthia FARAHAT, “The Arab Upheaval: Egypt’s Islamist Shadow”, in *Middle East Quarterly*, Summer 2011, Vol. XVIII, Number 3, pp. 19-24, <http://www.meforum.org/2887/arab-upheaval-egypt-islamist>, accessed on 10.23.2013.

*democracy*. In 2006, a survey was made in several Muslim countries by John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed and the results allowed interesting conclusions. The majority of Muslims, although positively regarding the freedom of speech and other democratic rights, were willing to accept only Islamic religious rules in their countries<sup>16</sup>.

This does not mean the acceptance of democratic standards of the Western world – pluralism, recognition of women’s and minorities’ rights, etc. This is why whichever Islamist political party with religious fundamentals may come to power, it shall not function in accordance with the standards expected by USA or by Europe.<sup>17</sup> In the Western world, church and state were officially separated, which cannot happen in Muslim societies, as there is no field in life where religion does not interfere. If any democratisation process begins in the Arab world, that will only be possible with the support of Muslim religious

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16 John L. ESPOSITO; Dalia MOGAHED, *Battle for Muslims’ hearts and minds: The road not (yet) taken*, pp. 39-40 <http://media.gallup.com/WorldPoll/PDF/Esposito.pdf>, accessed on 24.10.2013.

17 The European countries committed a mistake when, without any proper knowledge of the Muslim world, launched programs aimed at promoting and implementing Western democracy. In the past two decades, human rights activists have organised several campaigns, placing emphasis on the individual rights of people versus the local community (state) and they tried to launch new political movements. The activities – costing huge sums of money – brought only little results as they were not aware of the functioning of local civil society. There are two expressions used for civil society by the Muslims: “ahli” and “madani”. Ahli refers to relatives and groups living close to each other, bonded with religious ties. This characterises Muslims better and this society is much more closely knit and coherent than Western societies, they do not really take in external “foreign” influences; they speak no foreign languages; they do not need any external financial support and although they suppress women in the Western sense of the word they play an active role in society. Although Muslim society is suspicious to external influence, it is not hostile. “Madani” is used for secular, Western society, which is alien to Muslims and, even when in Western Europe, they want to live in accordance with their own social standards generating frequent clashes between them and their host communities. For details, see Amr ELSHOBAKI; Gemma Martin MUNOZ, *Why Europe must engage with political Islam?*, pp. 5-7, <http://www.iemed.org/publicacions/10papers5.pdf> accessed on 19.10.2013.



leaders. Without them, failure is encoded as, according to radical Islamist organisations, Western democracy exercised by Europeans and Americans is taken for atheism, because it places the will of people above that of God. In their opinion, democracy does not differ from secular dictatorships, supported by the USA and the EU against various Muslim terrorist groups<sup>18</sup>. This is why the “new political actors” in the North-African countries regard Western countries more like adversaries – or forced allies at best – and not as friends.

This statement also refers to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which despite having been suppressed by the secret service of the previous regime with Western assistance, became a governmental factor after the overthrow of President Mubarak. Leaders of the organisation declared several times that they were supporters of democratic transition, but, since their coming to power, seizing and keeping power at any costs and the introduction of Islamic legal system has been more important than anything else<sup>19</sup>. On the basis of their actions, they cannot be regarded as a democratic organisation. On the contrary, in my opinion, the activities of the organisation have a negative influence on the Euro-Atlantic security.<sup>20</sup> For example, several members of Al Qaeda began their “career” in the Muslim Brotherhood, which has a fundamental role in laying the theological grounds for modern

Jihad<sup>21</sup>. Nazi ideas had also huge influence on the Brotherhood as the founder of the movement Hassan al-Banna not only appreciated the ideas of Hitler and Mussolini, but also considered the Nazi leaders as role models<sup>22</sup>.

The Brotherhood maintained close relations with the nationalist-fascist organisation of militant Misr al-Fatat, founded by Ahmed Hussein, which has been operating as National Islamist Party since 1940. Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser also joined the Brotherhood later, when frictions broke out between the political and military wings – leading up to a break-up within the organisation – Nasser established the Association of Free Officers, which seized power in a coup d'état in 1952. Since then, the two organisations have been in a continuous conflict with each other, but not as an authoritarian and secular dictatorship and an Islamist organisation, but as two ideologically related rivalling groups with similar background. Egyptian presidents with military background – Nasser, Sadat, then Mubarak – managed to convince the West that they are the only ones to contain the Islamist threat by making the USA and the European states regard them as moderate allies. In fact, when President Mubarak took position against the Islamist organisations in 1995, it was not the Brotherhood, which was an opposition party in Parliament, he committed to imprisonment, but the members of militant Salafist groupings (al-Takfir wa-i-Hijra, al-Gama'at al-Islamiya, and the Tanzim al-Jihad). At the same time, President Mubarak launched actions against an opposition organisation, the Liberal Egyptian Party, which he excluded from

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18 Western powers established close cooperation with Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, even more, with Libya against Al Qaeda and the related organisations, and for curbing illegal migration. For the sake of their short-term security interests they accepted the rule of antidemocratic authoritarian leaders as they did not trust in the democratisation of Arab states. For details, see Oded ERAN, “The West Responds to the Arab Spring”, in *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 14, No. 2, July 2011, p. 16.

19 Jerry GORDON, *No Blinders about Egypt under Muslim Brotherhood*, <http://www.meforum.org/3369/egypt-under-muslim-brotherhood>, accessed at 27.11.2013.

20 The level of security threat of Muslim Brotherhood to European countries is clearly illustrated by the paper of Lorenzo VIDINO, “The Muslim Brotherhood’s Conquest of Europe”, in *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2005, pp. 25-34, <http://www.meforum.org/687/the-muslim-brotherhoods-conquest-of-europe>, accessed at 23.10.2013).

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21 Glen BECK, “Glenn Beck on al-Qaida links to Muslim Brotherhood”, <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2011/feb/04/glenn-beck/glenn-beck-al-qaeda-links-muslim-brotherhood/>, accessed on 24.10.2013; Toni JOHNSON, “Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhoods”, <http://www.cfr.org/africa/egypts-muslim-brotherhood/p23991>, accessed on 24.10.2013.

22 Cynthia FARAHAT, “The Arab Upheaval: Egypt’s Islamist Shadow”, in *Middle East Quarterly*, Summer 2011, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, pp. 19-24, <http://www.meforum.org/2887/arab-upheaval-egypt-islamist>, accessed on 23.10.2013; David PATTERSON, *A Genealogy of Evil, Anti-semitism from Nazism to Islamic Jihad*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 129-139.



political life, while the Muslim Brotherhood was allowed to have 88 representatives in Parliament. In this light, it is clear why, at the beginning, the Brotherhood refused to join the demonstrators in the streets saying: “The Brotherhood will not participate in anti-Mubarak street demonstrations as a political force or organisation”<sup>23</sup>. Several other Islamist organisations followed suit and joined the demonstrators only when the collapse of the Mubarak-regime became inevitable. When the armed forces, previously also at power, “took power”, they made an alliance with the Brotherhood and not with secular opposition or the Coptic Christians. During transition, it became clear that the representatives of the previous regime and the Islamist groupings successfully impede any real democratic change, suppress groups demanding it, resulting in the Brotherhood’s coming to power<sup>24</sup>.

Although the Ennahda is a moderate Islamist party, its performance has not been very encouraging. In 1979, for example, the organisation supported the attack on the US Embassy in Tehran and, in the ‘80s, participated in four attacks against Tunisian hotels. Afterwards, in 1991, its members launched an attack on the HQ of the Tunisian government party, where they lynched one man<sup>25</sup>. In the same year, a four-day conference was held by leading Muslim politicians and religious leaders in Khartoum, Sudan. Among the participants was not only Rashid al-Ghannoushi, but also Ibrahim Shukri, the leader of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, the Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Abassi Madani, the leader of Algerian Islamist Salvation Front and George Habbas, representing People’s Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The host of the conference participants was vice president of Sudan Hassan al-Turabi. The participants approved a six-point manifesto in which they declared “whatever the strength

of America and the West”, in the aftermath of the Gulf War, “God is greater”<sup>26</sup>. The issues of liberalism and democracy were also discussed with the conclusion that these could be accepted only if in harmony with Islamic law. Political pluralism was also regarded as acceptable only if it was limited and subordinated to religious regulations. The manifesto was worded clearly: Islamists keep on fighting Western democracies until their idealised “pure” Islamic state can be established. For this cause, they regarded any means acceptable to use as “the end justifies the means” which allows acts unacceptable for Western democracies<sup>27</sup>. For example, the current leader of the Ennahda encouraged his followers to carry out attacks against Western targets during the first Gulf War. Nevertheless, Western leaders would rather have Islamist political parties in governments than in opposition, because, in the latter case, they can make significant troubles for any new government<sup>28</sup>. The case of Algeria is a good example in this respect: in 1992, Islamists won the elections whose results were nullified by the armed forces, unwilling to cooperate with them. That event was followed by a 16-year-long period of civil war, in which Islamists fought not only against government forces, but also against innocent civilians, taking the lives of tens of thousands of people.

Many claim that there have been no significant changes in the North African states, which is proven by the fact that the majority of the former elite in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya managed to preserve their power and – particularly for their own political survival – provide support to

23 Cynthia FARAHAT, *op. cit.*

24 \*\*\*, *The Egyptian elections: A preliminary political assessment of the post-Mubarak era*, The Henry Jackson Society <http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org/cms/harriercollectionitems/EgyptFuture2.pdf>, accessed on 25.10.2013.

25 Anneli BOTHA, *Terrorism in Tunisia*, <http://www.issafrika.org/pgcontent.php?UID=19718>, accessed on 24.10.2013.

26 Judith MILLER, “The Challenge of Radical Islam”, in *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1993, pp. 43-44.

27 *Ibidem.*

28 Some politicians think if former extremist groups got government tasks they would change because of the responsibility and would become law abiding members of society. This opinion is illustrated with IRA members, who consolidated after the agreement with the organization had been signed and completely gave up armed struggle. However, such a model has not been realized with any Muslim organization. Palestinian Fatah and Hamas are proper models of such conduct as both have their own territories and plenty of financial support yet neither have been willing to give up committing terrorist acts against Israel.



Islamist parties against forces demanding genuine democratic changes.

The situation of economy does not seem any better either. Even before the demonstrations, North Africa was facing serious economic problems. In the '90s, its annual economic growth was hardly over 3%, between 1980 and 2010 the GDP grew only 0.5% yearly, while this number in the developing countries was 3%. According to the World Bank, the 2011 economic growth in the Arab countries was no higher than 3.6%, but this estimation was dramatically reduced later because of the falling revenues from tourism industry. This is rather significant as tourism generates 13-16% of the GDP<sup>29</sup>. In addition to tourism industry, significant depression hit the financial sector and construction industry too. The industries of Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt are in ruins, and their population is poorer than a few years ago. This generates serious problems in the case of the latter two nations as they do not have huge oil deposits as Libya does. Due to the nearly two year long uncertainties, investors take a wait-and-see position rather than risking their money. On the basis of the above, it seems clear that the primary objective of the population was to prevent death by hunger and not the expansion of political rights, while, the middle class (regular staff in various firms, enterprises, traders and public servants), – the engine of demonstrations – aimed at stopping the fall of their living standards. However, due to the current inflation rate and the dramatic increase in the prices of imported food this does not seem possible.

For most people with empty stomach, democracy and dictatorship do not differ very much. Therefore, powers ruling Arab states try to keep food prices low and create as many jobs as possible. However, due to the lack of funds, this can be possible only temporarily with even more desperate masses in the streets later on. The economic reform attempts made on the basis of Western models brought about only temporary

29 Elena IANCHOVICHINA et al., *World Bank, Middle East and North Africa Region. Regional Economic Update. May 2011. MENA facing Challenges and Opportunities*, pp. 4-6, [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/MENAEXT/Resources/EDP\\_MNA\\_2011.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/MENAEXT/Resources/EDP_MNA_2011.pdf), accessed on 04.06.2014.

relief for the countries, then, an even wider income gap followed. If North African countries do not elaborate a new and successful model for economic reforms, the region will reach a situation similar to the one of 2011.

It is widely accepted that several changes would be vital for the establishment of a secure North Africa, such as stabilizing the financial environment, reinforcing private sector vs. state ownership, an increasing integration of local industries into regional and international economy, the development of regional trade relations, the improvement of social security, fighting corruption and unemployment, improving the prospects of the population, particularly of the youth. Although everyone agrees on these points, there have hardly been any measures taken in this field – most probably, for financial reasons. The EU bled out while trying to save the common currency and the Arab world would need at least a comparable or even larger financial support from EU<sup>30</sup>.

The Muslim-Christian conflict also seems almost inevitable, thus, questioning the possibility of establishing a stable state. Even after the change of the ruling regimes, Christians in Muslims countries do not have the democratic right of freely exercising their religion, they are still strongly suppressed, afflicted with various limitations and not regarded as equal citizens. In Tunisia, for example, a Catholic priest was murdered in broad daylight, moreover, groups supported by the Ennahda, coming to power, attempted to forcefully turn a Christian church into a mosque. Some regard this only a marginal problem, as Christianity cannot be regarded as a “native” religion and most Christians living there are foreigners.

However, Coptic Christians, making up 10% of the population in Egypt, have lived there longer than Muslim majority, yet since the overthrow of President Mubarak, there have been continuous attacks against the Coptic communities<sup>31</sup>. Firstly, mobs fanaticized by radical Muslims

30 Oded ERAN, *op. cit.*

31 *International Religious Freedom Report for 2011*, Egypt, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/193093.pdf>, accessed on 25.10.2013.





attacked believers. For example, they kidnapped Christian women, forcefully converting them to Islam, and, then, forced them to marry Muslim men; others attacked Coptic Christian monks; the activities of Christian merchants were impeded; later, Christian churches were set to fire and believers were lynched<sup>32</sup>. Such events took place in early October 2011 too, when Coptic Christians launched a demonstration because of the destruction of the St. George church in Assuan Province. The crowd, demanding government protection, was brutally dispersed by police and army units deployed armoured vehicles which drove into the crowd and killed a number of people<sup>33</sup>. In the most violent anti-Christian attack to date, 25 people were killed and another 300 were injured. Media broadcasting the crackdown on the demonstration were taken under military control, then their operation was suspended in order to prevent the information from getting to international news channels<sup>34</sup>. Similarly to Middle East Arab countries, a significant wave of emigration took birth, which has been further encouraged by the government in order to get rid of Christians. According to a report by the Henry Jackson Society, in 2011, more than 100,000 Coptic Christians were forced to leave their homeland, so that they could save their lives<sup>35</sup>. In the long term, however, this will cause serious financial problems for Egypt, as the roughly 8-million-strong Christian minority is well educated and work in the most important fields of economy<sup>36</sup>.

32 John PONTIFEX; John NEWTON (edit.), *Aid to the Church in Need: Persecuted and forgotten? A report on Christians oppressed for their faith*, 2011, pp. 37-41, <http://www.aidtochurch.org/pdf/reports/P&F2013.PDF>, accessed on 24.10.2013.

33 \*\*\*, *CNN, Egyptian Army attacking Pro-Christians protesters in Maspiro October 10, 2011*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvLcJELOj-Q&feature=related>, accessed on 25.10.2013.

34 Mariz TADROS, "Egypt's bloody Sunday", <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero101311>, accessed on 03.11.2013.

35 \*\*\*, *The Egyptian elections: A preliminary political assessment of the post-Mubarak era*, The Henry Jackson Society <http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org/cms/harriercollectionitems/EgyptFuture2.pdf>, accessed on 25.10.2013.

36 In my opinion, Christian immigrants integrate more easily within European countries than the Muslim refugees and this is the reason for which we shall consider that the

Yet, Salafist organisations do not care about this as they focus on creating a purely Muslim country, therefore, the persecution of Christians can continue without any consequences.

In the light of such events, I would not think that the Islamist groups coming to power in North African countries will be reliable and predictable partners of Western countries regarded as hostile by them. Nevertheless, for strategic reasons, there must be found methods of cooperation with the new governments, but they should have a bilateral nature.

#### 4. The role of the European Union

All this makes the question justified: what can be expected with regard to the nations of the "Arab spring"? A study, made by Rym Ayadi and Carlo Sessa, analyses the impact of the transformation within the framework of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation<sup>37</sup>. The authors emphasise that the current policy of Western governments has been rather inefficient; moreover, it partly supported the shaping of the present situation. For the next two decades, three possible scenarios were made on the future of the region.

In accordance with the scenario regarded as the least desirable, the Mediterranean Sea will separate in two conflicting cultures. Current conflicts will escalate leading up to political, economic, and social crises. Crises in the Middle East and Western Sahara will generate further problems; consequently, North African countries may turn in failed states, where terrorist organisations will find proper support for their anti-Western struggle. Migration from the region will grow significantly stronger, presenting further risks for the European community that will lose all its influence on the region, turning into an increasingly hostile "frontier" for Europe.

Taking into consideration the history of

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former are more prone to leaving Egypt than the latter.

37 Rym AYADI; Carlo SESSA, "What scenarios for the Euro-Mediterranean in 2030 in the wake of the Arab spring?" in *EU Foreign Policy*, MEDPRO Policy Papers, 25 February 2013, <http://www.ceps.eu/book/what-scenarios-euro-mediterranean-2030-wake-arab-spring>, accessed on 24.10.2013.



the region, the study examines the cooperation opportunities in two versions which are more favourable for Europe. In the first version, a “Euro-Mediterranean Union” with an integrated and common market would be established by European and Arab nations. The integration would be based on the lessons learned from the European Economic Community. However, in such a case, the different level of development of the member states could pose a problem and the elimination of the differences would take a long time. On the other hand, a united Euro-Mediterranean Union would be able to become the third great power of the world, besides USA and China.

The other version outlines a loose Alliance instead of a Union – the Euro-Mediterranean Alliance – where the two regions would preserve their independence. In the North, it would comprise the EU – including the Balkans and Turkey – and, in the South, the Arab states in the Mediterranean basin. In this case, there would be no common economic region established, however, within the Alliance, countries could cooperate on either bilateral or regional basis and, later on, they could shape an Arab-League-like multilateral cooperation. In the framework of such cooperation, all fields mutually important for both regions could be regulated (migration, economic and security issues, etc.). This approach aims at resolving the problems of the region in a multilateral and regional way, taking into consideration differing political, economic, social, and religious backgrounds. In this case, of course, there is no urge to resolve the decades-long problems in the Middle East or Western Sahara, unlike in the case of the Euro-Mediterranean Union.

In my opinion, the first scenario is rather unlikely as the Islamist parties currently at power have proven before that they can act very pragmatically for the stabilisation of their countries if it is in their interests. In the current situation, they desperately need the financial support of Western states (USA and EU Member States), which is necessary for revitalising their economies and stabilising their countries.

Naturally, the situation would be completely different if they could get funding from other regions – the Arab countries or China. In that case, they would not need to comply with certain democratic standards required by the West and the current situation in which they need Western support may change.

For the time being, however, Western states are the ones needing the cooperation with the North African countries (e.g. in the field of oil and natural gas import, limitation of migration, countering terrorism, etc.) and not the other way round. For this reason, we would need to make agreements which we would find unacceptable in other cases.

In the second scenario, more favourable for the European countries, the harmonisation of states with different development levels would cause significant troubles which the EU would find unacceptable in the present situation.<sup>38</sup>

Alas, European states have been often unable to take a common position in assessing the “Arab spring”, moreover, they openly criticised each other with regard to some decisions. This made the lack of a common European foreign policy clear for anyone.<sup>39</sup> When the events in Tunisia began, most European states remained silent and waited to see which party seizes power and they welcomed the revolution only after the Tunisian Head of State had fled his country. France had provided active support to the previous government by sending various crowd control assets and even experts to the Tunisian security forces.

Similar events took place in Egypt, where under the leadership of France and with the support of Hermann Van Rompuy and Catherine Ashton,

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38 Partly due to the economic crisis, EU is currently struggling to survive. Therefore, I do not consider it could spend the funds necessary for saving Greece, Italy, Spain, or Ireland in North African countries. Yet, we must not turn away from this set of problems and should provide some assistance to the North African countries as it is in our interests too.

39 In the past few years, I participated in three Peace Support Operations in Muslim countries and I understood there that most Muslims there do not regard the EU as a real, unified, and functional power, in contrast with the USA, as in their views it is just an economic and political community of interests of a few states and may disintegrate anytime.



some Southern European countries worked for the Egyptian leadership. They thought Mubarak was the only one capable of stopping Islamic extremists and a democratic transition wouldn't be possible unless he remained in power. Their opinion changed only when UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, openly criticised the Egyptian regime because of its violent actions against civilians. Just the week before President Mubarak resigned, the EU condemned the Egyptian government and called on its representatives for talks with the demonstrators<sup>40</sup>.

In the case of Libya, EU member states unanimously rejected cooperation with the Gadhafi regime, but several of them declined to participate in NATO operations launched under French leadership, or to unilaterally recognise the interim government<sup>41</sup>.

On the basis of the events in the region, it can be stated that the attitude and relationship of these countries to the Western world will change. In the future, it is not heads of governments to make agreements with them, but governments and groupings that – no matter how pragmatic might be – they will make politics on the basis of their religious beliefs. It is in the interest of the EU to create stability for the newly established governments, not only within their own nations, but also at regional level. Whoever will rule North African countries, it is important for them to maintain a reasonable cooperation in the fields of illegal migration, economic, agriculture, energy sector, education, security issues etc.. Currently, these states can only be stabilised with the financial support of Western countries and we are fundamentally interested in providing support to them. Naturally, this could happen only with the appropriate pre-conditions, meant to provide a more efficient protection to Christian minorities, and with the respect of certain standards. In any other case, not only the stability of the region, but also those of the Union will suffer serious damage.

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40 *European Council declaration on Egypt and the region*, February 4 2011, [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/nscentre/EgyptRegion\\_Declaration\\_EC.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/nscentre/EgyptRegion_Declaration_EC.pdf), accessed on 28.10.2013.

41 Tobias SCHUMACHER, "The EU and the Arab Spring: 'Between Spectatorship and Actorness'", in *Insight Turkey* Vol. 13, No. 3, 2011, pp. 116.

## Conclusions

Although there are more than three years since the beginning of the "Arab spring", its consequences and influences have still been unforeseeable. Islamic organisations in the region – both moderate and radical ones – have clearly grown stronger in all North-African countries and become government factors. Whether these parties grow radical or consolidated when they exercise power, or what security challenge they present for the Western countries is unknown yet. However, it is an obvious fact that during the Arab spring several militant Islamists were freed from the prisons in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya and now are active without any limitations or, even more, some of them got into power. In these countries, central government has temporarily been weakened and, due to the involvement of Muslim organisations in governance, security forces – even if they could – do not counter the various Islamist groups, which, exploiting the new situation, are free to raise funds for themselves, recruit new members and participate in political life in an increasingly active way. For this reason, the strengthening of Islamic terrorism in the region can be regarded as a real threat affecting European countries in the Mediterranean basin. Regardless of our intention, it is highly unlikely that a Western type of democratic social structure could be implemented there, moreover, a further limitation of human rights can be expected (the positions of the Christians or other minorities) as the Islamist organisations in governments wish to base their rule on the principles of Sharia law.

However, it's not only former prisoners who have no limits any more. There are only estimations about the number of military installations that were robbed and emptied by unknown groups, only estimations about the quantity of weapons – even heavy armours – that were taken illegally for use or for sale. The almost non-existent borders of the North African countries mean a great opportunity for arms trafficking in a region where few AKs can turn the outcome of armed clashes for the opposite. The former dictatorships had their means to fight proliferation, but now, weak central governments have no or little influence in remote border areas,



especially in the case of Libya border with Chad, in the once disputed Aozou region, and at the Egyptian-Sudanese border. These weapons were taken not only by smugglers, but also by militia members and soldiers as well who fled the country after the armed fights were over or after the government was unable or unwilling to pay them. These soldiers with combat experience are now looking for other opportunities where they can fight for their cause or find their fortune.

In my opinion, this is depending a lot on the abilities of the new governments to use their existing economic potential for placing their stagnating economies on the course of development, and also to discontinue the corruption and bribery-stricken policies of their predecessors; and it also depends on the redistribution of the revenues of their nations. If they are able to make new jobs and rebuild the battered social systems, they will be able to gain the support of the majority of their societies. Naturally, this cannot happen without the (financial, material, know-how) support from Western countries as, without that, the exploitation of their existing opportunities will not be possible. If the aforementioned conditions are met, these countries will be stabilised, but if their new leaders do not achieve results in these fields relatively soon, new demonstrations may be launched, determining the destabilisation of the region, presenting thus further risk factors for Europe, including Hungary.

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