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Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the emerging democracies in the Arab world

Report[1]
Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
Rapporteur: Mr Jean-Charles GARDETTO, Monaco, Group of the European People's Party

Summary

The Political Affairs Committee is following with great interest and concern the evolution of the "Arab spring". It welcomes, and fully supports, the emergence of democratic regimes in that region.

The committee report duly notes that the people who have risen up are drawing their inspiration from the values upheld by the Council of Europe, and it condemns unequivocally the use of violence against the populations.

The Council of Europe can share with the Arab countries in the neighbourhood of Europe its experience in the field of democratic transition, in particular the recently established "Partner for Democracy" status with the Parliamentary Assembly for parliaments of these countries.

Other instruments and mechanisms of the Organisation may also contribute to the progress towards democracy in Arab countries, in the framework of a Council of Europe policy towards its immediate neighbourhood.

1. Reference to committee: Reference 3751 of 11 March 2011.

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly has been following with great interest and concern the evolution of the "Arab spring": the popular protest movements, which have been breaking out throughout the Arab World since the beginning of the year and which have already brought about the most dramatic changes in the region since the 1950s. It welcomes, in particular, the positive developments in Tunisia and Egypt and refers to its Resolution 1791 (2011) and Resolution 1819 (2011) on the situation in Tunisia, adopted on 27 January and 21 June 2011 respectively.

2. The Assembly pays tribute to the memory of Mohammed Bouazizi, whose desperate act of protest instigated the uprisings now taking place in the Arab world, and to that of the victims of repression who have lost their lives in the struggle for democracy. It expresses its regret at the significant loss of human life and extends its sympathy to the families of those killed and to those injured.

3. The Assembly is particularly disturbed by the situation in Libya and Syria, where the authorities have launched brutal repression against their respective populations resulting in thousands of deaths. It unequivocally condemns the use of violence against the populations and urges for its immediate cessation. It calls on the authorities of the Council of Europe member states to impose firm and effective sanctions on those who have contributed or are contributing to violence against the people. There must be no impunity for crimes against humanity, whoever committed them. The Assembly therefore calls on the international community, including, as appropriate, the International Criminal Court, to ensure that all such crimes are investigated and punished.

4. The Assembly calls for the release of all those arrested for their political support for democratic changes. It also urges the *de facto* and *de jure* authorities in the countries experiencing unrest to facilitate the departure of foreigners wishing to leave. It asks them to allow medical relief teams and representatives of humanitarian organisations to have free access to the areas of confrontation.

5. The Assembly regrets the terrible loss of lives of refugees in the Mediterranean Sea and calls on all member states to provide additional aid in this humanitarian emergency situation and to honour their commitment to the Geneva Conventions.

6. The Assembly also regrets that the countries of the Arab World have failed to take advantage of the important oil-generated resources to ensure the implementation of social progress, either at home or to assist their neighbours, in a spirit of solidarity. However, it recognises that some part of the responsibility for past failures rests with Europe which, in its dealings with the Arab World, has given excessive weight to considerations of short-term stability over those of longer-term development consistent with the values upheld by the Council of Europe.

7. Today, Europe must help bring about a peaceful transition to democracy and respect of human rights in the Arab countries concerned, some of which are its immediate neighbours, with humility and mutual respect, and prevent the emergence of military or theocratic regimes, or degeneration into chaos following a prolonged absence of authority. In particular, it is essential to:

7.1. engage in a dialogue with the democratic forces in the countries concerned;

7.2. encourage respect for public liberties, including freedom of religion and the right to change one's religion, and enable all religions to be practised openly;

7.3. implement paragraph 15 of Recommendation 1957 (2011) on violence against Christians in the Middle East;

7.4. reform family law to give women equal rights and ensure that women are able to take an equal and active part in the life of society, including by allowing them to set up businesses, vote and stand for election;

7.5. assist the countries concerned in developing regional and local democracy;

7.6. take into account the opinions of the representative elements of civil society, develop a dialogue with those civil society forces which promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and help them become stronger

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 23 June 2011.

8. The Assembly believes that the stability of the Arab world aspiring to democracy would be facilitated by finding a solution to the main conflicts which remain in the region; it calls, in particular, on the Israelis and the Palestinians to take advantage of the opportunity brought about by the Arab revolutions to relaunch the peace negotiations, on the basis of the principles it already set out in its Resolution 1700 (2010) on the situation in the Middle East.

9. The Council of Europe can share with the Arab countries in the neighbourhood of Europe its experience in the field of democratic transition, including in particular the recently established "Partner for Democracy" status with the Parliamentary Assembly for the parliaments of these countries. In this respect, the Assembly refers to its Resolution 1818 (2011) whereby it granted this status to the Parliament of Morocco on 21 June 2011. It notes that a similar request from the Palestinian National Council is under consideration.

10. The Assembly undertakes to continue its close monitoring of political developments in each of the Arab countries in Europe's neighbourhood and to strengthen its co-operation with the parliaments of the countries engaged in the democratic process. In particular, it is ready to invite parliamentarians representing the successful democratic movements of the countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean to take part in the Forum for the Future of Democracy, the next session of which will be held in Cyprus in October 2011.

11. It encourages the authorities of the Arab countries in the neighbourhood of Europe, which are engaged in the democratic process, to intensify and broaden their co-operation with the Council of Europe, and in particular to:

11.1. be guided by the standards of Council of Europe conventions in the field of human rights and consider acceding to the Council of Europe legal instruments open to non-member states and enlarged partial agreements, in particular the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre) and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission);

11.2. promote dialogue and co-operation between their parliaments and the Assembly, particularly in the light of the recently established "Partner for Democracy" status;

11.3. abolish the death penalty and, in the meantime, introduce or maintain a moratorium on executions.

12. The Assembly welcomes the Council of Europe policy towards its immediate neighbourhood aimed at promoting dialogue and co-operation with the countries and regions in the vicinity of Europe, proposed by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and calls on him to:

12.1. establish contacts with the authorities of Arab countries in Europe's neighbourhood, which are engaged in the democratic process, and consider measures to support civil society in those countries;

12.2. consider ways in which representatives of young people in those countries can be involved in Council of Europe activities in the youth field;

12.3. consider ways of involving representatives of those countries in the Summer University for Democracy and in the Strasbourg International Forum for Democracy, whose establishment was proposed by the Assembly, in particular by promoting initiatives such as the Schools of Political Studies;

12.4. co-ordinate his action with that of Council of Europe member states and the European Union.

13. The Assembly calls on the Council of Europe Development Bank to examine the possibility of helping emerging democracies in the Arab world in Europe's neighbourhood and civil society in the countries concerned to the fullest extent possible and on the basis of specific arrangements.

14. The Assembly urges the principal international partners of the southern Mediterranean countries engaged in a process of democratisation, the European Union and the Union for the Mediterranean, international organisations with a financial remit and the member states of the Council of Europe to provide support for their recovery. It particularly urges Arab countries with substantial financial resources to contribute to this effort.

15. It is essential to follow the welcomed initiative of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to encourage and facilitate investment in the countries of the Arab world on the path towards democracy, facilitate their access to European markets, in particular agricultural markets, trade, enterprise start-up, as well as the creation of infrastructures and jobs. In this perspective, and taking into account the Euro-Mediterranean association agreements with the Maghreb and Mashreq countries, it is important to call for the establishment of funds specifically designed for investment in the Arab countries in the neighbourhood of Europe which are evolving towards democracy.

16. The economic recovery and expansion of the countries concerned, and consequently their transition to democracy, will not be sustainable unless there are resolute efforts to combat corruption at all levels of society, to remove bureaucracy, which stifles energy, and to put a stop to the distribution of advantages based on tribal or religious affiliations.

17. Europe must realise that reducing the gap in development between the countries in the north and the south of the Mediterranean should be a priority, in the interests of Europeans themselves and of course of the populations of the south, the aim being to enable the men and women of the south who so wish to remain in their countries, find employment there and enjoy fundamental freedoms and a good quality of life.

18. The Assembly wishes to prompt discussion with all parties concerned on the desirability of convening a summit of heads of state and government of the democracies of Europe and the southern Mediterranean to discuss co-operation between the Council of Europe and the emerging democracies in the Arab countries in Europe's neighbourhood.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Gardetto, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. On 17 December 2010 in Tunisia, a young street vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, was devastated when the police once again confiscated his cart, his only source of livelihood by which to survive and meet his family's needs. This act of humiliation is not unique; similar acts take place every day in various parts of the world as an example of the relentless tyranny of governments that deny their citizens dignity. Only this time, something different happened: after local officials refused to listen to his complaints, this young man, who had never been particularly active in politics, went to the headquarters of the regional government, doused himself in petrol and set fire to himself.[3]

2. "There are times in the course of history when the actions of ordinary citizens spark movements for change because they speak to a longing for freedom that has been building up for years; examples are the American revolutionaries and Rosa Parks in the civil rights movement. This is what took place in Tunisia, where that young vendor's act of desperation tapped into the frustration that had built up throughout the country and a sincere thirst for liberty and brought onto the streets hundreds then thousands of protesters, who, despite the bullets and the baton blows, refused to go home, day after day, week after week, until a dictator of more than two decades finally left power." And so it was that in early January 2011, the unrest that followed, fuelled by poor social and economic conditions, along with the people's desire for more liberty and for honest and independent justice, evolved into a nationwide protest movement, ultimately forcing President Ben Ali to resign and flee to Saudi Arabia.[4]

3. At its January 2011 part-session the Parliamentary Assembly held an urgent debate on the situation in Tunisia, following which it adopted Resolution 1791 (2011).[5] On that occasion the Assembly expressed the hope that the political transformation initiated by the population would lead to lasting democratic changes not only in Tunisia but also in other countries in the region, and it noted that the developments in Tunisia had already triggered a domino effect in Egypt.

4. Indeed, still in January, popular protest movements broke out in Egypt, forcing President Mubarak to resign, too. Since then, these protests have spread like wildfire in a number of Arab countries. In Yemen, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, the protesters have managed to secure some reforms, or occasionally only promises of reform, in some cases at the cost of human lives and police violence.

5. In Libya, protests against the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, the government's intransigence and the bombing of the population have led to full-scale armed conflict between the rebels and the forces of Colonel Gaddafi, prompting the intervention of a NATO-led coalition with a United Nations mandate to protect the civilian population. Several thousand people have been killed, and several thousand more have been injured in battles between the two sides. Hundreds of thousands of refugees have fled to neighbouring countries or directly to the Mediterranean Sea, where some 1 500 have lost their lives.

6. In Syria, unrest started in mid-March. At the beginning, the regime of Mr Bashar al-Assad responded with promises but soon reverted to brutal repression, attacking unarmed demonstrators with troops and tanks. Human rights groups say that more than 1 100 people have been killed since March and 10 000 arrested. Officials dispute these numbers and say that 100 soldiers have died. As in Libya, the government says it is "fighting terrorists".

7. In Bahrain, one third of the population (300 000 people) took part in the anti-government protests, which were harshly suppressed by the ruling monarchy, with military support from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. According to cautious official estimates, by the end of March 2011, 24 protesters had been killed. One of the major demands of the protest movement was a constitutional reform to allow the elected parliament to have exclusive legislative prerogatives. The Bahraini opposition expressed strong hopes for international support for its struggle for constitutional reform.[6]

8. On 8 March 2011, the Sub-Committee on the Middle East of the Political Affairs Committee held an exchange of views on the situation in Egypt with Mr Nasser Kamel, Ambassador of Egypt to France, and Mr Tewfik Aclimandos, historian and expert on Egypt, and decided to monitor the situation closely.

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3. Regarding this paragraph, see the speech given by President Obama to the State Department on 19 May 2011.
4. Ibid.
5. See Assembly Doc. 12497 (rapporteur: Ms Anne Brasseur, Luxembourg, ALDE).
6. See Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik, 5/2011, pp. 86-89.

9. On 9 March 2011, the Political Affairs Committee held a discussion on the situation in Tunisia, attended by Ms Bochra Bel Haj Hmida, member of the National Fact-Finding Commission on Abuses committed during recent events in Tunisia; Ms Sihem Bensedrine, spokesperson for the National Council for Liberties in Tunisia; and Mr Anwar Kousri, Vice-President of the Tunisian League for Human Rights. The committee also decided to ask the Assembly's Bureau for the question of "The situation in Tunisia" to be referred to it for report with a view to an Assembly debate during the June 2011 part-session**.** The debate was held on 21 June 2011 and led to the adoption of Resolution 1819.

10. On 11 March 2011, the Standing Committee held a current affairs debate on "Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the emerging democracies in the Arab world", introduced by Mr Tiny Kox (Netherlands, UEL), and with the participation of Mr Dominique Baudis, President of the Arab World Institute and Vice-Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs. On that occasion, the Standing Committee referred the matter to the Political Affairs Committee for report at the June part-session.

11. During the April 2011 part-session the Assembly held a current affairs debate on the situation in Northern Africa, introduced by Mr Andreas Gross (Switzerland, SOC).

12. The Political Affairs Committee appointed me as rapporteur at the April part-session, asking me to draft a report for the committee meeting on 30-31 May 2011. Because time was so short, I was not able to observe the situation on the spot, as I would have wished. The report is therefore based on indirect observations. In accordance with the Bureau's reference decision of 15 April 2011, I have taken account also of the motion for a resolution on "The pacification of the Mediterranean region" (Doc. 12550), tabled by Ms Fiamma Nirenstein (Italy, EPP/CD) and others.

13. The committee held a first exchange of views on this issue on 30 May 2011, based on a first draft report, and asked me to redraft the text in the light of that exchange of views. The present report is the result of that process, and I take this opportunity to thank all colleagues who have sent me their views and their amendments, which I duly took into account. In particular, I have taken the country-by-country analysis out of the explanatory memorandum.

14. The situation in the Arab world keeps changing, and the outcome of popular unrest is far from clear. The present report should therefore be seen as a first attempt by the Assembly to give its unequivocal support to those who are drawing their inspiration from the values upheld by the Council of Europe – democracy, human rights and the rule of law – and its clear condemnation of the use of violence against the population. It also serves the purpose of presenting some of the instruments that the Council of Europe could make available to the emerging democracies in the Arab world. It is obvious that the situation will change between now and October, and the committee will have to adopt an addendum to this report with a view to its presentation to the plenary during the October part-session.

15. The Assembly should continue to focus its attention on the region, and a specific report on the situation in Egypt, in the light of those on the situation in Tunisia, should be the next step, in particular since presidential and general elections are to be held there before the end of the year. It is up to the Assembly to decide to have other reports prepared for other countries of the region.

2. Overall analysis

16. Admittedly, it was not reasonably possible to foresee the scale of the outbursts that have rocked the Arab world in the past few months, but there were a number of factors that made them likely, namely:

– abusive police behaviour, human rights violations and widespread corruption;

– a population enduring economic hardship and high food prices;

– easy access to information technology and the widespread use of social networks.

17. A further catalyst here is the fact that people are no longer afraid: what we are seeing is a growing awareness among the people – particularly amongst the young, who are the majority of the population groups concerned – who no longer fear their governments and leaders, making protest possible.

18. This awareness is developing in a climate of responsibility on the part of those protesting: they are acting responsibly, resolutely and with maturity. This is the people's victory, not that of a political or religious group.

19. It is no coincidence that these popular protest movements first made themselves felt in Tunisia and Egypt. Indeed, those two countries achieved significant economic growth but without making any parallel social changes. The evolving situation there has provided young people, lacking any hopes for the future, with access to the new communication technologies.

20. Young people, especially highly educated urban youth, are frustrated primarily in their economic and political aspirations. Their frustrations are not motivated by religion, anti-colonialism or nationalism.

21. Some commentators may compare these events to those that ushered in democracy in southern Europe in the 1970s and central and eastern Europe in the 1990s, but in reality they are different in nature:

– they are truly popular movements, that is to say, they do not stem from organised opposition, and they have no formal leaders;[7]

– the regimes that collapsed (Tunisia and Egypt) were surprisingly fragile, but their fall did not bring down neighbouring, less fragile regimes;

– it is clear that social networks played a major part here, to the point where CNN suggested that these revolutions be named "Facebook Revolutions";

– the rebellions were nationwide, and, generally speaking, the populations turned to Europe and the United States for help, not to criticise.

22. There is no guarantee that the successor regimes to the fallen tyrants will be paragons of democracy; it is quite possible that other tyrants may seize power, that military or theocratic regimes may emerge or that a protracted power vacuum may lead to chaos. It is necessary to avoid not only retrograde steps but also extremes such as those of Iran or Somalia.

23. But one thing is certain and makes the role and responsibility of the Council of Europe more important – these young protesters espouse the values upheld by the Council of Europe: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

24. Europe, for its part, did not see these revolutions coming and was not prepared for them.[8]

25. As the Assembly commented during its debate on Tunisia in January 2011, Europe must accept some blame for having preferred to cultivate ties with the dictators, out of a desire for stability (Ben Ali and Mubarak were members of Socialist International), instead of anticipating the popular uprisings, and for not supporting them right from the start. "Societies held together by fear and repression may offer the illusion of stability for a time, but they are built upon fault lines that will eventually tear asunder".[9] Europe must now do all it can to help bring about a peaceful transition to democracy and to ensure respect for human rights in neighbouring countries, with humility, as part of a commitment based on reciprocal interests and mutual respect. It must also, once and for all, opt for truth and not "political correctness" because the interests of Europe (and the United States) lie not only in the stability of the Arab nations but also in the self-determination of individuals.

26. Europe is the Arab world's nearest neighbour, its natural market and its obvious partner.

3. The challenges

27. The challenges are both political and socio-economic.

3.1. A political challenge

28. The priority is to ensure the success of the transition towards democracy, enabling the voice of the people to be heard, which necessarily entails a process of learning about democracy and its associated best practices.

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7. At the 10th Conference of the Monaco Club on 25, 26 and 27 February 2011, the historian Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, comparing the revolutions in the southern Mediterranean with those in Eastern Europe, pointed out that the latter had been led by opposition parties that had the means of looking to the future. These were conventional revolutions against a political system and not against the power of an individual. In the current cases, the revolutionary factor was that of an extremely deep-rooted social unrest on the part of unemployed youth, unprecedented in history.

8. At the aforementioned Monaco Club conference, the former French Foreign Minister, Mr Hubert Védrine, expressed regret that Europe had reacted "with surprise and indecision". Ms Carrère d'Encausse felt that Europe now needed to find its place in a world it no longer recognised.

9. Speech by President Obama, op. cit.

29. Each country's situation in unique; there is no single, universally applicable model. Some countries have embarked on radical democratic reform (Morocco), and it remains to be seen whether this will succeed. Others have chosen the path of violence against their populations, who are paying the price with their blood (Libya, Syria), and this automatically means that their leaders are unfit to steer their countries towards a new political future because they have forfeited all legitimacy. Others again are playing for time (Yemen), without realising that the only solution lies in democratic dialogue and heeding the legitimate expectations of their people.[10]

3.2. A socio-economic challenge

30. The socio-economic challenge is at least as important as the political one. It is essential to create without delay an area of stability and prosperity on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean and offer prospects to young people and help people emerge from poverty. If this is not done, they will be tempted by extremes, and there is a danger they will turn to the radical elements of every kind. This is a particularly difficult task in today's budgetary climate.

31. Aid is taking shape under the European Union's neighbourhood policy and the policy decided on by the United States, but there are complaints that it is slow in arriving.

32. Working with the Arab world to bring about an area of peace, stability and exchanges in the Mediterranean is a challenge that is just as significant for the countries in the region as for Europe itself.

4. Europe's role

4.1. At political level

33. At political level, Europe's action needs to be fourfold.

34. First, we must guarantee respect for human rights. We should be mindful of the new principle adopted by the United Nations in 2005 on the responsibility to protect: "governments have the responsibility of protecting their peoples against war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocides. And if they do not, the international community recognises its right to do so in their place."[11] The violence of dictatorial regimes in the region and the clampdown on the civilian population must be roundly condemned, and those responsible must be brought before the competent courts, including international courts, and be punished.

35. We need to encourage respect for freedom of expression, assembly and religion, equality between men and women and the right to the free choice of one's leaders. "Such tolerance is particularly important when it comes to religion. In Tahrir Square, we heard Egyptians from all walks of life chant, 'Muslims, Christians, we are one'"[12]. It is therefore essential to ensure that all religions are respected and that bridges are built between them. In a region that was the birthplace of three world religions, intolerance can lead only to suffering and stagnation. If the democratic change desired by the Arab revolutionaries is to come about, Coptic Christians must have the right to worship freely in Cairo, just as Shi'a must never have their mosques destroyed in Bahrain. What is true for religious minorities is also true when it comes to the rights of women. History shows that countries are more prosperous and more peaceful when women are empowered. That is why it is imperative to help women, in the fields of health and education – including training in how to start up a business – and in general to ensure that their voice can be heard and that they can run for office.[13]

36. Second, we must support the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean in their transition to democracy. In particular, we can share with them our experience and expertise in constitutional law, political systems, public freedoms and press freedom.[14] In this context, it is also important to assist the countries concerned in developing genuine local democracy; for example, it is not right for a city such as Alexandria, with a population of some 5 million, to be headed by a governor appointed by the president of the country and not have a mayor elected by the local inhabitants.[15]

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10. Speech by Mr Alain Juppé, Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, to the Arab World Institute on 16 April 2011.
11. Ibid.
12. Speech by President Obama, op. cit.
13. Speech by President Obama, op. cit.
14. See the speech by Mr Juppé, op. cit.
15. See the speech by Mr Andreu Claret, Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation, at the MedPeople symposium, organised by the Monaco Méditerranée Foundation on 5 May 2011.

37. We must also change the way we look at the Arab world. Arab countries are often judged in terms of hostage taking, violent rhetoric and terrorist attacks claiming numerous victims. Furthermore, by virtue of their colonial history, many European countries thought they understood Arab societies well, but we are now finding that we lack knowledge and understanding of many aspects of those societies, especially matters of culture, and this occasionally gives rise to real resentment on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. For example, we need to use the concept of secularism with care, so as to present it as something aiming to achieve equality, rather than as something that could be perceived as a means of discrimination. Today we need to take on board what Arab civil society, which we must help to be powerful and plural, is saying: let us listen to what we are being told by business leaders, associations, artists, students and young people whose involvement in political life makes use of social networks. We have to talk to everyone who respects the democratic rules, upholds the law and rejects violence, even if we do not necessarily share their ideas, because democracy depends not only on elections but also on strong and stable institutions and respect for the rights of minorities. Consequently, we must also talk to Islamist groups who respect these rules.[16]

38. Lastly, we must find "a solution to the main conflicts persisting in the region": the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with a democratic Palestinian state; the situation in Lebanon, with a "sovereign Lebanon, free to choose her destiny"; the Iranian issue, with the Iranian government guaranteeing its people respect for human rights, resolving the nuclear issue in line with what the international community is asking and developing a positive influence throughout the region."[17]

4.2. At socio-economic level

39. Europe must focus on three priority socio-economic objectives in the Arab world: support for growth that will ensure job creation; assistance in dealing with social change; and the preservation of the Mediterranean, while taking full account of the constraints that affect European countries, especially migration policies.[18]

40. Successful democratic transitions in the Arab countries depend upon the expansion of growth and broad-based prosperity which these countries will be able to generate. Just as European Union membership served as an incentive for reform in Europe, so should the vision of a modern and prosperous economy create a powerful force for democracy in the Arab world. Accordingly, while initially it is imperative to help the countries concerned meet their financial obligations and recover from the disruptions to their economy as a result of their democratic upheaval, it is also necessary to bring together the European countries and the international organisations, especially those of a financial nature, to put in place a stabilisation and modernisation plan for the economies in the region. In particular, it is important to encourage and facilitate investment in these countries, ease their access to the markets, foster trade, give impetus to the establishment of businesses and finance the creation of infrastructure and jobs. To this end, it is essential to create investment funds that can channel capital to the countries in the region, as happened at the time of the democratisation of the countries in the former Soviet bloc.

41. The aid that is so essential to economic recovery in the countries in transition, particularly in the southern Mediterranean, under the European Union's neighbourhood policy and the policy set out by the United States, must be made available promptly to the countries concerned. While it is natural for such aid to be conditional on the practical application of democratic standards, it should nonetheless take account of the direction chosen and the genuine commitment to reform so as to give precedence to countries honouring their commitments in the fields of governance and human rights.[19]

42. The economic recovery and expansion of these countries, and consequently their transition to democracy, will not be sustainable unless there are resolute efforts to combat corruption at all levels in society, to remove red tape, which stifles energy, and to halt the distribution of advantages based on tribal or religious affiliations.[20] European countries have a responsibility to help, in whatever way they can, the Arab countries to achieve these objectives. The new Arab governments must also face up to their responsibilities and be accountable for the consequences.

43. Moreover, it is essential to create *de facto* solidarity between the two shores of the Mediterranean[21] and to meet the need of young people of the south to share in a collective destiny, the need to belong to a community outside the borders of their country and the need to communicate with the outside world, by

16. For this paragraph, see the speeches by President Obama and Mr Juppé, op. cit.
17. For this paragraph, see the speech by Mr Juppé, op. cit.
18. Ibid.
19. See the speech by Mr Juppé, op. cit.
20. See the speech by President Obama, op. cit.
21. See the speech by Mr Juppé, op. cit.

facilitating a greater number of exchanges between young people in the north and south, as well as by enhancing mobility, through the granting of visas and work permits for students who have demonstrated their skills in their own countries, so as to increase the sharing of academic experience and to enable them to acquire competences and skills in one or more countries on the other shore.[22]

44. Other measures must also be put in place, including:

– making good use of the diaspora networks of the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean that have been successful abroad, enabling young people from the south to look to them for support;

– enabling young people to benefit from the European institutional context;

– facilitating loans in euros to enable young people to fund a project (for example, via the European Investment Bank);

– establishing links between academic and voluntary sector networks on both shores of the Mediterranean;[23]

– developing networks of entrepreneurs;

– facilitating co-operation in the science and technology fields;

– helping civil society, including those elements that may "speak uncomfortable truths";[24]

– facilitating access to information, in particular through open access to the Internet, and giving journalists and bloggers the opportunity to be heard since "in the 21st century, information is power, the truth cannot be hidden, and the legitimacy of governments will ultimately depend on active and informed citizens".[25]

45. We must also reach out beyond elites to those "who will shape the future – particularly young people".[26]

46. As Mr Juppé said in his speech to the Arab World Institute on 16 April 2011: "If we are unable to reduce the gap in development between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean which we share, all our fine words will be in vain, both at political level and in terms of bringing migration under control. The aim is indeed to enable the men and women of the south to remain in their countries, find employment there and to enjoy fundamental freedoms and a good quality of life."

5. What we can offer

47. Europe experienced the transition towards democracy in its southern countries during the 1970s and its eastern countries during the 1990s. The Council of Europe played a significant part in these changes and can make its experience available to any of the Arab countries that may wish to make use of it.

48. The processes of transition in southern Europe and in central and eastern Europe showed that each situation is unique, that each nation has its own specific characteristics. The same is true of the Arab world. So each nation must create its own model, building on existing foundations.

49. The Council of Europe also has a number of potentially useful structures and instruments: the partnership for democracy, parliamentary co-operation, the Venice Commission, the North-South Centre, the Pompidou Group, GRECO, MONEYVAL, the Council for Penological Co-operation, the Strasbourg International Forum for Democracy, intergovernmental co-operation programmes, particularly as part of the new Neighbourhood Policy, support programmes for local bodies and civil society, the Council of Europe Development Bank and the human rights institutions and monitoring mechanisms, which, although they may not be open to non-member states of the Council of Europe, can offer their experience and case law for the benefit of the Arab countries.

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22. See the contribution from Mr Pierre Distinguin, International Director of Promotion Provence, to the colloquy on "Etre Jeune en Méditerranée" organised by the Monaco Méditerranée Foundation as part of the MedPeople symposium of 6 May 2011.
23. Ibid.
24. Speech by President Obama, op. cit.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.

5.1. Partnership for democracy

50. "Partner for democracy" status, established by the Assembly in 2009, allows parliamentary delegations from countries in the Council of Europe's neighbouring regions to take part in the Assembly's activities, subject to a number of undertakings, for example, that they will apply the values upheld by the Council of Europe, hold free and fair elections or work to abolish the death penalty. The Moroccan Parliament was granted this status on 12 June 2011, and a request from the Palestinian National Council is currently under consideration.

5.2. Parliamentary co-operation

51. As part of the Assembly's parliamentary co-operation activities, specific programmes for the national parliaments of countries with Partner for Democracy status can be developed to meet their priority needs in the context of ongoing reforms.

52. These co-operation programmes, which should be funded as joint programmes with the European Union and by voluntary contributions from member states, have two main focuses, though their precise content is decided in consultation with each parliament concerned. First, they aim to strengthen the democratic functioning and technical and administrative capabilities of the parliamentary secretariat; second, to familiarise parliamentarians as well as the civil servants working with these parliaments with the reference texts and standards of the Council of Europe in its core areas of activity, through specific activities such as seminars, study visits, traineeships and special subject workshops.

5.3. Venice Commission

53. The European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) is the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters. Established in 1990, the Venice Commission has played a leading role in the adoption of constitutions that conform to the standards of Europe's constitutional heritage. Initially conceived as a tool for urgently needed constitutional revision and design in a context of transition to democracy, the Venice Commission has become an internationally recognised independent legal think tank.

54. The Venice Commission helps to disseminate Europe's constitutional heritage, based on the continent's fundamental legal values, while continuing to provide "constitutional first aid" to individual states. The Venice Commission also plays a unique and unrivalled role in crisis management and conflict prevention through constitution building and advice.

55. Membership of the Venice Commission is also open to countries that are not members of the Council of Europe. Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia are members. From the very beginning of the people's uprising in Tunisia, the Venice Commission quickly took steps to offer its assistance to the transitional authorities, as regards electoral reform and preparation of elections, on the one hand, and constitutional reform, on the other. The Political Affairs Committee facilitated contacts by inviting the President of the Venice Commission to a hearing in Paris in March 2011 attended by representatives of Tunisian civil society. Co-operation has also been stepped up with Morocco, including as part of our committee's examination of the request for Partner for Democracy status submitted by the Moroccan parliament.[27]

5.4. North-South Centre

56. Created in November 1989, the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre) was set up in Lisbon. Its objective is to provide a framework for European co-operation designed to heighten public awareness of global interdependence issues and to promote policies of solidarity consistent with the Council of Europe's aims and principles (respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law).

57. Membership of the Centre is also open to countries that are not members of the Council of Europe. To date, Morocco and Cape Verde are the only "southern" states to have joined. The Centre could play a key role in the context of the "Arab Spring" and develop its relations with the countries to the south of the Mediterranean if it were given additional resources.

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27. See Resolution 1818 (2011) on the request for Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Parliament of Morocco, Doc. 12625 (rapporteur: Mr Luca Volontè), and Resolution 1919 (2011) and Recommendation 1972 (2011) on the situation in Tunisia, Doc. 12624 (rapporteur: Ms Anne Brasseur).

5.5. Pompidou Group

58. The Pompidou Group's core mission is to contribute to the development of multidisciplinary, innovative, effective and evidence-based drug policies in its member states. It seeks to link policy, practice and science, and it also focuses on the realities of implementation at the local level of drug-related programmes.

59. The Pompidou Group also acts as a bridge linking member states of the European Union and non-member states and neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean region. In this context, it has established the MedNET network for co-operation in the Mediterranean region on drugs and addictions. Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia participate in a number of the network's initiatives.

5.6. Support programmes for local bodies and civil society

60. Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) were created by the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to provide assistance to municipalities ravaged by the war in former Yugoslavia, through partnerships with cities in western Europe. The experience acquired by LDAs could be made available to emerging democracies in the Arab world that may wish to make use of it.

61. The Council of Europe also has a Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform.

62. In the words of its President, "The Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe, a genuine hub of European NGO networks, has contacts and strong links with NGO members in several of the countries concerned (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya). It has discussion skills and tools capable of helping population groups as they strive to facilitate this shift, this regime change. It can and will complement the action of states and international organisations in support of the desire for a better future expressed by women and men".

5.7. Strasbourg International Forum for Democracy

63. The Parliamentary Assembly has suggested that a number of activities be grouped together in a "Strasbourg International Forum for Democracy" in order to strengthen the democracy pillar of the Council of Europe; the activities in question are the Forum for the Future of Democracy, the Schools of Political Studies and the Summer University for Democracy. If this idea takes off, the Strasbourg International Forum for Democracy may include countries from outside Europe in its work, and in particular the countries of the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean basin.

64. The Forum for the Future of Democracy was established at the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, held in Warsaw in May 2005. Its aim is to strengthen democracy, political freedoms and citizens' participation through the exchange of ideas, information and examples of best practice. The proposals resulting from its discussions about possible future action help to enhance the Council of Europe's work in the field of democracy. There are plans to invite representatives of states on the southern shores of the Mediterranean basin to attend the 2011 Forum, to be held in Cyprus in October.

65. The Council of Europe Schools of Political Studies were established to train future generations of political, economic, social and cultural leaders in countries in transition. They run annual courses of seminars and lectures on topics such as European integration, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, with the participation of national and international experts.

66. Over the years, the Council of Europe's Summer University for Democracy has become a major fixture in the calendar of young democratic leaders of the new Europe, wherein they can debate issues, exchange ideas and seek to respond to the major challenges of our era. The Summer University for Democracy is also an ideal forum for regional and bilateral meetings of the schools in the network. These meetings have become an integral part of the Summer University's programme, offering opportunities for informal and in-depth dialogue.

5.8. Council of Europe Development Bank

67. The Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) is a multilateral development bank with a social vocation. Established in 1956 to bring solutions to the problems of refugees, its scope of action has progressively widened to other endeavors directly contributing to strengthening social cohesion in Europe.

68. The CEB represents a major instrument of the policy of solidarity in Europe, in order to help its 40 member states achieve sustainable and equitable growth. Accordingly, it participates in financing social projects, responds to emergency situations and, in so doing, contributes to improving the living conditions of the most disadvantaged population groups.

69. The Bank is willing to do what it can to help emerging democracies in the Arab world. Under its Articles of Agreement, the Bank can give direct aid only to its member states, but it is currently drawing up proposals for concrete means of action.

5.9. Council of Europe Neighbourhood Policy

70. In February 2011, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe prepared an initial "Analytical Background Document for the Ministers' Deputies' thematic debate of 2 March 2011" entitled "A neighbourhood policy for the Council of Europe?".[28] In a second document, published in April 2011, entitled "Council of Europe Neighbourhood Policy",[29] the Secretary General set out the broad lines of a new Council of Europe Neighbourhood Policy, with three objectives:

– to facilitate democratic political transition (constitutional process, electoral legislation, organisation and observation of elections);

– to help to promote good governance in the countries in the Council of Europe neighbourhood, on the basis of the relevant Council of Europe standards, mechanisms and instruments (independence and functioning of the judiciary, fight against corruption, money laundering, etc.);

– to reinforce and enlarge the Council of Europe regional action in combating trans-border and global threats such as trafficking in human beings, cybercrime, organised crime and terrorism.

71. In his presentation, the Secretary General said that the new Neighbourhood Policy had to be focused and relevant and had to respond not only to a clearly existing need but also to the existence of clearly expressed interest and concrete commitments from the beneficiary countries.

72. This topic was of course included on the agenda of the 121st session of the Committee of Ministers, which took place in Istanbul on 11 May 2011. The Ministers took note of the proposals made by the Secretary General regarding "a Council of Europe policy towards its immediate neighbourhood" aimed at promoting dialogue and co-operation with the countries and regions in the vicinity of Europe that request Council of Europe assistance, based on the common values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The Ministers also invited the Secretary General to develop action plans for the implementation of this policy, with a view to their approval by the Committee of Ministers, and agreed to conduct an initial review of this new policy at their next session.

73. Finally, the Assembly could, for its part, initiate reflection on the desirability of convening a summit of heads of state and government of the democracies of Europe and the southern Mediterranean to have a high-level political discussion on co-operation between the Council of Europe and the emerging democracies in the Arab world.

6. Conclusions

74. Europe cannot stand idly by and watch as history is made by this spectacular push for freedom in the countries of the southern Mediterranean.

75. Europe, which prides itself on having done so much for civilisation and on having developed universal models of democracy, which seeks to combat discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia, which speaks up for minorities and which defends the ideal of a multicultural society, must rise to the occasion and appreciate the scale of the changes now unfolding and the importance of its historic responsibility. It must now reach out to the Arab countries moving towards democracy, and first and foremost to those that are its neighbours. The latter should consider the possibility of applying the above-mentioned principles themselves, using the same mechanisms to ensure that they are upheld.

28. See document SG/Inf(2011)5 of 25 February 2011.
29. See document SG/Inf(2011)7rev 2 of 19 April 2011.

76. The time when large political groupings were shaped by geography alone has gone. We need, collectively, to appreciate that we are now in a new era. If the peoples of Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and elsewhere have made the effort to throw off the yoke of dictatorship, and perhaps that of religious extremism, too, we must help them – not like a teacher helping a student but as partners in a new and shared political world project for democracy, justice and freedom.

77. It is time to create a "common democratic home". The Council of Europe is the body that has done the most to bring together the peoples of its 47 member states, that possesses acknowledged experience and that helped the countries of Eastern Europe in their transition to democracy. It has instruments and mechanisms that make it possible not only to develop standards for establishing a common legal area that upholds the principle of the rule of law and human rights and for deepening the democratic character of reforms but also to provide a system for monitoring and scrutinising those standards.

78. The Council of Europe now needs the political will to impart a new historical impetus to its work. The countries of Europe must be ready to put their values to the test, beyond the immediate frontiers of their continent, and tie their destiny more closely to that of other countries that aspire to democracy and are willing to accept the same standards and scrutiny. An undertaking of this kind presupposes that the men and women currently in charge in the southern Mediterranean countries and responsible for leading their countries along a new path without falling into the mistakes of the past will want something other than just economic aid from Europe and will embrace our common values of tolerance and respect for freedoms. The Council of Europe can then make its facilities available to them, to address as closely as possible the concerns of the people and respond together to the main political challenges facing our societies.

79. As the President of the Assembly said in Istanbul on 11 May 2011, serious consideration should be given to the idea of convening a summit of heads of state and government from the democracies of Europe and the southern Mediterranean to lay the foundations of a process to discuss co-operation between the Council of Europe and the emerging democracies of the Arab world. The Parliamentary Assembly, with its Partner for Democracy status, has opened the way for this, but further action is necessary.

80. It is for the Arab states to make their own choices, but Europe must be ready to step up to the mark. If it now fails to show ambition and a clear, democratic and optimistic political vision for the future, it will bequeath to future generations an environment still driven by political, cultural and religious dissent, which could become insurmountable and which sooner or later will present it with a major problem.