

**Summary:** In September 2012, the Transatlantic Foundation of the German Marshall Fund of the United States co-hosted a workshop entitled “21 Months and Counting: The Changing Landscape of the Arab World and Implications for the EU and Turkey” with the support of the EU Delegation in Turkey. The event brought together some 50 international participants from the EU, Turkey, the United States, and the Middle East and North Africa region. Discussions from the five panels — “Revolution and Evolution in the Arab World: Triumphant, Unfinished, and Ongoing,” “Socio-economic Disruption and Economic Development — How Can the EU and Turkey Contribute?,” “Education, Institution-Building, and the Establishment of Democracy: What Role for the EU and Turkey,” “Stability and Leadership: The Transatlantic Alliance and the New Middle East,” and “Cooperation between the EU and Turkey in the New Arab World: How Would we make it Operational?” — are summarized in this policy brief.

## The Changing Landscape of the Arab World and Implications for the EU and Turkey

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### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

On September 17-19, 2012, the Transatlantic Foundation of the German Marshall Fund and the EU Delegation in Turkey co-hosted the first EU-Turkey Strategic Dialogue. Entitled “21 Months and Counting: The Changing Landscape of the Arab World and Implications for the EU and Turkey,” the closed workshop gathered some 50 international participants from the United States, the EU, Turkey, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Discussion ranged from an assessment of current developments in the Middle East and North Africa to prospects for Turkey-EU cooperation in the common neighborhood, from economic development and financial aid to democracy support. The diverse mix of participants also allowed for a debate on the larger international impact of the Arab Spring, starting with implications for transatlantic actors.

The meeting was held under the Chatham House rule. What follows is a summary of the main points that emerged during the discussion, without attributions.

### Session I: Revolution and Evolution in the Arab World: Triumphant, Unfinished, and Ongoing

Almost two years after the beginning of the Arab uprisings, there is a general consensus that the changing Arab world offers a highly mixed picture. Uncertainty dominates the political future of all countries, including those such as Tunisia and Egypt that have embarked on democratic transitions. The flashpoint of the Syrian civil war poses challenges of its own, but it is part of a larger context of instability due to rising ethnic and sectarian tensions and unmet economic and social demands, which in varying degrees cut across all Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa. The security dimension of the ongoing transitions remains very significant even after the conclusion of the international military intervention in Libya last year. A new international conflict may erupt in the Levant, if regional tensions surrounding the Syrian internal strife are not contained.

The term “revolution” is used by both outside observers and representatives of local political forces with growing caution. The Arab uprisings led in some cases to the fall of long-ruling regimes but the social basis of political power has yet to

<sup>1</sup> The contents of this policy brief are the sole responsibility of its authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union or the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

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change in many contexts. While segments of the old elites retain measures of the political and military power, high levels of corruption and inequality persist and so do high levels of unemployment among the youth constituencies that started the protests in 2011. Unaddressed grievances could cause new tensions and further violence in some cases. “Uprisings,” therefore, may be more apt to capture the phenomena that have characterized the MENA region since 2011, as dissatisfaction has shifted targets but not found a solution yet. Arab rulers were the initial target of protests but now there is also growing resentment toward foreign powers — Washington in particular — which are sometimes perceived as an impediment to the realization of local demands. Conspiracy theories about an alleged Western agenda to divide and rule the peoples of the region — by undermining the unity of fragile nation states — are also spreading.

The situation in **Syria** is particularly serious. The regime has engaged in violent repression of its own people and has been unable or unwilling to contain spillovers of violence to bordering countries, particularly to Turkey. The situation is further complicated by the unclear or at least undecided status of the opposition to President Bashar al-Assad. Representatives from the Syrian National Council downplayed factional and other divisions within the country and inside the reform movement. But international observers are skeptical about the movement’s ability to develop the necessary cohesion and coalesce around common, acceptable strategies for a post-Assad balance. International monitoring institutions have denounced the violence that has been committed by both sides but rebels emphasize the disparity of means, different scales, and opposite goals of contending forces. In recent weeks, the strength of the opposition movement seems to have considerably diminished in terms of capabilities due to new military tactics on the side of the regime and lower defections. In some areas, only more extremist groups are able to engage the military. Despite the rise of extremists within the opposition movement, however, the leaders of the Syrian National Council are confident that Syria’s future after the inevitable fall of the Assad regime will be the one of a moderate country — one consistent with the moderate historical character of Islam in Syrian society.

Many from neighboring countries and the West contested this relatively optimistic assessment of the composition of forces on the ground. It is noted that Jihadists are part of the rebellion. Syria’s many minorities are already being

targeted. A serious schism with Alawites has emerged. Some ethnic groups — in particular the Kurds — have taken advantage of the new fluid situation to revive long-standing claims for a Kurdish nation. Although they have relied on the battling regime to cover their actions across Syria’s borders such as in eastern Turkey, their goals point in the direction of independence for the Kurds in West Kurdistan. Some questioned that Syria with its current borders has a clear future irrespective of who will emerge as the winner of the ongoing conflict. Others underlined that Syria’s future as a nation–state, as for other Arab states, will depend on the future definition of citizenship. Ethnic and other tensions can be solved or at least contained by recognizing all minorities as equal citizens, a shift that should be firmly anchored in new legal instruments and enforced in practice.

Syria’s complex internal tensions are also part of larger international maneuvers and reactions. The revival of Kurdish demands and recrudescence of Kurdish violence poses a direct challenge to Ankara across the Syrian-Turkish border. Ankara has been supporting the rebellion by hosting training camps of the Free Syrian Army for many months before they were moved to Syrian territory. Ankara has also encouraged the activities of the Syrian National Council as the legitimate representative of New Syria but as recent developments clearly highlight, Turkey is now faced with a direct security challenge due both to the cross-border military activities of the PKK and the hostility of Damascus. The realization that support to anti-Assad forces has led to a series of unintended and largely uncontrollable consequences, including the strengthening of Islamist groups and the revival of the Kurdish issue, seems to be having a restraining impact on Turkey’s engagement. The spreading of violence to Turkey’s most eastern provinces, on the other hand, may induce Ankara to resort to military force either for retaliation or a larger intervention to establish securable buffer zones beyond its border.

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So far, status-quo oriented nations such as Russia and China have inhibited the international consensus that would have been necessary for a Libya-like external intervention, but there are questions about their lasting support for Assad regime. Their priority to ensure that their interests in Syria and the region are protected may be met even in the case of a regime change. Iran has worried that if Assad exits, it will lose a key ally in the Arab world and has extended solidarity. But Teheran seems capable of withstanding pressure as it also seems to believe that time is on its side. The Arab Spring has led to the fall of powerful allies of the West in the region and reigniting the resistance of Muslim communities to the interference of foreign powers. While challenged through economic sanctions and international isolation, the regime of the Mullahs in Iran has showed firmness overall. Meanwhile, Mohammed Morsi's Egypt seems positioned to play its own game, seeking to broker a regional deal on Syria either to avoid Assad's demise or manage the transition if he were to be removed. Israel sees an opportunity in the fall of Assad but also weighs the risk of regional conflict and seems deeply concerned that a post-Assad regime dominated by extremist forces could be more revisionist.

Despite the bloodshed and growing risks of a regional conflict, a wait and see attitude has characterized the European and U.S. positions since the outbreak of the conflict. Some complain that Western countries have chosen inaction over the cost of intervention because of the uncertain future that a post-Assad Syria would face. Personalities of the anti-Assad movement lament and representatives of the Western governments agree that international intervention remains a remote prospect at least until the November 6 presidential elections in the United States. Even if military intervention were decided, this could remain limited to the more restrictive goal of containing the spread of violence to Turkey.

Given this state of affairs at the international level, what representatives of the rebellion demand is no longer full-blown outside intervention but resources and concrete help with establishing some defensible buffer zones along the border with Turkey. This prospect has notably become more urgent as cross-border tensions have increased. Others, however, worried that establishing this type of zones could trigger a larger uncontrollable dynamic, leading to escalation and ultimately full-scale intervention.

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The situation in **Libya** has also remained very volatile since the removal of Gaddafi and end of hostilities, as dramatically demonstrated by the tragic and murderous terrorist attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi in September. Libya's challenge is nothing less than national unity. The problem so far is that factions and groups have failed to coalesce around a vision of a common interest. Institutions are to be built from scratch in the absence of a culture of the rule of law let alone democracy. The debate over federalism is indicative of the high stakes of the fragile transition phase. For some, a more federal Libya is a precondition for the nation's renaissance. For others, it will mark the beginning of Libya's disintegration. The risk of a civil war, extending to Libya's southern porous borders, is a distinct possibility despite recent achievements, such as peaceful and fair elections, which had marked the victory of moderate forces. On the other hand, the dynamism characterizing the post-Gaddafi era — over 150 political parties emerged after the fall of the regime — infuses some optimism.

Further undermining the establishment of new institutions is the weak state of the economy. Libya has never fully embraced capitalism and now it is at a crossroads. Its conspicuous natural resources are driving internal and international competition. The risk is the encroachment of tribal interests as opposed to the creation of a level playing field for the development of Libya as an open economy integrated into the world market.

Representatives of **Tunisia's** liberal elites lament the lack of progress even in the country that set itself on a course of political change first and was considered to have the strongest prospects for success. It was underlined that even if adopted, democracy can have different meanings to different people and groups. Some Islamist forces seem to be willing to learn how to navigate elections only

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to then establish a new hegemony once victorious. Some provocatively argued that the country has moved from a secular to religious dictatorship, with no real change in terms of liberties. The rule of Islamist forces may lead even to a regression in some areas. For example, a proposal is being considered to change the Tunisian constitution to make women a “complement” to men, as opposed to equal to men. Artists and thinkers are severely limited in their ability to express their independent opinions, though the internet ensures there are spaces for criticism.

Some noted that even beyond the struggle for ideas, inclusiveness is still very much a challenge. Youth and women are still largely excluded from the political process while elements of the corrupt old elite are still in place. As a result of frustration with the lack of change, limits to participation, and ongoing suffering, suicides and “immolations” continue, although they are less reported by international media.

Security is also fragile in the country and personal safety has become one of the most pressing and immediate needs for a people that had hoped to gain not just freedom from oppression, but better rule and greater well-being through the revolution. Looting, rape, and other crimes are on the rise.

The inability of new governments to provide for basic needs such as security, together with the apparent difficulties in laying out any long-term vision of Tunisia’s economic future, may erode the electoral basis of new rulers and undermine the success of Islamist forces. Tunisian liberals feel that challenges are great but that the new dynamic environment may in the end provide an antidote to the much-dreaded drift toward new forms of authoritarianism. As in other Arab countries, NGOs are proliferating and networks of citizens are creating new spaces despite efforts by some groups to limit freedom of expression and participation.

Many participants agreed that **Egypt** will continue to be a trend-setter for the region as a whole, despite different trajectories of transition countries and heightened diversity within the Arab world following the uprisings. It is in Egypt where both the aspirations and the contradictions of Arab reform are most evident. Egypt is currently bisected by different and competing impulses, from the quest for a new independence to the search for a new internal balance among different forces of change and pieces of the old

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apparatus. While it remains unclear what the new leadership under Mohamed Morsi may mean for groups and constituencies that do not recognize themselves in the agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood, nationalism is being revived in Egypt among wider sections of the population, and so is the ambition of Cairo to play a larger role in the Middle East by leveraging connections and renegotiating some of the neighborly relations, starting with the one with Israel.

At the same time, there seems to be a huge gap between national re-assertion and the needs of the Egyptian and other economies. Macroeconomic imbalances and rising debt call for international support. Economic nationalism would be a suicidal option for an Egyptian economy that is already plagued by vast distortions of incentives, from subsidies to corruption. Rather, while Cairo explores new international connections, it will have to balance out different external influences. Support from Arab states in the Gulf is available in addition to other traditional sources from international institutions and the West.

The nexus between the revolutions and the economy was in fact emphasized by many participants as being of the essence. Internal political developments will continue to have their own evolution but the success of ideologies and parties — and the very prospect of a more democratic Arab world — will be largely staked on the resulting economic conditions. Even in contexts such as Syria where the battle is currently shaped as one of clashing identities between groups and sects driven by different political priorities, economic and social needs will be the litmus test for stability in the medium run.

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## Session II Socio-Economic Disruption and Economic Development: How Can the EU and Turkey Contribute?

Socio-economic disruption and development in the region remains one of, if not the, key challenge and often a prerequisite for sustained political openings. Yet, support for economic development on the part of outside players can no longer be merely at the symbolic level that it was confined to in the early months of regional reconfiguration. There are important roles to be played by all those with interests in the region from “insiders,” namely the Arab countries, “inside-outsiders” like Turkey, Iran, and Israel, and “outsiders” from the United States and EU to Russia and the UN.

With regard to the MENA countries themselves, a regional insider noted that the upheavals since 2011 have been about incomplete processes of nation-building — stymied first by various colonial mandates and later by homegrown, military-backed regimes. Thus, even though the countries have a common language and media outlets like Al Jazeera impact everyone, the revolutions are not at all pan-Arab but rather intensely nationalist, shaped by the historical memory of colonization in each country and arrayed *against* foreign interference as much as *for* democracy.

This presents a paradox, it was suggested, because in a globalized and very networked world, countries that are strategically and economically important, like many in the Middle East, cannot actually operate without taking into account international opportunities and constraints. Thus, the new governments in the region, including those who long espoused a populist line that railed against outside interference, are compelled to explain to their “streets” that freedom today, everywhere in the world, is about negotiating interdependence rather than unadulterated autonomy per se. There are signs that the leadership is beginning to understand that without foreign aid they will not be able to get their projects back on track, but it remains an open question whether they will be able to communicate this to followers who remain quite anti-Western and anti-American. Another important question is whether acceptance of aid will come with an open-minded approach to the many

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political and economic conditions that are often attached to international programs, especially when U.S. or EU-run.

Economic developments are of particular importance for the **new Egyptian regime**. After all, now that President Morsi has managed to consolidate power, he and the Egyptian people realize he has no excuses for poor performance. He faces both macro-economic and distributional challenges. With regard to the former, his position is strengthened by the work of the Central Bank in sustaining a stable economy over the past year and a half, but weakened by the fact that US\$21 billion left the country due to capital flight, loss of tourism revenue, and corrupt money seeking havens elsewhere. In fact, FDI rates are close to zero, while tourism has ground to a halt and prices have been slashed in an attempt to attract business. Given these tight constraints, it was estimated that the Morsi government has between six and twelve months to put its house in order, otherwise it will face a social crisis with all of its attendant dangers. Part of its problem is that while there are many capable economists in Egypt, not all are willing to cooperate with the new government.

On the distributional side, Egypt faces challenges related to both salaries and government subsidies. In the context of the revolutions, both bureaucrats and workers discovered the efficacy of strikes. Recently, for example, bus workers went on strike putting the whole country on hold. This does not give the new Egyptian president much room for maneuver. The same is true for subsidies, especially oil, which accounts for one-third of the budget going toward subsidies. It is not an option for Morsi, who does not have a coercive apparatus like the previous regime, to slash subsidies, and in the meantime he has to generate funding to deliver on the social programs that the Muslim Brotherhood pledged to produce during the election campaign.

The upshot is that Morsi’s Egypt must prioritize economics over politics in its foreign policy and will be seeking support from any and all quarters from the United States to China, Saudi Arabia and Qatar to Iran. This means its policies have not and most likely will not differ dramatically from those of former President Hosni Mubarak for the foreseeable future. The challenge will be to attract FDI, loans, and tourism without appearing to betray the populist rhetoric that is patently against outside influence and lifestyles. It’s a crucial balancing act for the Muslim Brotherhood which ultimately — an Egyptian observer noted — has to figure out how to feed 80 million people in the

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upcoming months. If it does not succeed, it will not remain in power.

**Foreign assistance**, however, comes with strings. With Saudi Arabia and Iran, it entails a combination of political Islam and oil, while with Turkey there is no oil but a connection to political Islam that is perhaps more pragmatic and that could be an asset in helping to provide some legitimacy without having to out-do the likes of Iran in inflammatory rhetoric. After all, populist invocations of religion will only serve as a stop-gap solution for the Muslim Brotherhood until it can meaningfully deliver on economic development. Its ability to do so is also challenged by the fact that most of its constituents are, even if merchants and academics, hardly professional economists or business people. This presents Morsi with a set of strategic decisions. One option is to align with the Salafis, a pathway that would make legislation much easier as Islamists in general dominate the parliament. Yet, there are also the secular-civic movements, which are socially liberal but divided vis-à-vis preferences for right- and left-leaning economics. Along with the supporters of the old regime, these secular groups actually constitute the majority of the electorate. So Morsi's outstanding question is to understand in which way the wind is blowing. What is certain is that the Muslim Brotherhood is at the height of its mobilizing power — with 41 percent of the vote. It may never have such an opportunity again.

When it comes to those countries that are “in” but not entirely “of” the region, a prominent view was that they would have a role to play only if it were desired and solicited by the regional insiders. That said, Israel could be a force by its absence in developments in Syria in that it may come to the conclusion that an enemy it knows and with whom there has long been a sort of cold peace, namely Assad, is preferable than having to recalibrate vis-à-vis any

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new regime. Iran, meanwhile, has its own well-established network of clients and operating systems as well as ethnic (Kurdish) and sectarian (Shi'a) cards it could seek to parlay. Needless to say, an Iran-Israel showdown would have far-reaching impact, including an economic one, on everyone in the region.

In the case of Turkey, it was pointed out that especially because of the intense popularity of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on questions where he has actually produced few results (e.g. Israel and the *Mavi Marmara* apology question), Turkey may be seen as slightly less of an interloper in the region than its partners in the West. Yet, there is still some imperial baggage in terms of how the Ottomans are remembered in many quarters in the Middle East. A feature of Turkey's experience that clearly has deeply impressed many in the region is its civilian-ization, which may have emboldened the likes of Morsi, for one, to move so swiftly to sideline key generals in Egypt.

In another crucial area — the role of political Islam — an irony was observed in that while the “model” presented by AKP-led Turkey is a bit too Islamist from the perspective of many in the West, it is too secular for most Islamists in the Arab world. This, a regional insider noted, suggested that if Turkey does indeed have a natural leadership role in the MENA region, it is vis-à-vis the more secular-liberal constituencies as well as the large numbers of youth whose grievances about their economic opportunities (or lack thereof) remain unaddressed and who are therefore among those most impressed by Turkey's economic transformation.

Turkey's economic performance was thought to be the most clear-cut source of its power of attraction for countries and constituencies across the Arab world. Its success, an EU observer emphasized, was also a function of Turkey's EU reforms. For example, while in the 1980s and 1990s, investments in Turkey were mostly undertaken by large firms equipped to take on labyrinthine regulatory and business practices, after the IMF and EU reform process in the early 2000s, investments soared as many small and medium-sized companies from around the world but especially the EU began to come to Turkey. To sustain this sort of performance, it was noted, Turkey needed to reinvigorate the reform process and implement a pending second generation of reforms with regard to the tax system, for example, and the judiciary system. Otherwise, it would run the risk of getting stuck in middle-income brackets.

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After all, while it has managed to become the 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world — some observers noted — it has not managed to move up a slot since 2002.

One approach that could seek to build trilateral synergies between Turkey, MENA countries, and the EU would be to move beyond a narrow sectoral focus to see how in promising areas — tourism, for example, or cheese production in the case of Egypt — small and medium enterprises (SMEs) from Turkey and the EU could play a cooperative role at different stages in the value-chain (although they also compete with one another at various other stages). Here, normalization of the economic environment is imperative for such SMEs because with the present state of most of the economies in the Middle East, only large companies can overcome the unlevel playing field and have the resources to deal with the governments and other uncertainties in the region. In this context, the Turkish experience can indeed be quite inspiring — including the incompleteness of its reform as an incentive to go quicker and further. What is key — and here a report was cited that canvassed the views of hundreds of public and private actors — is the need for a “win-win-win” mentality that should be incentivized. Today, however, a bilateral paradigm seems to have prevailed. A multi-lateral approach could also be pursued in order to involve and leverage the resources of the Gulf countries.

## Normalization of the economic environment is imperative.

The EU, it was noted, could contemplate going further by offering significant loans and grants to help countries like Egypt, for one, to avoid currency devaluation and the social unrest with which it would be accompanied. The EU also has a good track record in setting up frameworks into which others can invest, and could draw on its experience doing so in Palestine. It could even consider a comprehensive economic package, though given the present climate at home this would be unlikely. Meanwhile, countries with specific areas of technical expertise like France and Germany could provide support to market-friendly development schemes. The recovery of southern Europe could also be linked to the future of sub-regional investment linking, for instance, Italy with Tunisia and Libya, or Spain

with Morocco — frameworks that could be developed with or without Turkish (or Gulf) assistance.

Ultimately, however, the EU, like the United States, should be aware of the fact that it does not have a great deal of political capital in the region (whereas Turkey could afford to be more political). If the West wants to influence outcomes, a regional insider noted, it will have to step up its involvement in economic terms, and any moves to do so will also have to take into account Russia’s status quo preferences with regard to the region as well as rather allergic sentiments in Moscow toward Islamist movements. But the fact is that Islamists across the region are now a political force and represent a new elite that needs to be socialized into the international community. The alternative, epitomized by Iran, is combative regimes sitting on the sidelines.

### Session III: Long-Term Goals — Education, Institution-Building, and the Establishment of Democracy: What Role for the EU and Turkey?

Turkish, European, and U.S. representatives agreed that education, institution-building, and more representative governance will be key to development in the MENA region beyond short-term stabilization needs. As regards education, there was widespread optimism about the prospects of Turkey-EU cooperation. The EU has stepped up its Erasmus Mundus program to promote transition countries in its southern neighborhood and Turkey is willing to host a greater number of students from the Arab world (the current number, it was noted, is often overestimated). These initiatives can be linked in the future, seeking synergies among the two actors. Funding for education support is also available. The issue of impact, however, was hotly debated.

Some participants noted, for instance, that Islamist groups are fully aware of the importance that education plays as an instrument for hegemony. Textbooks may be changed in some contexts to reflect the beliefs of some groups. The risk of biased school books and biased teaching — which was already a reality under past dictatorships — has not diminished; only the references are changing. Others noted with concern that female education may be soon at risk as segregation of women is already a reality in some cases, up to the secondary level of education and beyond. It was also pointed out that parallel systems of education exists in the majority of Arab countries, with national tracks being offered next to international and other tracks. The

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tendency seems to be for new rising groups to support and develop new tracks of education reflecting their priorities and world-views. It will be difficult for external actors to stem this evolution toward, on one hand, control of curricula for ideological, religious, or political purposes and, on the other, the privatization of education following major fault lines in society.

Some noted that the state of the education system in most Arab countries is so poor that reform — whether implemented from within or induced from the outside — can hardly fix the problem in the short to medium term. A way to influence the education of the Arab youth is for pro-democracy groups and external actors to engage the new generations in the places where they really go to for information and exchange, starting with social media.

As far as institution-building and democracy are concerned, the debate was very open both as to the prospects for a true and successful process of democratization and as to the content and form of EU-Turkey cooperation to this end. Turkish, European, and U.S. representatives all agreed that procedures and institutions are of the essence in a democracy. Elections can be used to occupy the political space and establish soft or less soft forms of authoritarianism. They can also be used to pass laws that favor one group over others. Emphasis was therefore put on support to inclusive constitution-making processes that can lead to widely accepted legal and institutional frameworks within which the new regimes can operate.

The role of civil society in creating the necessary domestic context for reform was also emphasized by many. One worrying trend is an apparent will to crush independent civil society organizations by new dominant forces in the attempt to eliminate a source of dissent. External actors such as the EU, Turkey, and the United States, it was proposed, should clearly convey to newly elected governments that their success in establishing more representative forms of government will be judged not only on the fairness of elections but on the attitude that new regimes display toward their respective civil societies. Representatives from the EU, Turkey, and the United States concurred that unfortunately much of their financial aid has historically ended up benefiting those elements of civil society that are closer to the ruling elites and bureaucratic establishments in the respective countries.

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The issue of pluralism dominated the debate on democracy support, together with the discussion of what is often referred to as the “Turkish model.” Some participants drew attention to the fact that pluralism and the rule of law should really be the litmus test for new regimes to prove that they have a genuinely democratic reformist agenda. The establishment of full-fledged democracies, especially of a liberal style, was seen by most as completely unrealistic at this stage. But the more limited goal of legal protection for the many minorities and the strengthening of the checks and balances and system of legal guarantees that go under the label of the “rule of law” was seen as of the essence to assess progress in transition countries.

These widely supported observations sparked a debate on Turkey’s role, and notably the relationship between Turkey’s own internal transformation toward democratic consolidation and the influence it can have on democratizing Arab societies. Some noted that Turkey is still an imperfect model, as its own democratic system and culture are still to be strengthened in important respects, from the definition of citizenship to freedom of expression. Others preferred the notion of Turkey as a model in the making, which suggests that a link should be drawn between Turkey’s ability to reform further and the power of its model in the Arab world. Still others cautioned against the idea of a Turkish model altogether, underlining that Arab societies will pursue their own national pathways to political and economic development and that difficult legacies dating back to Ottoman times still negatively affect the image of Turkey in the region despite the popularity of Turkish leaders among the Arab people.

Many agreed that one should talk of a Turkish experience rather than model. In recent times, Turkey has gone through changes that Arab societies will also have to face, from the rebalancing of civil-military relations to constitutional reform. These changes have sometimes brought Turkey closer to a model of a full-fledged democracy, while

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in other cases they have engendered an anxious debate on whether new majoritarian tendencies may jeopardize the significant progress that was made in the past in different areas. Media freedom and checks and balances, including the independence of the judiciary, have become real concerns of external observers and Turkish liberals in the most recent years. These issues and faults, however, may diminish the Turkish model but for the same reasons add to the Turkish experience as they provide critical lessons to both external actors engaged in democracy support and local stakeholders and constituencies in Arab countries.

Finally, the issue of conditionality was debated. It was recognized by many that Western conditionality may be both more necessary and more difficult to justify and implement in the new context. New regimes may be even less open than their predecessors to accept conditions attached to external aid. On one hand, some argued the credibility of Western institutions, starting with the EU, has been seriously undermined by selective application of conditionality in the past, when EU authorities were willfully engaging authoritarian regimes that showed no respect for Western political values and universal human rights. On the other, new political forces representing the newly emerged constituencies have to cater to a population that has grown even wearier of external interference. In other words, the weak legitimacy of Western players and rising populism may combine to create a context in which conditionality may become impractical or may even backfire if strictly applied.

When it comes to Turkey, many noted that Ankara traditionally has avoided attaching formal conditions to the support provided to Arab countries and governments. Ankara's new emphasis on democracy and democracy support has not significantly changed this attitude, at least for now. Unlike the EU, Turkey does not have the same instruments and clear legal principles to deal with its neighbors, let alone a formalized and institutionalized

**Turkey is still an imperfect model, as its own democratic system and culture are still to be strengthened in important respects.**

“neighborhood policy.” But many nonetheless noted that Turkey can in some ways be more effective than the EU in linking its support to principles and objectives if it so intended. This does not necessarily come from a higher moral ground — Ankara was possibly closer to some of the old authoritarian regimes than EU countries — but, once again due to credibility emanating from its own experience. Prime Minister Erdoğan's emphasis on the separation between religion and state, if it became a condition for Turkey's engagement as opposed to a simple call in places like Egypt, could have an impact because of the history of the messenger.

## **Session IV: Stability and Leadership: The Transatlantic Alliance and the New Middle East**

Turkey's evolving role in the region and the ongoing debacle in Syria emerged as key themes in a debate that was embedded in an awareness that both the region and the globe are undergoing rapid and profound changes, which are fundamentally reshaping international balances.

In this context, it was noted that the MENA region can be faced with decades-long instability coming on the heels of two difficult decades. As to the phenomenon of Islamism, it was remarked that in the 1990s, agreement was found among transatlantic partners to engage with those Islamist forces that did not resort to violence. The bloody civil war in Algeria helped cement these views. In the 2000s and despite of the new focus on the region brought about by 9/11, no real progress was made in terms of how the West should deal with Islamist movements and ideologies in the region. The challenge of the next years, therefore, will be for transatlantic partners to establish the terms of engagement with forces that in some local contexts have already become dominant and occupy positions of power. While the distinction between violent and nonviolent forces may still hold, more stringent and detailed parameters will have to be worked out lest Europeans and Americans accept significantly less control than what they already have on local political dynamics that, as the case of Egypt's new leadership has already shown, will have an impact on larger international balances.

When it comes to Ankara, it was noted that Turkey is surrounded by three geopolitical ecosystems — Europe, the former Soviet space, and the Middle East. Its position vis-à-vis all three has changed dramatically in the past decade. Europe appears to have entered a period of stagnation,

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decline, and re-emergence of national divide lines, which the process of integration had partly redrawn or deleted. The Middle East in the wake of the Iraq war and the Arab revolutions, for its part, is experiencing the unraveling of a settlement that has endured since at least the period of the British mandate. This was an order that gave Sunni Arabs privilege over non-Sunnis and non-Arabs. Today those who had grievances against that order are seeking to reconfigure the region. Only the Russian-Central Asian arena appears to display continuity to the extent that it can remain impervious to developments next door.

These cataclysmic changes have created a very new geopolitical theater and one in which Turkey's credentials as a leader in a region more torn than ever are being tested in much the same way that EU complacency and U.S. supremacy have been challenged. Just a decade ago, and leveraging its EU process and the permissive regional environment, Turkey proved able to activate pent up entrepreneurial, social, and political capital to transform its own political balance and start developing a more inclusive political system. This made it something of a beacon in a region where the United States had lost capital with the prolonged struggles in Iraq and also affirmed a sense in Turkey itself of its own long-torn identity and destiny. Turkey was able to de-securitize some of the relations with its most immediate neighbors while rising as a "trading state" with an interest in building bridges with, instead of containing or fighting, problematic actors.

For some critical voices among the Turkish, Middle Eastern, and European participants, these domestic and international accomplishments spurred Turkey's leadership to overplay its hand, squandering, for example, what some saw as Ankara's greatest advantage: the neutral image that had enabled Turkey's diplomats to shuttle between Tehran and Tel Aviv, Damascus and Brussels. It was also argued that an inflated sense of accomplishment led to a discounting of the very real dangers that could emanate from places like Iran and Syria while belittling, at least for an interlude, the importance of NATO. According to this perspective, on the domestic front too, the AKP leadership used power it acquired by building coalitions to take revenge against political rivals instead of to deepen Turkey's democracy, leaving long-festering identity and citizenship issues, particularly with regard to the Kurds, unresolved. Thus, while Turkish businessmen continue to engage and prosper across the region — many among them also fear that a downturn is on the way. And while Turkey's

prime minister continues to enjoy high levels of popularity among publics in the region, the country is faced with a dangerous conflict in its own backyard, with serious potential for spillover in terms of its domestic Kurdish question and no meaningful EU framework with which to reach out to Kurds to seek its resolution.

On one hand, this has fed speculation and a sense of unpredictability among both Turks and Turkey-watchers about the country's trajectory, a sentiment that has been exacerbated, critics argued, by the increasingly personalized ways in which policy is presented. On the other, it appears to have greatly heightened awareness among many in Turkey's foreign policy community, as well as the population at large, that a "lone wolf" approach is unfeasible and that valuable partnerships with Western countries and organizations need to be nurtured. Similarly, the aspiration to regional prominence may have been diluted, a European observer ventured, because there is something to be said for a rather cautious foreign policy profile when one lies at the intersection of so many fault lines and has to maintain an equilibrium on so many contentious issues.

In Ankara's defense, it was noted by participants from the EU and Middle East as well as Turkey that the foreign policy goal of the past decade was to desecuritize, to the extent possible, relations with neighbors, and that until the lid of Pandora's Box unhinged with the Syrian conflict, this was both an admirable and a feasible approach. In such a context, Turkey had not sought autonomy *per se* but a more functional relationship with transatlantic partners, which drew out the comparative advantages of the different parties in engaging the region. Even when problems were encountered on the political front, as in the case of the EU, meaningful strategic dialogue continued. Today, with the much more perilous regional environment, few actors in the region have the capability to secure outcomes and the EU is as responsible as Turkey for not reaching out earlier to act in a complimentary fashion. Ultimately, the security threats of this era are such that most agree that it is impera-

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tive to define, design, and activate new partnerships with old allies. This endeavor, however, is proving as challenging given both the flux in the region and the unfortunate state of Turkey's EU stalled accession process, which risks negatively reverberating on the less ambitious goal of strategic cooperation in the common neighborhood.

Connected to the Syrian crisis but with a history and dynamic of its own is the Kurdish question. At the heart of the dilemma for Turkey, many felt, has been the escalation of the Kurdish conflict with a conservative estimate of 750 deaths — 250 soldiers, 300-400 PKK operatives, and some 85 civilians and counting. The PKK is clearly being led by hardliners who are unleashing all of the tools in its arsenal from kidnappings and arson to suicide bombings. If the goal is to provoke the government into a heavy-handed response, argued an expert observer, then it has been by and large successful with the prime minister taking an increasingly hard nationalist line and the detention of an estimated 7,000 people whose relationship with the PKK has not been clearly established. Yet, he continued, with all of the upheavals in the Turkish military in recent years due to the full-fledged establishment of civilian control, it is not certain whether the army is operationally up to the task.

This has implications for internal security but also Turkey's security partners, which worry about the recrudescence of a national question that they were never able or willing to address in the decades following the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Any transatlantic support to a political solution will have to be found acceptable by Ankara. On the other hand, a re-securitized approach to the Kurdish issue could isolate Turkey from the region as it did in the 1990s, not least with regard to investors interested in Turkey as a gateway. Bolstering the security relationship, it was felt, also necessitates communicating to the Turkish public, which all too often is receptive to conspiracy theories, that PKK

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activities are not being fomented by Turkey's allies in the West.

However, it was also felt that there is room for optimism on the Kurdish issue if the political will were to be forthcoming. First, the political leadership of the Kurdish movement would be more effective as interlocutors if they were enabled to communicate Kurdish demands more clearly to the Turkish public. At the end of the day, most Turks and Kurds want to live together, and a majority of Kurds do not seem to want a separate state. Turkish political elites and publics also have a better sense than they did, say, a decade ago, of what a political and cultural rights-based solution to the problem entails. Citing a recent report by the International Crisis Group, four recommendations were put on the table:

1. Provision of mother tongue education for Kurds and other minorities — a costly option to be sure but one that in time will yield results.
2. Lower the current 10 percent parliamentary threshold to 5 percent to enable moderates in the Kurdish movement to be more effective partners in parliament.
3. Explore formulas for decentralization by fleshing out, for example, the notion of “democratic autonomy” in such a way that would empower all of Turkey's 81 provinces while retaining overall unity.
4. To enable all of the above, pursue long overdue constitutional reform for which there is clear mandate from the Turkish people that will decriminalize discussion on these matters. This will also help prevent the dangers associated with rising sectarianism in the region at large and that is manifest in the Turkish context by the growing insecurity felt by its large Alevi community.

## Session V: Cooperation between the EU and Turkey in the New Arab World: How Would We Make it Operational?

The final panel, on operationalizing cooperation, was characterized by consensus that the considerable potential for Turkey-EU cooperation in the neighborhood has not been exploited. Turkey, like other European countries, has an interest in stability, the cessation of violence, and the resolution of ethnic or socio-economic tensions that risk causing the outburst or widening of domestic or interna-

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tional conflict in the Arab world. As a maturing democracy, Turkey also understands the need for political development in the region, and has sided with those forces that advocate reform and democracy in the various contexts. Yet, while foreign policy dialogue has intensified between Brussels and Ankara in recent years as exemplified by the frequent meetings between the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, a host of obstacles from institutional barriers to reservations in some EU member states mean that practical cooperation has not developed in a lot of critical areas. The panel accordingly sought to tease out avenues for cooperation.

To begin with, the sources of impasse were noted, with Cyprus cited as the biggest obstacle in substantive terms, along with the lack of political will on both sides vis-à-vis both Cyprus and reinvigorating relations more broadly. The current lack of agreement about how to manage the Syrian refugee crisis — with the EU complaining about lack of access to the refugee camps — was cited as a case in point because despite the clear, common (humanitarian) interests, the approaches taken by Turkey and the EU did not mesh. As the crisis mounts, however, it could provide an impetus to enhanced cooperation.

To realize cooperation, a general need for heightened consultations and discussions was noted, moves that should not remain hostage to the reservations of individual EU countries and be able to overcome the institutional difficulties that could come with the establishment of formal settings, such as Turkey's participation in the EU Council meetings on foreign policy. A joint declaration of sorts to convey to broader audiences that Turkey and the EU will be working together could have the ability to change the current narrative of missed opportunities and promote the dialogue that is already happening at the working level. This would not require much political will and could serve to soften Turkish public opinion vis-à-vis the EU. Consultation could then be accompanied by higher level mutual engagement at the bilateral level in the form of joint missions, or even joint delegations of Turkish ministers or leaders traveling with their EU counterparts, measures which — if used sparingly — could create an impact.

Yet, the most important dimension, participants agreed, was to ensure that initiatives are in accord with the priorities of Arab partners on their journey to democratization and economic development. In this regard, the need for clear and specific inputs from Arab partners was under-

scored with regard to sectors such as health and education to infrastructure. After all, a European observer pointed out, it is not at all clear to what extent a joint EU-Turkey approach would be well-received in the Arab world. Turkey's "model" appears too Western and secular for many Islamists in the region, while the EU is chastised for its relations with the previous regimes.

Ability to engage also will be shaped by the balance that emerges in the region once the pendulum that swung away from the old regimes toward the Islamists finds a new equilibrium. In the meantime, an Arab commentator warned, there is a danger of embarking upon a self-fulfilling prophecy in that by assuming that Islamists will be the only game in town, Western and Turkish interlocutors empower them to achieve precisely such a position. A recurring theme in this regard was the need to strengthen the civil society groups that made the revolutions possible in the first place. It was recalled that nowhere in the region had Islamists taken a majority of the vote. Rather, they won because multiple — in some cases hundreds — of newly emergent, institutionally underdeveloped, liberal/secular parties in places like Tunisia and Egypt split the majority vote. Several representatives of civil society in the region accordingly plead for support for these fledgling organizations, which the new authorities may seek to clamp down upon before they acquire any meaningful capacity.

Further "low political" areas in which support could be forthcoming including secondary and university education and expansion of the Erasmus student and faculty exchange program, which has proven to be such a pillar of inter- and intra-regional cooperation. That said, a participant from Europe noted that Turkey must still complete several cycles of reform in order to be able to work with the EU on Arab

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transitions in areas related to judicial and constitutional reform, the media, and the role of women.

Recalling that socio-economic development is a crucial ingredient for inclusive political settlements, it also was noted that public and private sector actors could work together toward the region's industrialization, not least through the types of construction and infrastructure-building projects at which Turkish companies excel. Long-standing connections between Turkish business, including its chambers of commerce, with counterparts in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, were noted as an asset Turkey brings to the table, though the inherent competition between such firms and their EU counterparts was also taken into consideration.

In terms of looming concerns with regard to any future cooperative platform, two questions — trajectories in Tehran and Damascus — stood out prominently. Some participants asked if a common threat perception in Turkey and Israel was not forming, though it was also noted that the Turkish position would always be measured and multi-dimensional on such a complex and sensitive question, just as Turkish public opinion was unlikely to develop a Manichean view of relations with Iran. The question as to whether Turkey, the EU, or anyone else had thought seriously about the nature and composition of a post-Assad regime in Syria was also raised.

Constraints on the EU's ability to commit to cooperation include the fact that it is still consolidating the new system put into place by Lisbon and that has been coalescing in a climate of crisis. This has resulted in a sort of schizophrenic attitude as politicians had claimed that they wanted less EU and they have received precisely this sort of an arrangement. Yet, it is clear now that we need more EU and it is not clear how this is going to be delivered. This suggests that prominence in the short- and middle-term could be accorded to bilateral cooperation. The exit of Nicolas Sarkozy from the French political scene may mean the removal of a major obstacle to Franco-Turkish cooperation, but does not necessarily bode well for concrete improvements. An open question is whether France at some point in early 2013 will unfreeze several chapters, and whether Turkey's prime minister will be invited to participate in the European Council.

With regard to incentives and obstacles for Turkey, the degree to which a reinvented image and position as a

stakeholder in Europe would impress Arab audiences was stressed by commentators from Europe and the Arab world alike. The commitment to an enhanced relationship, as was noted by many, would provide the EU with an invaluable component in its outreach to the Muslim world — a Muslim but not necessarily Islamist voice in Europe. The key, it was reiterated, was to reopen chapters by signing the protocol acknowledging Cyprus, which would lead to the reopening of several chapters and create a whole new dynamic in the relationship, none of which would guarantee outcomes in the short-term but which would at least inject much needed elasticity into the accession process.

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