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About this Series

Op-Med is an ongoing series of opinion pieces on topical issues in Mediterranean politics from a transatlantic perspective. The series brings together European, North American, and southern Mediterranean experts through the German Marshall Fund–Istituto Affari Internazionali strategic partnership. The series examines key questions surrounding the political, societal, and economic evolution of specific Mediterranean countries as well as the broader regional and international dynamics at play in the Mediterranean region as a whole.

The Mediterranean's 3 Cs and Implications for the West

by Pol Morillas

The term “Arab Spring” is contested. Critical voices argue that the nature and causes of the revolts in the Arab world differ from one country to another and that the prospects for political change are uncertain in many cases.

From the 3 Rs to the 3 Cs: Mapping the Evolution of the Arab Spring Mediterranean

Capturing this diversification is the “trilogy” of 3 Rs. The 3 Rs stand for countries undergoing Revolution (Tunisia and Egypt above all), countries where regimes have confronted popular movements with violence and Repression (Syria today and Libya before the ousting of Muammar Gaddafi), and countries that have avoided major upheavals so far and have engaged in more or less genuine Reform (Morocco and Jordan). As a result, the Southern Mediterranean has become a more fragmented region. A year and a half after the start of the Arab Spring, this trend remains unchanged. But this fragmentation should be read as the product of a dynamic process in which countries tread different paths on the way towards political change.

Moving forward, a new trilogy is in the making, the 3 Cs, which captures the evolving political reality of the Mediterranean region: the Consolidation of democratic processes, Collision between democratizing forces and remnants of the old regimes, and Continuity of a pre-Arab Spring reality. A bird's eye view of the region illustrates the degree of democratization in these three scenarios.

First, a progressive Consolidation of democracy is taking place in Tunisia and Morocco, and may follow suit in Libya. Debates in Tunisia since the 2011 elections of the Constituent Assembly have focused on building an inclusive democratic system. Secular and liberal groupings from the revolution have entered the political scene and the media to establish the pillars of a secular liberal democracy. Some political parties in this camp are examining whether merging is the best way to enhance their voice and thus the overall plurality of the system in view of the moderate Islamist party *Ennahda's* strength. In the meantime, critics of the current coalition government between the *Ennahda* or Renaissance Party, the nationalist-leftist *Congrès pour la République*, and

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the leftist *Ettakatol* argue that revolutionary momentum is sufficient and would not require a coalition justified on the sole grounds of preventing an unlikely return to the status quo ante.

Non-revolutionary countries like Morocco are also moving towards a more inclusive political system. From the top down, Morocco introduced substantial revisions of its constitution following the November 2011 elections, broadening the powers of the elected parliament and government. The executive branch is now in the hands of the Islamist *Parti de la Justice et du Développement* and the “cohabitation” between the King and the newly elected government is carving out a unique path towards democratic reform.

While too early to tell what the outcomes will be, Libya too, having toppled Gaddafi’s repressive regime, has a chance to transition towards a democratic system. Political elites agree that the success of the next parliamentary elections is essential to establish the fundamentals of a new democratic system. There is also general agreement on the need to draft a new constitution after the elections, which would delineate the contours of a roadmap towards democracy. The need to establish solid state institutions, disarm militias, and ensure national unity remain key challenges for a future democratic state, but there is consensus to avoid a return to a Gaddafi-style regime.

Second, Egypt as well as Syria appear to be on a Collision course between democratizing forces and the remnants of the old regime. Violent collision looms large in Syria, where the Bashar al-Assad regime shows no sign of halting the killings of the civilian population. More than a year after the first demonstrations began, the country is split along sectarian lines and the risk of civil war increases by the day while the opposition struggles to form a united front. Collision also characterizes the international level, with the international community split over regime change and

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support for the Syrian leadership. The dangers of a regional spillover of the conflict have at the same time underpinned and undermined both the “Responsibility to protect” doctrine and the UN mediation efforts.

In different ways, Egypt as well seems set on a collision course between democratizers and remnants of the old regime. Before Mohamed Mursi was elected president, the Egyptian political system was in disarray, given the “soft coup” by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in June 2012, which dissolved the Egyptian parliament dominated by the Islamists, assumed legislative functions, and increased its power over civilian authorities, including the writing of a new constitution. After the following presidential elections, there are few reasons to believe that collision will be avoided. In the coming months, the old regime is likely to use Egyptian institutions, and above all the judiciary, which remains firmly in its hands, to recover its loss of influence. Open contrast between the old regime and the Muslim Brotherhood and other democratization forces are likely to re-emerge on the occasion of the next legislative elections and the appointment of a constituent assembly.

Third and finally, Continuity is likely to characterize Algeria and most Gulf countries for now. The fault lines of Algerian politics have not been shaken by the Arab Spring. Social uprisings have been far weaker there than in other countries, and the few political reforms that have been passed have left the political scene mostly unchanged. The country’s recent history of civil war and terrorism has proven to be a powerful demobilizing factor for a large part of the Algerian population. Also, previous political openings, freedom of expression (notably in the written press), and a subsidized economy have been perceived by Algerians as gains that should neither be dismissed nor compromised. All in all, the parliamentary elections of May 10, 2012 did not bring about intense debates on the need for a democratic revolution, leaving the Algerian political scenario in a pre-Arab Spring condition.

Some Gulf countries have also avoided political turmoil by relying on the redistribution of energy-generated wealth via social security programs. Buying domestic peace has been the standard formula of Saudi Arabia and Oman. Others, such as Qatar, have transformed the Arab Spring into a foreign rather than domestic policy issue. Only in Bahrain have popular uprisings shaken the grounds of the ruling family. Shia

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opposition movements have been severely repressed, with the assistance of Saudi Arabia, preventing the emergence of a powerful opposition with close links to Iran.

Implications for the West

The Mediterranean's 3Cs capture the uneven path towards democracy in the region. Some countries that had experienced revolution like Egypt are still caught in an uncertain democratization process, while democracy seems more promising in other countries like Morocco that engaged in top-down reform. What does this mean for the European Union and the United States?

The EU has long favored a regional approach towards the Southern Mediterranean, complementing this multilateral vision with bilateral policies. However, a more fragmented region may well lead to more fragmented Euro-Mediterranean relations, in which bilateralism takes precedence over multilateralism. In modulating its policies towards the region, the EU faces a choice: to focus on the most successful experiences in democratic transition through its bilateral forms of cooperation or to devise a functioning regional vision for the Mediterranean as a whole. The EU must also account for the rise of extra-regional influential actors, which may force Euro-Mediterranean politics to become less "Euro" and more "Mediterranean." The EU response to the Arab Spring so far has been largely premised on a revision of existing policy instruments rather than a broader appraisal of what is needed in a region undergoing fundamental change. Responses to both questions are needed urgently to move beyond what risks being the end point of the EU's foreign policy rethink towards the region.

The United States has traditionally been less prone to adopt regional policy frameworks for the Southern Mediterranean region than the EU. U.S. President Barack Obama has not followed up on regional strategies such as George W. Bush's inspired Broader Middle East and North African Initiative (BMENA) and the "Freedom Agenda." His administration has provided a "muddling through" strategy after the Arab Spring, putting national interests first. With the consolidation of a fragmented region, the United States is likely to promote bilateral ties with Arab countries on an ad-hoc basis, not least because Washington's capacity to shape developments will vary from country to country as its centrality wanes.

About the Author

Pol Morillas is coordinator of Euromed policies at the European Institute of the Mediterranean. Previously, he was coordinator at the Political and Security Committee of the Council of the EU, advisor on external action at the European Parliament, and analyst at the Cabinet of the President of the CIDOB Foundation. He has published research articles and op-eds on institutional developments of European foreign policy, EU external action toward the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and human security.

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The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), founded by Altiero Spinelli in 1965, does research in the fields of foreign policy, political economics, and international security. A non-profit organization, the IAI aims to disseminate knowledge through research studies, conferences, and publications. To that end, it cooperates with other research institutes, universities, and foundations in Italy and abroad and is a member of various international networks. More specifically, the main research sectors are European institutions and policies, Italian foreign policy, trends in the global economy and internationalization processes in Italy, the Mediterranean and the Middle East, defense economy and policy, and transatlantic relations. The IAI puts out an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*AffariInternazionali*), a series of research papers (*Quaderni IAI*) and an Italian foreign policy yearbook (*La Politica Estera dell'Italia*).