The EUDEM network - set up in September 2010 within the framework of an IRA Jean Monnet Project funded by the European Commission through the Lifelong Learning Programme - has conducted information and research activities on EU foreign policy and democracy promotion. Since January 2011 the so-called Arab Spring and the role played by media during the Arab revolts have mostly attracted the EUDEM research attention. Therefore, a research group has focused entirely on media and freedom of expression in the MENA region. This issue of the EUDEM Newsletter is devoted to the research group which dealt with media and freedom of expression in the MENA region. This research relied primarily upon a press review and was conducted by the students’ research team coordinated by Daniela Melfa and Guido Nicolosi.

Undeniably, free media is one of the most crucial features of a democratic regime and the granting of freedom of expression and free press represents an essential aspect of any democratic reform process. Assuming that the reduction of, or ultimately the abolition of, censorship is one of the most tangible political changes of a democratic transition, this multidisciplinary research team focused upon the restrictions to freedom of expression and information in many MENA countries, the use of media made during the Arab revolts, the practice of censorship traditionally made in many authoritarian Arab countries. Already in 1970 Robert Dahl considered free media among the essential requirements of democracy. Why is freedom of expression and of press still so important? Authoritarian regimes have traditionally controlled the circulation of information to artificially construct political consensus and portray the image of a ‘good authoritarianism’. But technology and global circulation of information have deeply challenged the structure of authoritarianism. If the authoritarian leaders Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak have been defeated through a net-revolution is still arguable.
MEDIA IN NORTH AFRICA: FROM “COURT PRESS” TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION? THE RESULTS OF AN INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

The reformist thinker and statesman Khayr ad-Din, in his *Essai sur les réformes nécessaires aux Etats musulmans* (1867), considered the press an equivalent to “consultation” (*shurûa*) in Islam, and therefore the freedom of the press a guarantee for an enlightened government.

Although Khayr ad-Din is mentioned in the Tunisian National Pact of 1988 as the inspirer of reforms, neither the Tunisian republic nor the other North African States are today distinguished by press freedom. According to the Freedom of the Press report of 2010, edited by Freedom House, Morocco (66th in the ranking), Algeria (64th), Tunisia (85th) and Libya (194th) are considered, at different degrees, *not free*, while Egypt (60th) is rated *partly free*.

The history of Arab journalism is characterised by a close relationship to and dependence on the political system. Only a few experiences (like Lebanon before 1975 or Kuwait before the invasion of Iraq) can be considered successful. In the Arab world control over information has always been the rule rather than the exception. Colonial powers such as France and Great Britain were the first that exercised control over Arab public opinion by rigidly disciplining the information flows. They introduced both the press and the control over it in the Arab world, sharing this power with local governments. Subsequently, in the independent States, new regimes, frequently linked to or supported by the army, were set up over time.

They continued the practice of controlling the media directly and indirectly. In 2004, William Rugh defined a fourfold typology in order to represent the range of different kinds of dependence of Arab media on political systems:

- **The mobilization press** (Syria, Iraq, Libya, Sudan): countries where revolutionary military regimes imposed reforms; they are often characterised by the State ownership of media, or absolute control over them; no criticism of policy allowed, sanctity of leaders, no diversity of opinions, media as a tool for regime mobilization;
- **The loyalist press** (United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Palestine): private ownership of media but compliant press defending the *status quo* and private interests of big players; the tone is less aggressive and less aligned with the revolutionary rhetoric of regimes, but there is a serious lack of investigative journalism;
- **The transitional system of print** (Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Algeria): these countries are characterized by political systems in perpetual “transition”; the press is frustrated by a complex mix of freedom and repressive actions and laws;
- **The diverse print media**: temporarily oasis of freedom (Lebanon, Kuwait, Morocco and Yemen).

We had a similar situation in the case of broadcasting before 1991. The first Iraq war caused a dramatic shift. The CNN and satellite television changed radically the “mediascape” and...

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Stefania Panebianco (EUDEM Academic coordinator, Prof., University of Catania)

However, the local population who gathered spontaneously in the Arab streets to complain against their authoritarian leaders and ultimately *overthrew their regimes* demonstrated that the sharing of information is an important political tool. In the interdependent global political system authoritarian powers should find new tools to survive.

The EUDEM research group has presented its preliminary results during the international conference on “Winds of Democratic Change in the Mediterranean? Actors, Processes and Possible Outcomes,” which took place on 19th May in Catania at the Faculty of Political Science.

This EUDEM conference addressed a large group of people interested in the topic of EU international action and the political changes which are tidily taking place in some Mediterranean Arab countries.

One hundred of professors, researchers, BA, MA and PhD students primarily from the University of Catania, the University of Palermo and LUISS University (Rome), together with civil society representatives and practitioners, attended the Conference live or via web-streaming. The papers presented at the conference will be published in edited books aimed at national and international circulation.


http://www3.unict.it/eudem/eudem/
“Nothing will be as before”. But the real point of no return was the launch of Al Jazeera in 1996. Al Jazeera’s style of reporting was a new experience that changed public opinion in the Arab world (the BBC model of news, the reporting-from-the-field, the role of female journalists, the practice of showing different opinions and viewpoints, etc.). In the variegated and changeable North African context, the observation of traditional and new media, through deeper qualitative inquiries, is not fruitless due to political restrictions, but, on the contrary, it allows a glimpse of the internal dynamics of Muslim societies. The research on Media in North Africa was realised from October 2010 to May 2011 by a group of PhD, MA and BA students enrolled at the University of Catania under the supervision of Daniela Melfa and Guido Nicolosi. It took into account online press with available free archives, and, in a comparative perspective, Tunisian dissident websites and blogs. In both cases, the analysis was restricted to sources in French and English languages. This material is, of course, accessible to a European public, but domestic readers remain the main target of the press. In this respect, the Tripoli Post, addressing explicitly foreigners, represents an exception. The survey sample included pro-government and opposition newspapers, all subjected, on the whole, to tighter governmental control or even to autocratic censorship. Attention has been addressed to the Berbers and the Copts’ standpoints, by examining the Algerian El Watan and the Egyptian Watani, both significantly insisting on their attachment to the nation (watan).

The analysis combined two different methodological criteria: after a detailed research focused on quarters randomly chosen, articles have been selected by key words. The range of newspapers analysed, as well as the subjects privileged, reflect the different country profiles. Two fundamental topics have been examined: firstly, the process of democratisation through selected salient aspects, such as the situation of minorities (the Berbers, the Copts), women and youth condition, political opposition (the Saharawi in Morocco, the Muslim Brothers in Egypt), press freedom and migrations; then, the international relations and the role of international actors, especially the European Union as democracy promoter. Although the chronological framework has been extended back to 2004, the main focus has been the current transition phase after the ousting of Tunisian and Egyptian presidents. A realignment of pro-government newspapers may be observed in Tunisia and Egypt, whereas journalists in Morocco, Algeria and Libya covered the events with a mixture of prudence and detachment. Silence over internal protest in the Algerian case is striking. The analysis of Tunisian blogs highlights the gap between the lively, satirical debates involving young people, and the established press. Finally bloggers and net-surfers have been a driving force in changing traditional media. References to democracy are copious in newspapers, revealing institutional adhesion to formal democracy. While the media admit that a full democracy is far from being realised in their country, an autonomous way to democracy is often claimed. Basically the press review showed a vibrant society that enacts democracy-building by itself. External interference aiming at supporting democracy attracts criticism.

Daniela Melfa (Assistant Professor, University of Catania)
Guido Nicolosi (Assistant Professor, University of Catania)
MOROCCO AND DEMOCRACY PROMOTION: A SELF-PROMOTED PROCESS?

This work of press review has analysed how democracy promotion, and, in particular, EU democracy promotion policy, is seen by the Moroccan press. Eight francophone newspapers were chosen among the most popular, both on paper and on the web, as referred by OJD Maroc, *Organisme de justification de la diffusion*, with various political orientations. Two newspapers *Audjourd'hui Le Maroc* (Independent) and *Le Matin* (Monarchical) and two weeklies *MarocHebdo International* and *Tel Quel online*, both close to the opposition have free archives with all the articles available, while *Libération* (Independent), *Albayane* (Socialist), *L’opinion* (Conservative) and the weekly *La vie éco* were analysed by the use of keywords. Newspapers with free archives had been analysed by reading all the articles related to democracy promotion published from October 2009 to January 2011, when riots in North Africa took place. No time limit for analysis by keywords used for other newspapers, which had no web archives or available only for a fee. Concerning the topic of democracy promotion, we have observed three points which the related articles were mostly focused upon: democracy promotion as a national and self-promoted Moroccan policy; the exclusion of Morocco in the riots for democracy in North Africa; the refusal to recognize any democracy instances of the Saharawis. Although there were a few differences, all the newspapers had the same approach to the three questions. Regarding democracy promotion, Moroccan press articles presented it always like an internal issue, not influenced by EU policy. Depending on their different political orientations, the press releases emphasized the role of the monarchy, of the government, of local associations or of the Moroccan public opinion in democracy promotion. However, the result is quite the same: Morocco promotes democracy by itself. Even if real reforms were not considered enough, journals refused to promote an image of a country which needs help from Western and European countries. Democracy promotion is an internal issue, a national affair, a Moroccan question. EU democracy promotion policy has no role in it. Just one article in *Tel Quel online* wrote about a case of institutional conflict between the Minister of Justice and two judges, caused by some promotions made inside the High Council of the Magistracy. The article criticised the Justice Reform and said it was approved just to receive the related EU funds and not with any real intent of renewal. The article also mentioned the King’s role in sanctioning the two judges for their revelations to the press, but did not highlight this fact. It is important to remember that clear criticism against the King is not possible. Reforms and stability of institutional structures were targeted in the second part of our analysis on democracy promotion in Morocco and its exclusion from the “2011 Arab Spring” for democracy in North Africa. In effect, despite some demonstrations against governmental policies, Morocco has not been involved in any political and institutional revolts such as those which caused the fall of Ben Ali or Mubarak, the war in Libya or the strong demonstrations in Algeria, Syria and Bahrain. What is the cause of this “Moroccan case”? All the newspapers agree: the Moroccan monarchy is the cause of stability. The king ensures the unity of the nation and demonstrations are represented more as requests of economic reforms than of institutional ones. Then, articles about the “Arab spring” were always accompanied by others about Morocco and its “unique stability”, often asserted by important figures like scholars, international professors and historians. Despite economical problems, corruption and internal issues related to Western Sahara, Morocco is safe from the contagion of the North African uprisings. The Western Sahara issue occupies most of the articles in all the Moroccan newspapers. They have the same approach: it is a part of the country and some autonomy is the maximum that can be given to Western Sahara, where issues are matter of police control against the Polisario and its connection with terrorism and not of democratic instances advanced by the Saharawi population. Our study has noted that the term *Polisario* occurs twice as much as the term *Sahraouis*, used to identify the Saharawis, and *sahraouis* occurs more as an adjective which identifies territorial aspects than as a term correlated to an ethnic group. Except for some criticism for the way the government has managed its last crisis in Lâayoune, the capital of the Western Sahara region, Moroccan newspapers never doubted the territorial integrity of the country and denounced the Algerian support to the Polisario. Moreover, journals also underlined how the Spanish press used the issue of human rights in Western Sahara to hide the Spanish economic relations with Algeria and the regret for its colonial past in that area. Moreover, Moroccan newspapers condemned the EU upheld of a motion proposed by the Spanish PPE in which it claimed Moroccan violations of human rights in Lâayoune and gave evidence to the versions of those events formulated by some NGOs, like HRW, that underlined the collusion between Polisario and Al Qaëda and considered most correct the work of the Moroccan forces. In conclusion, it is possible to affirm that, despite different political orientations, the Moroccan press provided an image of a country which, despite some difficulties, ensures itself along the path of democracy promotion, fighting against both its internal and external enemies.

Giuseppe Maimone (PhD candidate, University of Cagliari)
Chiara Pane (MA student, University of Catania)
Still shocked by the civil war, they are reluctant towards every form of violence and rebellion, even against a selfish president whose way of administrating the country definitely recalls French colonialists. Moreover, human rights are continually violated and no one is able to react. The lack of effective opposition forces has led many citizens to give up all hope for changes. As regards the international actors' role, independent and Government-friendly press still present different opinions. The former harshly criticizes both the US and EU: they act in a selfish and unfair way, paying no attention to the population's suffering in order not to damage their economic relations with the government. Algeria is the third oil producer in Africa and the eighth world natural gas reserve. These are two good reasons not to interfere in the domestic affairs of the country. On the other hand, the latter underlines the Algerian role as a valuable trade partner and stresses American praise to President Bouteflika for the removal of the state of emergency.

In conclusion, Algeria appears as a "mutilated state". People really want changes but, unlike Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, there are some Algerian-specific elements that seem to foster the actual status quo. In particular, I mean the psychological element (the
WOMEN AND YOUTH: TWO TOPICS TO INVESTIGATE DEMOCRACY PROMOTION PROCESS IN TUNISIA

This press review aims to analyze the process of democracy promotion in Tunisia and is based on the analysis of three Tunisian francophone newspapers, chosen among the most popular journals, Le Temps and La Presse, which were pro-government newspapers until Ben Ali's regime fell on January 14th, and the weekly newspaper Attarig, journal of the Ettajdid Party, which represented one of the most important voices of the opposition to Ben Ali, former president of Tunisia. The different approach to information, as well as the different political orientation of these journals, ensured a more objective view of Tunisian politics and society.

The research focuses on the democratic transition of recent months, and concentrates on the categories of women and youth, which had been two central propaganda tools of the Tunisian regime. Both these categories had a leading role in the uprisings that have taken place in Tunisia.

Thus, this study revealed three elements: first, the existence of a political limit of the process of Tunisian democracy promotion which showed the ambiguities of the state system built up by Ben Ali, represented as a democracy but, indeed, just a formal one; second, the existence of a cultural limit which emphasized how the patriarchal mentality prevents the development of equality in Tunisian society, and finally the existence of a gap between civil society and the Ben Ali's regime.

Regarding the political limit, the press analysis showed a society strongly framed by structures with no space for freedom. In fact, the Tunisian regime created an associative network to control civil society and formalize citizens' rights and, at the same time, maintained a strong control over all the associations which tried to be independent from central power.

Furthermore, it tried to influence young people by reducing union spaces to professors and university students and by censoring blogs and Facebook. In addition to politics, the press review highlighted a cultural limit to gender equality, a fundamental requirement for democracy.

Despite the process of female emancipation, social transformations and female claims for an egalitarian democracy.

Antonella Licitra (MA, University of Catania)

FROM ETTOUNSI TO BOUAZIZI: FIFTEEN YEARS OF OPPOSITION BETWEEN WEB AND STREETS

It was June 2002 when Zouhair Yahyaoui was arrested in a Cyber Café in Ben Arous, a suburb of Tunis. The year before Yahyaoui, aka Ettounsi, had created an e-magazine where he openly took sides against the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali. In those years, piazzas, schools, universities and all major gathering places belonged to the eyes and the truncheons of the police; in response young people began to meet on the web: anonymity against breaches of privacy, satire against torture, skill and courage against censorship.

The shift of the democratic arena, from
the real world to the virtual world, took place gradually and in the shadow of the underground movements which were led by young people of the wealthier classes. Among these there is the noteworthy website and e-magazine Takriz, which will become a pirate party in the upcoming years. “Takriz main raison d’être is to oppose the erosion of Freedoms in general and those of Speech and Expression in particular by the corrupt and undemocratic government of Tunisia [...]” (Takriz.net). Today Takriz is closely linked to the Anonymous cyber movement which was involved in actions against the regime at the end of 2010. The language used by these cyber-dissidents is full of taboo words in Muslim countries. A clear example is the way the government is called: “group of pigs”.

Takriz was one of the few voices able to bypass the censor’s sword with which the dictator cut the veins of free information. Ettounsi had joined Takriz before creating his personal website Tunezine.com. Tunezine was banned several times until Yahyaoui, anonymous until then, was arrested. While in prison Yahyaoui, suffering from a serious kidney disease, began to refuse medical treatments as a way to protest. His health condition worsened and in March 2005, Zouhair Yahyaoui passed away. The web had no doubts: Ettounsi was the first martyr of a revolution that lays its roots in the virtual network. Public resentment was growing, not only on the web but also on the streets.

The anger exploded in Redeyef when, in January 2008, the young unemployed of the area were excluded from the selection of eighty jobs in the phosphate mines. The repression was bloody.

The images of the lifeless bodies of two boys were uploaded on the web and made their way around the network. Even on the web repression was harsh. YouTube and Dailymotion were blocked. Young people and dissidents continued to access these sites by using proxies. Ben Ali in front of the international community minimized. But the web lied in wait for him. “Contre les douleurs et les troubles persistants de ses régions postérieures, la patiente Tunisie se contente de traitements superficiels de licothérapie lacrymogène” (debatunisie.canalblog.com). Debatunisie, the blog of a Tunisian cartoonist, represents the other side of the virtual protest. His language is not as violent as the language of Takriz. The government did not like even the biting satire of his cartoons and in 2009 blocked the blog. The social situation in Tunisia was already degenerated for most of population when Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire at 11:30 a.m. on December 17th, 2010. The web had something more than in 2008, instead: Facebook. News spread quickly on the social network, reaching millions of users.

Communicative immediacy of Facebook and Twitter was a very valuable relief valve for anger and suffering of citizens.

The organization of the protests on January 14th, 2011 at Place de la Kasbah was impeccable. On February 25th another event at the Kasbah forced Mohammed Gannouchi and the transitional government to resign. The victory of the web, which led people to the streets, is clear. After January 14 bloggers began to write steadily, providing a comprehensive information service. Social networks complete this process, spreading the news to a bigger audience, obtaining real-time feedbacks from users in addition to speeding the flow of information.

Giovanni Sciolto (BA student, University of Catania)

LIBIA: AL-QATHAFI, AN ARTFUL PLAYER ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE. THE POTENTIAL OF OIL RESOURCES AND MIGRATIONS

This press review on Libya seeks to depict some domestic and some international features of the Libyan authoritarian regime. As pointed out by the Freedom House report, Freedom of the Press 2010, freedom of information doesn’t exist in Libya, which is classified in the 194th place as a NOT FREE country. Each kind of media, from newspapers, to television, to Internet websites, are controlled and censored by the pervasive political control of the regime in addition to the influential phenomenon of self-censorship. Therefore, searching, studying and analyzing some online free newspapers published on the internet provides a clearer vision of freedoms’ violations perpetrated in Libya. After a general screening of the Libyan press on the web the Tripoli Post, the only English-language weekly addressed to a foreign public, appeared to be an interesting source of information. A two-step research was carried out: with the reading of every article published on the website from November 1st 2010 to January 31st 2011, about 100 articles were selected; then a thematic research of the articles was conducted by focusing on key words such as “migration” and “Berber-s”. About 70 articles were selected for the first topic, not finding anything about the second one which is a very significant outcome di per sé.
Although further elements could be taken into account, it may be assumed that the Tripoli Post is a regime controlled newspaper. Great attention is given to foreign policy and international events, while domestic events, with the exception of migration policy, are neglected.

With regard to Libyan foreign policy, the review of the trimester November 2010-January 2011 shows that Libya remains a free-rider in the international political system. Thanks to its “petrodollars”, colonel Muammar al-Qathafi has always had ample scope for maneuver in his foreign policy choices. He expressed his anti-colonialist rhetoric in very important international meetings, like the UN General Assembly or against WTO or IMF judged neo-colonialist instruments of the West. Similar considerations may be made for his anti-Zionist policy. From the official readmission into the international community in 2004, Qathafi returned to his usual foreign policy, apparently without changing and concretely modifying or disturbing the international order: as much rhetoric in words as pragmatism in facts.

In line with this general portrait of Libyan foreign policy is the migration policy adopted by the regime, especially in the relations with Italy and the European Union. In his own words, Qathafi declares that African people, like everybody in this world, has the right to freely move everywhere. Yet paradoxically Libya has become in the last decade the guardian of the “Fortress Europe”, violating human rights of the migrants, especially of those coming from sub-Saharan and eastern Africa, many times imprisoned, tortured or, as currently is happening, forced to leave Libya to hinder the international community’s action against him.

Giuseppe Belluardo
(MA student, University of Catania)

FACING A SCARED SOCIETY AND THE STATE REPRESSION: THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN EGYPT

Undertaking a research on anglophone Egyptian press, one may be disoriented by the impressive number of newspapers, available also online. Faced with this flowering, a systematic analysis is made difficult by heterogeneous, not always accessible, newspapers’ archives. In order to have the widest possible sample of the Egyptian press, this study has been addressed to Al-Ahram weekly, partly state-owned and considered pro-government; Al-Masry Al-Youm, considered independent; Egyptian Gazette, a biased state-owned newspaper, Watani, a weekly set up by the Coptic community; Ikwanweb, Muslim Brotherhood’s London-based website. At a superficial glance, there seems to be a certain degree of pluralism and freedom of the press. Also minority groups, like the Muslim Brotherhood, officially banned during Mubarak’s regime, or the Coptic minority, have the possibility of making their voice heard. The focus on both these communities offers a privileged point of view for studying significant intersections between religious issues and political freedom. A backwards analysis, from 2005 to 2010, allowed us to grasp events in their course and, if present, the seeds of the recent uprising. Even in the asphyxiating and clearly non-competitive elections, the press is used to pay great attention to the periodical rounds of voting. Articles give voice to worries raised by the Muslim Brotherhood’s strength, as the regime and the Copts are not reassured by its deliberately marginal role. Many opinion leaders tend to consider the Muslim Brotherhood as an influential mobilization force, thus probably overestimating its manoeuvring ability, with the effect of fuelling an image of threat to State stability.

On December 2005, the news that the Muslim Brotherhood had gained 88 seats in parliamentary elections frightened the Coptic community. The result also caught the journalists unawares, who tried to find explanations and work out the possible consequences in the short and medium term. After the 2005 election, various sectarian clashes broke out. The Copts, often victims of violence, used accidents to present their claims for a real political and social participation. Usually their requests remained unheeded, because a security approach prevailed. Al-Masry Al-Youm criticized State strategy, demanding to solve confessional issues on a political, religious, cultural and educational level. The Muslim Brothers were assumed to be involved in such troubles and an upsurge occurred on December 2006, when hundreds of students, who supported the Brotherhood, made a paramilitary parade. In 2007, the government party had to face a different kind of issues when some American representatives held several official meetings with some Brotherhood members belonging to the pragmatic wing. The Brotherhood did not seem very interested in this mild opening, while it aimed to keep control over trade unions and professions. “The general conference for Citizenship” held on 25 November 2007 in Cairo gave the Copts the opportunity to denounce discrimination. They asked for the removal of religious information from identity cards and a common law regulating the construction of places of worship. In 2008, the focus was instead on interfaith marriages, because the Christian and Muslim communities accused each other of kidnapping and forced conversion. A spiral of violence marked 2010, which started with the violent attack in Nag Hammadi. Clampdown on the Brotherhood’s affiliates was constantly reported, in spite of their effort to dialogue with other social and political forces.

The relationship between religion
and politics in a modern State became a moot point. Although protests against the long-standing regime have occurred since the first years of the new millennium, and the last parliamentary elections took place in a tense atmosphere, signs leading to the popular uprising passed unnoticed by the Egyptian press. No inkling if not after the facts.

Giuseppe Spadaro (MA student, University of Catania)

THE EGYPTIAN RELIGIOUS QUESTION
AS AN INTERNATIONAL ISSUE

The presence of different religious communities inside a country has made the issue of interfaith dialogue and the protection of human rights and individual freedoms, an important component of global politics and Euro-Mediterranean relations in order to promote policies of partnership and democracy building in the Maghreb. Speaking about the ‘Coptic question’ in Egypt, the political, social and religious participation of this community becomes often a subject of daily news because of frequent discriminations. In order to understand how the religious question is dealt with in Egypt, we focused on the analysis of some news articles drawn from various newspapers in English and in French: Al-Ahram Weekly; Al Masry Al-Youm; The Egyptian Gazette; Watani. We tried to highlight the role played and the policies enacted by international political actors, such as the European Union, the United States and local organizations, such as the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR). Moreover, we can find relevant associations of Copts living abroad, the most important of which is the US Copts Association; these are involved in increasing awareness of international public opinion on the religious problem in Egypt.

On the occasion of a sectarian conflict which happened in Alexandria in October 2005, Al-Ahram Weekly reported that the US Copts Association, through its president Michael Munir, exploited the unrest to ask Congress to place additional pressure on the Egyptian government, and press its allegations of ‘Coptic-targeted hate crimes’ in the predominantly Muslim country.

The following November a controversial US-based conference ended with calls for greater US pressure on Egypt, and restrictions on Washington’s aid to Cairo, in the light of alleged persecution of Coptic Orthodox Christians. According to this, the US might want to reconsider its aid package; in fact, Egypt is the second largest recipient of US foreign aid. In December 2007 Watani and Al-Ahram Weekly focused their attention on the General Citizenship Conference held in Cairo under the auspices of the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) which resulted in the Egyptian Declaration of Citizenship (EDC). Important options were offered to combat religious discrimination where identity documents are concerned. The head of the NCHR, Boutros Boutros Ghali, said that particular problems faced by religious minorities, such as Coptic Christians and Bahais, had been carefully examined. At the beginning of 2008 an article published in Watani underlined how an European Parliament resolution, adopted on 17th of January which criticised Egypt’s human rights record, especially with regard to the status of religious minorities, provoked a far-reaching negative effect on Egyptian-EU relations.

The dramatic situation was confirmed by a series of sectarian conflicts which happened during 2008; in July 2008 Al-Ahram Weekly highlighted an important question: while a chorus of Coptic foreign activists protested against the conditions of Copts in Egypt, those at home tended to play down the Coptic ‘crisis’ propagated by Copts who live abroad. Many Coptic laity believed that their interests would be compromised if the Copts abroad stepped up their angry demonstrations and protests. “Copts, like their Muslim compatriots suffer from the sharp rise in the costs of food and fuel and many are unemployed”, said Milad Hanna, a leading Coptic intellectual and community leader to Al-Ahram Weekly.

In conclusion, although this analysis of different newspapers shows only a specific point of view on the religious issue in Egypt, we can understand the important and difficult role played by the international community in order to promote a new policy that could help to create a climate favourable to change.

Alessia Melcangi (PhD candidate, University of Catania)

EUDEM CONFERENCE REPORT
WINDS OF DEMOCRATIC CHANGE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN? ACTORS, PROCESSES AND POSSIBLE OUTCOMES - CATANIA, 19-21 MAY 2011

The international Conference on Winds of Democratic Change in the Mediterranean? Actors, Processes and Possible Outcomes, which took place on 19th-21st May in Catania at the Faculty of Political Science, represented the major event of the EUDEM project. The title meaningfully illustrates the focus of this Jean Monnet Information and Research Activity funded by the LLP and represents the fil rouge linking all the papers presented at the EUDEM Conference. There is currently a lively debate on the recent events affecting the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region and there is a common view that scholars should advance the existing democratization literature. Actors, processes and possible outcomes of the so-called Arab Spring have been discussed analytically during this two-day conference. The Conference was opened with a quotation of Fernand Braudel, who is one of the most famous scholars defining the Mediterranean as a region. By quoting Braudel, both the Dean of the Faculty, prof. Barone, and the Director of the Department of Political Studies, prof. Ligresti, wished the creation of a common area based upon close political, cultural and economic relations among the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Two important aspects emerged during Panel 1 on Democratic change in the Mediterranean area: the EU’s role. First of all, it was stressed the external actors’ difficulty to promote democratic regimes in the area. Great attention was devoted to the European Union (EU), which might stand as the most relevant actor in the region. The institutional changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty - namely the creation of a Permanent Presidency within the European Council, a new role for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)/High Representative and the creation of an External Action Service - seemed to reflect a more ambitious than a stronger Union (D. Dinan). Moreover, the EU capability to develop an actual actorness in the CFSP field seems to be decreased by member states, which are not willing to give up their sovereignty prerogatives. The second critical aspect concerns the EU’s tools devoted to the promotion of political reform processes. For instance, the conditionality policies used within the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) are not very effective, neither in the creation of adequate incentives nor in the resources distribution (M. Comelli). Moreover, the US as well presents some weaknesses in fostering democratic transition processes in the MENA region. In fact, many doubtful initiatives were introduced during the last three presidencies: a democratic enlargement policy (Clinton), a freedom agenda (Bush) and Obama’s pragmatism which was not enough to encourage the stability of the area (M. Do Ceu Pinto). As a result, it seemed more appropriate to talk about an overestimation of external actors’ influence (S. Panebianco). For instance, the new media used during the revolts (such as TVs, mobile phones and internet) created new powerful platforms able to aggregate and stimulate transition processes which brought the individual at the center of these political changes (D. Melfa & G. Nicolosi).

On this purpose, Stefania Panebianco introduced a new interpretative perspective concerning the recent revolts in North-Africa, focusing on the individual as the key actor during the first phase of the reform process. Panel 2 on From iron fist to popular protests: the Southern shore of Mediterranean mainly dealt with the local actors’ role in the reformation process taking place in the Southern shore of the Mediterranean and the influence of Islam. A great variety of case-studies and perspectives of analysis was provided.
Laura Guazzone focused on the relationship between Islam and the Egyptian transition, which has been hardened by the ambiguous role played by the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, the movement has preserved his links with the regime renouncing to direct opposition and to a clear political project. The Tunisian case was treated by Beatrice Hibou, who talked about an imaginative and authoritarian reformism as a distinguishing feature of the country during the XX century. An exception within this framework is represented by the Turkish case (J.F. Bayart). It stands as a viable compromise between Islam and a modern state structure, economically dynamic and politically democratic. However, Turkish features are strictly "Turkish-specific" and can be hardly found elsewhere. Finally, the issue of the Italian colonial legacy in Libya was addressed. Federico Cresti illustrated a schizophrenic relationship which started in 1943 and came to an end in 2008 thanks to the Friendship Treaty - rooted on contrasting interpretations of the colonial period.

Day two of the conference addressed a fundamental issue of democratic change: why is this process happening? What is the driving force of this change? Panel 3 on Philosophical perspectives on rights, justice and democracy touched on the philosophical and ethical roots of this historically complex bond. The panelists questioned the idea that we- as European, as academics-hold of the EU-MENA relationship. We cannot help thinking of the EU-MENA relationship through the lenses of hierarchy founded on a misleading ‘tolerance’ of diversity. While this argument leaves room for an optimistic agenda of growing mutual ‘respect’ (I. Carter), the EU suffers from an inner ‘liberal’ bias that makes it think of its southern partners in sheer terms of utility. Accordingly, every time the EU decides whether or not to help a neighbor in developing its own democratic process, the room for ‘joint ownership’ decreases. Tolerance, that is, can become a means of exclusion (F. Sciacca). The diversity underlying the EU-MENA relations needs to become not a problem for the EU to solve, but richness for the whole Mediterranean to harness. The inconsistency of this hypocritical conditional approach is, unfortunately, a structural deficiency of EU policy in the area. The policy change policy in the African of continent (F. Cerutti) and the liberation vs. liberty contradiction of the NATO armed intervention in Libya (B. Spoto) being just two notorious examples.

This ethical concern was apparent in the contributions to panel 4 on A democratic contagion in the MENA region?. The contributors have investigated the process leading from the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) to the ENP, highlighting a controversial move from an idealistic perspective to a more pragmatic standpoint, from ethics towards interests (P. Bauer). The recent development of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) somewhat comes full circle with this ‘hypocritical’ trajectory (P. Seeberg). Beginning with the 1972 Global Mediterranean Policy through the establishment of the UfM in 2008, EU Member States have pursued specific interests that, at times, have been best achieved behind the curtain of authoritarian regimes.

The panels also provided insights into the bottom-up dimension of this relationship. As the EU proved an unreliable and incoherent example for democratic ‘exports’, peoples in the Mediterranean countries have been exploring ways to grow democratic from the inside of their own societies. Open communication and the exchange of information and knowledge via internet and social networks, for instance, have proved to be powerful means of socialisation with democracy, civic dialogue, and emancipation (K. Ebermann). Significant field data, moreover, have shown that the perception of democracy in the MENA countries-as a complex concept including parliamentarism, tolerance, and equality-is much stronger than EU policy makers had predicted (D. Di Mauro). Besides the need for an efficient institutional machinery, the urge for democracy in the neighboring countries of the Mediterranean basin is-first of all-a call for equity and involvement. Case-studies and recent developments in the region were also addressed by the students’ reports on the role that the media and non-governmental organisations played in the recent events in the region, as well as on the prospects for human rights and democratic development.

The EUDEM project offered to a selected group of MA students the possibility to carry out first-hand research, ideally linking their findings to the more analytically
sound and scholarly contributions of junior researchers and PhD candidates from all over Europe and the Mediterranean.

The PhD sessions spanned from the theory of shared international governance, to the economics of democracy promotion; from the crucial issue of energy interdependence between Europe and the Mediterranean partners to the religious cleavages that the EU is unable to sedate in the area. Finally, a Round Table RT on bottom-up approaches including voices, actors, and testimonies from civil society concluded the works of the conference. The RT participants came from diverse backgrounds (international NGOs, local development projects, religious charities, advocacy groups) and described a lively portrait of bottom-up actions of democratisation in the MENA region. Stories of local development projects; best practices of coordination between the two shores of the Mediterranean; stories of immigration and integration of cultural roots and families, all proved that, besides the high politics involved, an actual and mature process of democratisation still has to spring from the people engaged in it, at all levels. Moreover, great thrust came from the audience: challenging questions were raised, replies from the contributors often transformed into gripping debates that once and again emphasized the tight link between the languages of the academia and practitioners, and the feedback from the public. The analysis of several case-studies highlighted important aspects.

The reformation process in the Mediterranean must be analyzed through a broad perspective taking into account the religious, the local, the regional and the international actors' role as well as the multidimensional tools they use to promote democratic change. By giving for granted that the recent events have altered the so called “Arab exceptionality” and authoritarianism as persistent and unchangeable conditions, we cannot assume a priori a clear path towards democratization since the outcomes of this process depends on a great multitude of internal and external factors.

The analysis of the actors influencing the contemporary transition process taking place in the MENA region showed that the final outcome is still unknown. Yet it is too early to predict whether a democratic path will follow.

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### IN THE NEXT ISSUE: A GLIMPSE ON CIVIL SOCIETY PROJECTS

The Round Table (RT) on Human Rights and Democracy Promotion: the Role of Civil Society and the Bottom-Up Strategies that ended the EUDEM Catania Conference of last May 2011 gave voice to many civil society representatives. The RT, without neglecting the pitfalls of international cooperation projects, drew the attention on civil society's concrete experiences and their potentiality in the democratization process. These projects will be illustrated in the next EUDEM Newsletter, which will be a thematic newsletter devoted to bottom-up strategies promoting democracy in the MENA Region and the distinctive contribution of civil society actors. The Newsletter will present also the main results of the EUDEM students network’s research focused upon civil society, in particular the results of a survey on Sicilian NGOs, and a report on EU Democracy Assistance (EIDHR II).

The entire EUDEM project, in fact, was based on the assumption that the active involvement of both civil society actors and young people is an effective approach to political change. Active participation of non-governmental actors represents a significant experience of pluralism and political participation, key factors of democratic practices that arise from local and diversified arenas. The youth involvement may indicate that democracy has become a widespread request and political changes will be backed also in the next future. The NGOs wide cooperation strategies with MENA countries and the different ways used by civil society actors to establish dialogues with political institutions were observed mainly through the lenses of an empirical survey conducted by young researchers. Also the direct practices of cooperation experienced by some students involved in the EUDEM project revealed to be fruitful resources for promoting political changes which should be further developed.

The Arab Spring has shown that youth and the grass-roots network can play a significant role in blowing the winds of democratic change.

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