

The Arab Revolts and the strategic relations between the EU and the MENA region – the case of Egypt

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This paper analyzes the perspectives of the in many ways surprising development in Egypt since early 2011 for the strategic relations between Egypt and the EU. First of all existing bilateral agreements between the EU and Egypt will be discussed and to which degree changes are in the pipeline as a result of the political changes in Egypt and the Middle East following the Arab revolts. Furthermore significant strategic agreements which Egypt has entered with regional partners in the Middle East are discussed in the context of Egyptian-European relations. Finally it is the ambition to discuss to which degree we will see changes of foreign and security policy relations between Egypt and the EU after the fall of the Mubarak regime and the start of an unclear but significant transformation process.

Introduction

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Progress Report, published 15 May 2012, describes how Egypt experienced profound change and daunting political and economic challenges during 2011.¹ Following widespread demonstrations, which started in late January 2011, the authoritarian regime of President Hosni Mubarak was toppled and replaced by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which – having told Mubarak, that if he didn't step down, a charge of high treason would be imposed on him – took over presidential, legislative and executive powers.²

Later in 2011 and the beginning of 2012 elections were held, which resulted in the formation of a parliament, in which the Islamist parties play a dominant role. Mohammad Morsi, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), one of the most important Islamist parties in the new Government, won the presidential elections and assumed office as President on the 30th of June 2012 – and immediately after that he resigned from the presidency of the FJP.

A power struggle between the military and civilian parts of the state were obvious (and widely discussed in the media) before presidential elections were held and since Morsi took office a conflict between him and the SCAF leaders has been a reality. On the 12th of August 2012, Morsi asked Mohamad Hussein Tantawi, head of the country's armed forces, and Sami Anan, the Army chief of staff, to resign – and what in the beginning looked like a planned deal with the army leaders, developed in a few days into dismissals of a larger group of former army leaders and people from the media. It seems to be in accordance with the demands of the Egyptian revolution to assert civilian control. And even though Tantawi and a few others are appointed advisory positions, there is no doubt that their power is reduced significantly. On the other hand the open question now seems to be to which degree the Muslim Brotherhood will dominate the new constitutional assembly. That will, as mentioned by Lynch, be the major issue of the coming period, and not the least whether this dominance translates into an Islamist bias of the new constitution.³

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¹ EU-COMMISSION 2012b. Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Egypt. Progress in 2011 and recommendations for action. Delivering on a new European Neighbourhood Policy. Brussels: EU-Commission.

² LESCH, A. M. 2011. Egypt's Spring: Causes of the Revolution. *Middle East Policy*, 18, 35-48., p. 46.

³ LYNCH, M. 2012. Lamborghini Morsi. In: LYNCH, M. (ed.) *Abu Aardwark's Middle East Blog*. Washington.

changes in Egypt and the Middle East following the Arab revolts. Furthermore significant strategic agreements which Egypt has entered with regional partners in the Middle East are discussed in the context of Egyptian-European relations. Finally it is the ambition to discuss to which degree we will see changes of foreign and security policy relations between Egypt and the EU after the fall of the Mubarak regime and the start of an unclear but significant transformation process.

EU-Egyptian relations prior to the fall of Mubarak

As described at the European External Action Service (EEAS) ENP homepage the EEC and Egypt began diplomatic relations back in 1966, when Gamal Abdel Nasser was President of Egypt. Ten years later, in 1976, a first Cooperation Agreement was signed, aiming at establishing a “wide-ranging cooperation between the parties involved (...) designed to contribute towards the economic and social development of the Mashreq countries.”⁴ The agreement contained a financial protocol, which defined the amount and details of the EEC contributions to Egypt given as loans and grants, with loans as the largest part. Compared to recent aid the amounts of the 1970s were rather modest. The different aid resources were to be considered direct contributions by the European Community to Egypt, but were (from the European side) thought of as “a stimulus for the mobilization of capital from other sources.”⁵

As pointed out by Bicchi the EEC “invented” the Mediterranean in the first half of the 1970s, due to challenges emerging “on the European horizon. The first was terrorism, due to a shift of strategy by Arab-Palestinians determined to bring their fight closer to the Europeans. The second issue (...) culminated with the oil shock in 1973.”⁶ Both issues indirectly touched upon EU-Egyptian relations, not the least because Egypt was (and is) a very important Arab state, with its Nasserist legacy, its huge population, the Arab League office in Cairo etc. The EEC launched in 1972 the Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) aiming at regulating relations between the EEC and the non-European states around the Mediterranean, mainly with a focus on trade and aid. Later the GMP was followed by the Euro-Arab Dialogue (EAD), with ambitions of establishing a dialogue with a broader focus: discussing political, social, economic and cultural issues. The GMP and the EAD never developed into significant agreements – “it was only in 1980, with the Venice Declaration, that member states achieved *and* publicly supported a common position on the Middle East.”⁷

⁴ Commission of the European Communities: Cooperation agreements between the European Community and Egypt, Jordan and Syria, December 1976.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ BICCHI, F. 2007. *European Foreign Policy Making Toward the Mediterranean*, New York; Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan., p. 64.

⁷ Ibid., p. 93.

With the Venice Declaration the EEC might have entered the global political scene, but still for many years ahead without any significant foreign policy impact. As described by Bicchi: "if the Venice Declaration was a landmark in the development of European cooperation in foreign policy, it soon fell short of expectations as follow-on documents and missions sent to the area failed to accomplish any of their substantial aims."⁸ This reality did not change in the coming decades, where the EU continued to represent an approach based on soft-power elements, among which democracy promotion played an important role. Also later on, following 9.11, when the US launched its war on terror, the EU reiterated this view, not the least, as mentioned by Rutherford, in its new common security strategy of December 2003, "A Secure Europe in a Better World".⁹ This view, building on the belief that democratic states would be the most effective in dealing with international security, was frequently put forward by leading EU spokesmen and emphasized in official documents, where terrorism was emphasized. A characteristic statement can be found in "A Secure Europe...", stating that terrorism "puts lives at risk; it imposes large costs; it seeks to undermine the openness and tolerance of our societies, and it poses a growing strategic threat to the whole of Europe."¹⁰

In pursuing this interest of dealing with the terror phenomenon the EU to some degree has shared a commonality of interests with the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. Both the European and the Middle Eastern states have an interest in developing a security environment across the Mediterranean, as described by Aliboni and Ammor: "in the past few years, cooperation between governments across the two coasts of the Mediterranean Sea in suppressing Islamist terrorism and regulating immigration has increased markedly, in both the bilateral and the EU/EMP framework."¹¹ An aspect of this is that security cooperation at the operational level between the secret services of Europe and the states in the Middle East probably increased after 9.11. This might have had consequences for the regime resilience of Middle Eastern states, and added to that it underlines pragmatic tendencies in EU foreign policy, as demonstrated by for instance Seeberg.¹²

⁸ Ibid., p. 116.

⁹ RUTHERFORD, B. K. 2008. *Egypt after Mubarak. Liberalism, Islam and Democracy in the Arab World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford.

¹⁰ EU-COMMISSION. 2003. A secure Europe in a better world. European Security Strategy. Brussels, 12 December 2003. Available from: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf> [Accessed 1 October 2012].

¹¹ ALIBONI, R. & AMMOR, F. M. 2009. Under the Shadow of 'Barcelona': From the EMP to the Union for the Mediterranean. *EuroMesco Paper*, January 2009, 1-34., p. 14.

¹² SEEBERG, P. 2010b. Union for the Mediterranean – pragmatic multilateralism and the de-politicization of European-Middle Eastern relations. *Middle East Critique*, 19, 287-302, SEEBERG,

The Arab revolts, Egypt and the EU

The official EU approach to the new developments in the Middle East has been one of support for the new, democratic tendencies, as it could be seen with the launching of “A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood”¹³ of 25 May 2011. Taking its point of departure in the “overthrow of long-standing repressive regimes in Egypt and Tunisia; the ongoing military conflict in Libya, the recent violent crackdown in Syria, continued repression in Belarus and the lingering protracted conflicts in the region, including in the Middle East”, the EU-Commission modestly stated that “The EU needs to rise to the historical challenges in our neighbourhood”. Furthermore it was claimed that “EU assistance has increased and is better targeted. But there is room for improvement on all sides of the relationship. Recent events and the results of the review have shown that EU support to political reforms in neighbouring countries has met with limited results.”¹⁴ As one of the most important Arab countries Egypt was mentioned several times in the EU document and the policy ambitions on behalf of the EU obviously saw Egypt as one of the main players in connection with the new developments in the Middle East – not the least because of the fall of Hosni Mubarak.

The new strategy expressed support for “deep democracy”, defined as “free and fair elections; freedom of association, expression and assembly and a free press and media; the rule of law administered by an independent judiciary and right to a fair trial; fighting against corruption; security and law enforcement sector reform (including the police) and the establishment of democratic control over armed and security forces.”¹⁵ Furthermore the EU wanted to promote a thriving civil society by supporting organizations and NGO’s. And finally the EU wanted to encourage political and security co-operation, taking a point of departure in how the Lisbon Treaty should provide the EU with an opportunity of becoming a more effective foreign policy actor in maintaining its geopolitical, economic and security interests. Added to these mainly political ambitions the “New Strategy” contained relatively non-committing and general references to promoting sustainable economic growth, strengthening trade ties and enhancing sector cooperation (energy, environment etc.).

Also of significance – and of relevance for Egypt – was the ambition of establishing so-called Mobility Partnerships, an idea which still is not implemented in any MENA-state. So far Mobility Partnership agreements have only been signed with

P. 2010a. European Neighbourhood Policy, post-normativity and pragmatism. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 15, 663-679.

¹³ EU-COMMISSION 2011. A new response to a changing Neighbourhood. Brussels: High Representative of The Union For Foreign Affairs And Security Policy and the European Commission.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

the Republic of Moldova and Georgia. Obviously migration is an extremely important and also sensitive field, not the least in a security perspective. However, long-term interests are at stake for the EU: "Labour mobility is an area where the EU and its neighbours can complement each other. The EU's workforce is ageing and labour shortages will develop in specific areas. Our neighbourhood has well educated, young and talented workers who can fill these gaps."¹⁶ As mentioned the Mobility Partnership ambition is not carried out in a MENA context yet, but the "New Strategy" mentions that the Commission, beyond the covenants with Moldova and Georgia, will seek to conclude negotiations with Armenia and prepare for the launch of negotiations with e.g. Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. The Egyptian migration is significant and even though it, compared to for instance Morocco or Turkey, is less oriented towards Europe, it represents an important aspect of Middle Eastern migratory processes.¹⁷

The New Strategy finally expressed ambitions in establishing a so-called "Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity in the Southern Mediterranean". Also this was rather imprecise in its wording, but it should be mentioned that the fundamental elements from the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) were obvious, emphasizing the positive conditionality built into the ENP right from its start in 2004. As stated somewhat paradoxically in the document, the EU "does not seek to impose a model or a ready-made recipe for political reform, but it will insist that each partner country's reform process reflect a clear commitment to universal values that form the basis of our renewed approach. The initiative lies with the partner and EU support will be tailored accordingly." In short: "The more and the faster a country progresses in its internal reforms, the more support it will get from the EU."¹⁸

From an overall perspective it seems that the Arab revolts only to a minor degree have had consequences for the narrative of the "New Strategy". A year later, however, with the changes in the MENA region, first and foremost in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the official EU documents appear somewhat different in their rhetoric. An example of this can be seen in a "Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions" called "Delivering on a new European Neighbourhood Policy". In the Introduction of the document it is stated that: "Last year's changes in the Neighbourhood, in particular in the Southern Mediterranean but also in Eastern Europe, led to a rapid EU response."

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁷ GHONEIM, A. F. 2010. Labour migration for decent work, economic growth and development in Egypt. *International Migration Papers*. Geneva: International Labour Office. BARTOLOMEO, A. D., FAKHOURY, T. & PERRIN, D. 2010. Egypt. In: CARIM (ed.) *CARIM - Migration Profile*. Florence.

¹⁸ EU-COMMISSION 2011. A new response to a changing Neighbourhood. Brussels: High Representative of The Union For Foreign Affairs And Security Policy and the European Commission., p. 17.

Somewhat surprisingly it is claimed, that with the “The New Strategy for a Changing Neighbourhood” of May 2011, the EU “sent a clear message of solidarity and support to the peoples of the Southern Mediterranean. Their struggle for democracy, dignity, prosperity and safety from persecution would be supported by Europe.”¹⁹

On the 13th of September 2012 the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton received the new Egyptian President Mohammad Morsi in Brussels. The meeting emphasized the European commitment to support Egypt and launched a so-called Task Force, which later in 2012 should result in action on a number of different issues. The Task Force is “meant to act as a catalyst for collective EU support, to encourage the democratic transition and to help restore economic and investor confidence.”²⁰ Furthermore the Task Force should initiate cooperation within tourism, job creation, transfer of technology and by solving a number challenges within these fields aim at promoting political and economic stability. Ashton met both the newly appointed Prime Minister Hesham Qandil and President Morsi in Cairo in July 2012 and it seem obvious that it is essential for the EU representatives to maintain regular contact with the new Egyptian political leaders.

Egyptian-European relations: recent developments

In the following an analysis will be carried out dealing with some of the most significant recent developments regarding Egyptian-European strategic relations. The analyses has its focus on the Egyptian side and concentrates on the political dimensions. The strategic challenges related to the relation between Egypt and Israel in the light of the ENP-Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) complex are briefly discussed. Furthermore light is shed on the MB and the Egyptian political transformation process in a strategic perspective. Finally a more specific, but strategically important aspect of the new development is taken into consideration, namely the migration issue. As mentioned above this issue is emphasized in the revised ENP approach towards Egypt, not the least in connection the “Dialogue on Mobility, Migration and Security”.²¹ Migration and security are continuously significant interrelated concepts within the framework of the EU’s strategic considerations towards its Mediterranean partners.

¹⁹ EU-COMMISSION 2012b. Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Egypt. Progress in 2011 and recommendations for action. Delivering on a new European Neighbourhood Policy. Brussels: EU-Commission.

²⁰ Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton following her meeting with Egyptian President Morsi: EU and Egypt launch Task Force, Brussels, 13 September 2012.

²¹ EU-COMMISSION 2012b. Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Egypt. Progress in 2011 and recommendations for action. Delivering on a new European Neighbourhood Policy. Brussels: EU-Commission., p. 12.

Egypt, Israel and the ENP-UfM complex

Strategically the Israel-Palestine conflict is very important for the EU. This has been the case (at least) since the EU presented the Venice-declaration in 1980, as the first attempt at launching a "European" foreign policy towards the Middle East. The EU had as mentioned "invented" the Mediterranean in the early 1970s due to strategic challenges there, first of all the oil issue, secondly a new Palestinian strategy, which pulled Europe into Middle East politics.²² Despite the fact that the EU often by Israel is considered pro-Arab and that Israel might have a different strategic status for the EU as for the US, the security of Israel is also for the EU a significant issue. As shown by Dannreuther²³ the two-state solution constitutes a part of an EU foreign policy regime and as such a significant building stone in EU foreign and security policy. Therefore it is important for the EU that Egypt is in accordance with the EU in this crucial issue.

Furthermore the narrative of the ENP takes its point of departure in the notion of a ring of peaceful neighbouring states as the best guarantee for Europe's own security. The strategic ambition on behalf of the EU seems to be to adapt to the development of the given conditions as they unfold rather than to seek influence. The Egyptian-Israeli conflict, at the overall strategic level settled via the Camp David Accords of 1978-79, has had a renewed outbreak over the Gaza crisis in the beginning of 2009 and the appointment of Avigdor Lieberman as Minister of Foreign Affairs, which led to problems for the European-Egyptian cooperation and in November 2009 to postponement of a planned UfM meeting at Foreign Minister level in Istanbul. It was explained in a document from the European Parliament, that the meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers which was to have been held in Istanbul on November 24-25, 2009, was postponed owing to a boycott by the Arab States, protesting against the Israeli position on the Middle East peace process.

Unofficially an Egyptian official failed to invite the Israeli minister because of Lieberman's insulting earlier remarks made against the Egyptian President (who at that time was co-president of the UfM). "Lieberman told Mubarak to 'go to hell,' because Mubarak continued to refuse to visit Israel—the incident led to that President Shimon Peres and former Foreign Minister Ehud Olmert issued an official apology."²⁴

The contrast to the situation in 1977, where Sadat visited Israel and held a speech in the Knesset, is obvious. The historical breakthrough led to the Camp David Accord, which still constitutes an important part of the strategic set up behind the security of Israel, but not necessarily, as mentioned by Hashim, is guaranteed with a changing

²² See footnote 6.

²³ DANNREUTHER, R. 2007. Recasting the Barcelona Process: Europe and the Middle East. In: SEEBERG, P. (ed.) *EU and the Mediterranean. Foreign Policy and Security*. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark.

leadership in Cairo.²⁵ However, in the course of the electoral campaigns in 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood stated that they support the Camp David agreement, and this has later been reaffirmed by the FJP.²⁶ Thus, at the strategic level there seems to be accordance between the new Egyptian leadership and the overall EU policies and tendencies to support a less pragmatic policy vis-à-vis Egypt seem to gain ground in Brussels, as demonstrated in a “Quick Policy Insight” from the Directorate-General for Political Policies in Brussels: “To uphold EU’s interests and values in Egypt and in the region, it would be highly advisable to give up the prudent approach that has so far determined EU policy”.²⁷

The Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian political transformation process

The Egyptian elections took place under circumstances, which were completely different from what – democratically speaking – had been the highly problematic conditions under Mubarak (and also under Sadat and Nasser). The new political reality is therefore important and interesting to analyze, both regarding sociological and religious aspects. As mentioned in the EU document on the implementation of the ENP in Egypt the Egyptian electoral system was reformed in 2011: “Parliamentary elections were organized between November 2011 and February 2011 in a generally free and transparent manner and resulted in Islamic parties taking a strong lead in parliament.”²⁸

The MB FJP won 47% of the seats, the Salafist El Nour 24% and the New Wafd 8%. Egypt declined an EU offer of fielding a fully-fledged observation mission for the elections, but accepted seven international NGOs observing the election process. Furthermore the EU funded civil society organizations supporting the electoral process through training of Egyptian election observers, raising awareness and capacity building. The results of the elections were not surprising. The MB relied on its efficient

²⁴ SEEBERG, P. 2010b. Union for the Mediterranean – pragmatic multilateralism and the depoliticization of European-Middle Eastern relations. *Middle East Critique*, 19, 287-302.

²⁵ HASHIM, A. 2011. The Egyptian Military, Part Two: From Mubarak Onward. *Middle East Policy*, 18, 106-128.

²⁶ HAKALA, P. & NAPOLITANO, P. 2012. The Dawn of Parliamentary Democracy in Egypt. Available from:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/fr/studiesdownload.html?languageDocument=EN&file=73911> [Accessed 1 October 2012].

²⁷ HAKALA, P. 2012. Egypt's transition back on track after Mohamed Mursi's victory. Available from:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/dmas/dv/qpi_240_/qpi_240_en.pdf [Accessed 1 October 2012].

²⁸ EU-COMMISSION 2012b. Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Egypt. Progress in 2011 and recommendations for action. Delivering on a new European Neighbourhood Policy. Brussels: EU-Commission., p. 1.

organization and won a landslide victory, not the least as a result of what Allam names the power vacuum in Egypt after the fall of Mubarak.²⁹

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has in 2011 and 2012 had severe internal strife which is partly a result of different perceptions of the relation between religion and politics between factions of the party. The fact that segments of the party want a clear-cut Islamist platform can easily lead to confrontations with the representatives of the old regime, as it could be seen in connection with the presidential elections. But, on the other hand, a “modernization” of the party in the form of tendencies to secularism might drive parts of the Egyptian electorate back into the arms of the old establishment or of the Salafists.³⁰

El Sherif has pointed to this internal conflict in the Muslim Brotherhood, where we see “an emboldened group of MB insiders who strongly oppose what they have characterized as the party’s extremely timid agenda of reform.” El Sherif makes the point that the new tendencies within the Brotherhood, by working on reshaping Islamist discourses on governance and democracy, are “undermining the polarization between Islamists and secularists that long inhibited the development of policy-oriented (rather than identity-based) party politics.”³¹ If this actually is the case, maybe – as discussed by Bayat and Adib-Moghaddam – we might be witnessing important contours of a changing political Islam, on one side representing new and interesting political developments, on the other side possibilities of paralyzing faction strife.³²

The EU does not have a tradition for close cooperation with Islamist parties in the Middle East. Rather they have been met with an arms-length policy, and from time to time a refusal of cooperation as after the elections in the occupied Palestinian territories in January 2006, when “the EU harshly turned against the achievements of the

²⁹ ALLAM, R. S. 2012. The Islamists in the Realm of the Egyptian Revolution. In: IEMED. (ed.) *Euro-Mediterranean Policies in the Light of the Arab Spring*. Barcelona: IEMed., p. 122.

³⁰ According to Rutherford this tendency is no novelty. Already in the 1990s a group of younger members of the MB “wanted to clarify the organization’s political objectives in a manner that showed a willingness to work within existing political institutions to achieve change that was peaceful and incremental.” See RUTHERFORD, B. K. 2008. *Egypt after Mubarak. Liberalism, Islam and Democracy in the Arab World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford., p. 96. As for the preconditions for a moderation-trend of the Egyptian Islamists, see UTVIK, B. O. 2005. Hizb al-Wasat and the Potential for Change in Egyptian Islamism. *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 14, 293-306.

³¹ EL SHERIF, A. 2012. Egypt’s New Islamists: Emboldening Reform from Within. *Sada* [Online]. Available from: <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2012/01/12/egypt-s-new-islamists-emboldening-reform-from-within/8z6r> [Accessed 1 October 2012].

³² BAYAT, A. 2011. The Post-Islamist Revolutions. *Foreign Affairs*, Snapshot. See also ADIB-MOGHADDAM, A. 2012. The Arab Revolts, Islam and Postmodernity. *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 5, 15-25.

Palestinian reform movement when it brought unexpected results.”³³ The situation after the Egyptian elections in 2011 and 2012 does contain some similarities with what took place in Palestine in 2006, but also differences. First of all the context is different. The maybe most important official reason for the EU’s decision to freeze funds to the Hamas led administration was Hamas’ denial of recognizing Israel.

According to the EU Egypt has under MB leadership remained an active partner in the Middle East Peace Process. Egypt has even played a role in moving Palestinian factions closer to reconciliation and motivating the Palestinians to take part in a prisoner swap including the release of Gilat Shalit. The progress is reflected in the positive wording of the official ENP document: “The EU will continue to do all it can to support the peaceful and orderly transition to a civilian and democratic government in Egypt. Egypt is a key player in the Arab world, and a full and reliable partner in international affairs, so steps forward in Egypt are crucial for democracy-building in the Middle East and North Africa. The EU is aware there are many challenges ahead. But will continue to stand by Egypt and its people in their quest for both deep democracy and economic opportunity.”³⁴

The EU has of course realized that the former strategic alliance with the Mubarak regime is history. A new complex reality in which different types of policy actors have entered the political scene needs to be dealt with. The SCAF and the MB are of course some of the most important institutional expressions of the new situation. But added to that a participating population has become a key factor. The Egyptian revolt against Mubarak was dominated by the middle class in the big cities and especially Cairo. Kandil poses the question “Why was the middle class at the forefront of the demonstrations while the peasants remained conspicuously absent, while the workers hesitated, while the slum dwellers watched from the sidelines, and while one half of the upper class defended the regime fiercely and the other half had their jet engines running?”³⁵ The answer is not to be provided here, but the point that the growing new Egyptian middle class might be an actor, with which the EU could set up an interesting political alliance.

The EU, Egypt and the migration issue

³³ PACE, M. 2010. Paradoxes and contradictions in EU democracy promotion in the Mediterranean: the limits of EU normative power. In: PACE, M. & SEEBERG, P. (eds.) *The European Union’s Democratization Agenda in the Mediterranean*. London and New York: Routledge.

³⁴ EU-COMMISSION 2012b. Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Egypt. Progress in 2011 and recommendations for action. Delivering on a new European Neighbourhood Policy. Brussels: EU-Commission., p. 6.

³⁵ KANDIL, H. 2012. Why did the Egyptian Middle Class March to Tahrir Square? *Mediterranean Politics*, 17, 197-215., p. 197

Egypt is one of the largest emigration countries in the Middle East and in this respect it is very important for the EU to keep an eye on the migratory movements in and out of the country.³⁶ According to the Migration and Remittances Factbook by the World Bank Egypt is with 3,7 mio. emigrants number one among the top ten emigration countries in the Middle East.³⁷ They are, however, also the recipient of a large number of transit migrants, a large part of which are coming from Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. One of the reasons for this is that Egypt is hosting large resettlement programmes – run partly by the UNHCR and partly by national programmes financed by Canada, Australia and others.

It can be difficult 100% precisely to distinguish between economic and political causes for migration towards Egypt and often there will probably be some overlap.³⁸ During 2011 a large number of Egyptian migrant workers left Libya and probably it will take some time before they are back again. This has of course affected the amount of remittances received and added to that the unstable situation in the region has reduced the migration-induced income significantly. Historically, as shown by Dina Abdelfattah, the Egyptian regime has considered migration as an important pillar in its economic strategy and “a way of letting pressure out of the labour market, and providing financial gains that outweighed the cost of brain drain.”³⁹ The for the regime important remittances have been affected by the return of many Egyptians, especially migrant workers who left Libya during 2011, but it is still impossible to say anything about the actual amounts of “lost means”.⁴⁰

Abdelfattah mentions that in the fall of 2011, against expectations, the Central Bank of Egypt issued a report covering 2010-2011 showing the highest amount of remittances in the history of Egypt. Obviously this can be a result of the return of Egyptian migrants, who in connection with their return transferred their deposits to the home country. The political dispute related to the decision by UAE to close the doors on Egyptian migrants following the announcement by Egypt that it would put Hosni Mubarak on a trial probably also has had some significance. The conflict was apparently solved after a visit by the Egyptian Prime Minister Essam Sharaf to UAE, which took place in July 2011.

The political unrest in 2011 has led to increasing instability in Egypt, higher unemployment and economic problems for the ordinary Egyptians. Not surprisingly

³⁶ BARTOLOMEO, A. D., FAKHOURY, T. & PERRIN, D. 2010. Egypt. In: CARIM (ed.) *CARIM - Migration Profile*. Florence.

³⁷ WORLD-BANK 2011. *Migration and Remittances Factbook*, Washington DC, World Bank.

³⁸ ROMAN, H. 2006. Transit Migration in Egypt. *Research Reports* Florence: European University Institute., p. 31.

³⁹ ABDELFATTAH, D. 2011. Impact of Arab Revolts on Migration. *CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes* Florence: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1 and 8.

this contributes to creating a migration push-factor, as it has been demonstrated in a survey by the IOM. Based on 750 interviews in 17 different governorates in March and April 2011 the survey showed that despite people being rather optimistic about their long-term future, they were worried about the current security situation and the lack of job opportunities.⁴¹

The motivation among the youngsters for migration seems first and foremost to be economic:

“The most important push factors for the young Egyptians who wish to migrate remain lack of employment opportunities and unsatisfactory living conditions. The most important pull factor is the possibility of gaining higher wages abroad than in Egypt (...) Young Egyptians identified, Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as their favorite countries of destination.”⁴²

To fulfill those ambitions might, as mentioned above, be a problem, because of the gradual replacement of Arabs by migrants from different Asian countries. The European relations with Egypt regarding migration are described in the ENP Action Plan and focuses on legal aspects and practical issues related to control of migration flows in cooperation between the EU and Egypt. The Egyptian migration towards the EU is for historical reasons rather limited – in spite of the fact that Egypt has enormous potential, the main migration to Europe from the Middle East comes from the Maghreb states and Turkey. This is reflected in the Action Plan, which regarding migration is vague and unspecific. The uprisings in Egypt throughout 2011 are as mentioned hardly likely to change the preferred destinations for the Egyptian migrants, so that the EU becomes one of them.

As part of what is termed the EU “renewed migration strategy” it is mentioned that Egypt will be included in the launching of Mobility Partnerships, which will be offered to Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt in the first instance: “Mobility Partnerships offer a concrete framework for dialogue and cooperation between the EU and non-EU countries. These partnerships are focused on facilitating and organizing legal migration, effective and humane measures to address irregular migration, and concrete steps towards reinforcing the development outcomes of migration.”⁴³ So far, however, these initiatives are planned and it is not yet known when the actual implementation will take place.

⁴¹ PITEA, R. & HUSSAIN, R. 2011. Egypt after January 25. Survey of Youth Migration Intentions. Cairo: IOM.

⁴² Ibid., p. 21.

The Mobility Partnerships have been offered Egypt in the summer of 2011: "Following exploratory talks in June 2011, the EU offered Egypt the prospect of opening of a comprehensive Dialogue on Mobility, Migration and Security, leading towards the conclusion of a Mobility Partnership. In September 2011 the Egyptian authorities declined the offer."⁴⁴ The reason for the Egyptian decline has to do with the fact that the Egyptian authorities have stated that they cannot commit to any agreement as long as the new political leaders have been unable to take responsibility for the question. The progress in the development of the Mobility Partnerships will in other words have to await a process of "normalization" of Egyptian politics. At the same time the European side will have to decide on how to develop this new foreign (and security) policy instrument.

Conclusions

As shown the Egyptian agreements with Israel of 1978-79 plays an important strategic role for the EU. This is also the case with the Peace Process, which according to official EU policies is still a relevant perspective and together with the idea of a two-state solution is a part of the EU foreign policy regime vis-à-vis the Middle East. The EU in its approach towards the regime of Mubarak has for many years avoided touching on politically sensitive issues and for pragmatic reasons supported the incumbent leader. Behind this lie interpretations of the security environment in the Mediterranean, where common security interests between Egypt and the EU have constituted an important part of the background for the pragmatism in European foreign and security policy.

With the new political realities in Egypt this policy is no longer feasible. The EU will have to get accustomed to more binding forms of political cooperation with the Islamist parties and movements which now dominate the political scene in some of the Middle Eastern countries and Egypt in particular. This pragmatic realism is reflected in the official EU documents and the reciprocal visits of Morsi and Ashton in Egypt and Brussels seem to underline a new reality – at least at the rhetorical level. However, since the Egyptian uprisings, the EU's approach has not changed significantly and the financial support has increased, but not to a degree where it really makes a difference.

New policy instruments have been presented with the aim of dealing with the new developments in Egypt and some of the other Middle Eastern states. The so-called Mobility Partnerships are among the new tools launched in order to deal with a new reality. It seems that some of the "new tools" are old wine in new bottles and the major part is still work in progress. As demonstrated the Mobility Partnerships are not yet

⁴³ See the EEAS homepage:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/11/1369&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> (accessed 1 November 2012).

⁴⁴ EU-COMMISSION 2012a. *In*: EU-COMMISSION (ed.). Brussels: EU-Commission., p. 12.

implemented – on both sides there still remains work to be done. Migration and security are interrelated phenomena and this understanding is mutual on both sides of the Mediterranean, regardless of whether we are speaking of an authoritarian Mubarak regime or an Islamist government in (reversible?) democratic transition.

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