

EU's democracy promotion in Egypt before and after Arab uprisings

Alaa Hosny Zahran

*Department of European Studies, Faculty of Economics and Political Science,
Cairo University, Giza, Egypt*

Democracy
promotion in
Egypt

605

Received 12 March 2019
Revised 24 July 2019
20 August 2019
Accepted 16 September 2019

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to outline how the EU figures out the importance of strengthening its relations with Egypt as one of the most strategic countries in the region to keep the union secured and stable. The paper also assesses to what extent the EU succeeds to promote democracy in Egypt.

Design/methodology/approach – The EU pursues its policy through a series of both bilateral and multilateral agreements with Egypt aiming at positioning their relations in a strategic context. The research adopted different approaches as descriptive and analytical ones.

Findings – Following the Arab uprisings, the EU was caught by surprise and announced a paradigm shift in its relations and introduced a set of policies to foster democracy promotion that witnessed some successes but with extremely modest results in some areas compared to the costs of the process. The EU succeeded in important reforms in trade liberalization while it did not bring clear changes in the political arena in Egypt.

Originality/value – The findings of this paper convey that the Arab uprisings were a wake-up call for the EU. It was the right time for the EU to conduct such a strategic and sincere reflection based on the role it wants to play in the changing region. In addition, findings prove that the EU's response to revolutionary events has been weak and hesitant, and the EU has not an effective role in promoting democracy in Egypt.

Keywords European Union, Egypt, Arab uprisings, Democracy promotion, Democratization stability dilemma

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Democracy promotion has gained wide support from different countries all over the world recently. The debate on democracy promotion has grown considerably in the 1990s with new opportunities and different actors. Especially the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a strengthened Western policy on democracy promotion. Since the early 1990s, the European Union (EU) was too far to shape its relations with Southern Mediterranean countries to its democracy promotion policy.

The popular protests that have swept through the Arab region, since January 2011, came to represent a major shift in international history. Many Arab countries witnessed signs of democratic change by the will of Arab peoples rather than their authoritarian regimes. These changes in Arab regimes succeeded in overthrowing their leaders and gave them the chance to draw their new political will as they aspired.



The EU sketches out a new approach toward its relation with Egypt because of its geostrategic importance and political weight in the region. It is considered as a strategic partner for the EU in the Southern Mediterranean because of strong reasons ranging from the guarantee of energy supply through the Suez Canal to the fight against illegal migration and terrorism in the region.

The EU has been trying to fulfill its own power as a civilian power and has set democracy promotion on top of its agenda in the Mediterranean region, especially Egypt. In the past, the EU consistently prioritized regional stability and security, even if it meant working with authoritarian regimes. Following the uprisings, the EU feels the massive need for a fundamental revision of its policy toward Egypt to adopt a new approach. The European policies review has responded to the most fundamental questions the EU faces following the Arab uprisings.

2. Research problem

The EU feels a massive need to a major revision of its policies toward democracy promotion in the Mediterranean region, especially Egypt because of its potential and strategic weight in the region. Before the uprisings, the EU pursues a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements which aim to position relations in a strategic context. After the uprisings, the EU feels the massive need to a fundamental revision of its policy toward democracy promotion in Egypt. The aim of this paper is twofold. The first is to tackle the European role in promoting democracy in Egypt prior and following the Arab uprisings. The second is to tackle the impact of the European policies on democracy in Egypt.

3. Research questions

This research tackles different policies to promote democracy in Egypt. To this end, the research asks different questions. First, what is the first formal linkage between the EU and the Mediterranean countries? The next question is how the EU promotes democracy in Egypt prior the uprisings and how it responds following the uprisings? The main question sheds light on the impact of the European policies on democracy in Egypt. The final question is to what extent the EU succeeded to promote democracy in Egypt?

4. Research structure

This research paper comprises five major points, beginning with the conceptual and theoretical framework that tackles different models of democracy promotion and European's framework for democracy promotion in the Mediterranean. The second point tackles the EU's relations with Egypt before Arab uprisings governed by a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements which aim to position relations in a strategic context. The third point tackles the relations between the two partners after Arab uprisings which represents a sign into how or whether the Arab uprisings have had an impact on the EU's actions. The fourth one analyzes the impact of the European policies on democracy in Egypt. The last point assesses whether the EU was able to promote democracy in Egypt or not.

5. Conceptual and theoretical framework

The aim is to clarify and define confusing concepts in terms of their meanings, variables, hypothesis and methodology. It also introduces different models of democracy promotion and sheds the light on the European framework for democracy promotion in the Mediterranean which is considered the first formal attempt of establishing institutional linkages between the European Community and the Mediterranean countries.

5.1 Concept of democracy promotion

For a long time, the meaning of democracy has been discussed. Some scholars defined the term democracy in terms of mass participation or elections. Others extended their definitions to include the respect of central human rights. Besides, some scholars stressed the aspects of political change. The new term “deep democracy” requires a shift in democracy support. The actual vision of democracy that the EU promotes has not changed as a result of the shift in focus to the idea of deep democracy. The focus is still on: free and fair elections, freedom of association, the right to a fair trial and the fight against corruption (Kurki, 2012). Mari (2017) defined democracy promotion in a broad sense as all activities that are adopted, supported and directly or indirectly implemented by public or private foreign actors explicitly designed to contribute to democratic transition and consolidation in a specific recipient country.

5.2 Variables

Every experiment contains two key variables, namely, independent variable and dependent variable. In this paper, democracy promotion in Egypt conducted by the EU is the dependent variable while the policy that the EU tries to adopt to promote democracy is the independent variable. Following Arab uprisings, the EU tries to change its policies (independent variable) to new ones to test the effects on promoting democracy (dependent variable).

5.3 Hypothesis

- H1. The more the EU figures out the importance of reviewing and shifting its policies to Egypt, the less troubled and imbalanced the region.
- H2. The more the EU creates a radical change in its relations with Egypt, the genuine the benefits for each side.
- H3. The more the EU pursues a double standard policy, the less the EU applies effective policies to promote democracy in Egypt.
- H4. The more the EU supports Egypt financially, the more the economic integration between the two partners.

5.4 Research methodology

The paper depends mainly on the system analysis approach to analyze the European policies in promoting democracy in Egypt. Every system is divided into various components, which are linked together, and exists in a certain environment. Every system comprises inputs and outputs that need a link, feedback, which refers to the influence of outputs on inputs and how they succeeded to introduce various policies and measures.

The system analysis approach generates two main questions:

- Q1. What are the relations between inputs and outputs?
- Q2. How does the system integrate with the environment?

The system is represented in the EU that composed of a group of actors to keep harmony for a long time. So, the EU keeps in a continuous change as a response to what happened in Egypt to achieve stability. The inputs are represented in different models that reflect the

impact of the environment on the system. The outputs are represented in policies that the system takes to promote democracy. The feedback shows how the outputs have an influence on the inputs.

The system analysis approach is used to analyze how the EU as a system deals with different models as inputs and its response to those determinants through policies as outputs besides illustrating to what extent those policies and decisions succeeded in achieving the EU's goals in Egypt as a feedback. This approach reflects a set of responses: whether the EU has an active role in promoting democracy in Egypt before and after uprisings or not and whether its policies have an impact on democracy or not.

5.5 Literature review

Researches and studies help the researcher to be familiar with the concept of democracy promotion. It helps the researcher to get acquainted with such policies the EU pursues to foster its relations with their neighbors before and after Arab uprisings. Those research studies help the researcher a lot to get benefits of their approaches and methods.

A research by [Khalifa \(2012\)](#) entitled "Europe and the Arab Revolutions. From a Weak to a Proactive Response in a Changing Neighbourhood" helps the researcher to introduce changes in the EU's policy toward its neighbors and tackles different attempts to assess European responses to the uprisings. Another research by [Hatab \(2019\)](#) entitled "Deepening democracy or stabilization? European neighborhood policy (ENP) and the Arab spring". The paper examines the revision of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and selects Egypt after the uprisings. A third reference which helps the researcher to address different policies the EU pursued to promote democracy in Egypt entitled "How Does the EU Promote Democracy in Egypt? – A European Strategy put to the test" by [Bolous \(2007\)](#). Another valuable resource that helps the researcher is by [Youngs \(2002\)](#) entitled "The European Union and Democracy Promotion in the Mediterranean: "A New or Disingenuous Strategy?". It starts with focusing on the significance of the EU's full approach to democracy promotion in the Mediterranean but concludes that European policy failed fully to adhere to the logic of its own philosophy.

A research by [Behr \(2012\)](#) entitled "The European Union's Mediterranean Policies after the Arab Spring: Can the Leopard Change its Spots?" helps the researcher tackling different policies that the EU pursues to promote democracy. Another research from the [Association between the European Union and Egypt \(2017\)](#) entitled "EU–Egypt Partnership priorities 2017-2020" helps the researcher to highlight the general framework of the cooperation, Association Agreement, which sets the priorities between the two partners. Also, it presents the common challenges facing them and promotes the joint interests to guarantee long-term stability in the region. A research by [Mari, A.](#) entitled "Democracy promotion and stability in Egypt and Tunisia" focuses on political transition in Egypt since early 2011 and points to the new neighborhood agenda developed by the EU since the wave of the uprisings. The paper also highlights the adoption of a comprehensive stabilizing agenda by the EU to promote democracy.

A research by [Sundsten \(2013\)](#) entitled "Did the Arab Spring change the European Union's democracy promotion in the Middle East? – The EU's democracy assistance in Egypt and Jordan before and after the uprisings" helps the researcher to address the shift in the European policies toward Southern region after the uprisings and highlights the European assistance to Egypt to promote democracy. Also, a research by [Comelli \(2010\)](#) entitled "Dynamics and Evolution of the EU-Egypt relationship within the ENP framework" claims that the ENP consolidates the EU–Egypt economic partnership. Finally, research studies by both [Aydin \(2012\)](#) entitled "European Neighborhood Policy: The case of Egypt,

Jordan, Lebanon, Occupied Palestine and Tunisia” and Hollis (2011) entitled “Europe and the Middle East: Has the EU Missed its Moment of Opportunity?” provide a review and assessment of the European policies that the EU pursues to promote democracy in Egypt.

5.6 Models of democracy promotion

EU’s democracy promotion falls into three distinctive models – linkage, leverage and governance – which can be applied on the ground by each international actor. Their embracement in EU’s external relations has been influenced by both the internal development of the EU and changes in the external context (Tina *et al.*, 2015).

The linkage model has been persistent in EU’s external policies since the first support to democratic transitions. It locates democracy promotion at the level of society and targets the socio-economic requirements for democratization including economic growth, education and self-organization of civil society. Linkage model is operated through a set of different channels that aim at paving the way for the emergence of a democratic culture and involving socialization into democratic norms.

Then, leverage model became dominant within the European context after the cold war, as it is connected with the literature on democratic transitions that focuses on the role of ruling elites in promoting regime change. It attracts power holders to give up authoritarian rule in exchange for other benefits. This model is operated at the level of intergovernmental cooperation between the EU and third country governments and applies political conditionality to engage in democratic reforms.

Shifting toward governance model, it is considered as a complement to the two previous mentioned approaches. It relies heavily on a set of actors as transparency, accountability, and cooperation between different actors. It prepares a legal-administrative basis of democratic governance and constitutes an important element in the process of transition.

5.7 European framework for democracy promotion in the Mediterranean

The early 1960s witnessed the first interaction between the European Community and the Mediterranean region. In the early 1970s, the European Community deepened its relation with its Southern neighbors through introducing the Global Mediterranean Policy. Since the mid-1980s, the EU has dedicated itself and established the idea of democracy promotion as a foreign policy objective including the Mediterranean Basin. In 1991, the EU drew a general framework that includes both multilateral and bilateral dimensions to cover political, economic and cultural cooperation. These frameworks help the EU to achieve democracy promotion via different instruments that are in line with its global strategic framework (Van, 2009).

Hollis (2011) added that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) is considered as a great shift from old agreements to new bilateral agreements that focus on a set of regional cooperation programs. It also gives a high priority to financial assistance and to funding small-scale projects which may strengthen the relation between the two sides. Following that, the EU started to deepen its relation with its neighbors by developing a comprehensive regional strategic vision for democracy promotion and addresses a new instrument to boost its commitment with the Mediterranean Basin through introducing the ENP.

Smith (2005) argued that the EU has established a formal political dialogue with all its neighbors at different levels and in 2005, the EU had a tendency to create financial incentives for additional funding on the basis of progressive reforms. Following Sarkozy’s initiative, the EMP was launched in 2008 as a new initiative that called the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) which was built to support regionalism and promoting cooperation and dialogue in the Mediterranean region (Youngs, 2002).

Overall, the EU has succeeded in shaping the regional agenda on democracy promotion, introducing democracy, human rights and the rule of law into the Euro-Mediterranean framework for cooperation. In addition, the EU pursues a positive incentive to promote democracy relying on persuasion, socialization and capacity building instead of pressure or negative incentives.

6. European democracy in Egypt before Arab uprisings

Linkage model is considered as a foundation for European external policies applied by the EU to reinforce the democratic transition in Egypt. The seeming goal for the EU is to foster democracy in Egypt at different levels, but the EU targets only different areas. The EU recognized the massive need for economic liberalization, security cooperation and immigration control. The EU–Egypt relations are governed by a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements which aim to position relations in a strategic context.

6.1 EU–Egypt association agreement

Association Agreement, signed in 2001 and entered into force in 2004, is considered the cornerstone for cooperation between the EU and Egypt that governs the bilateral relations between the two sides. The top priorities of the agreement are to address challenges, to promote democracy, to respect human rights and to guarantee stability on both sides (Smith, 2005). The EU and Egypt are committed to strengthening trade and investment relationship and establishing a free trade area (FTA). The EU has put forward the idea of a comprehensive Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement initiative to deepen and widen the existing FTA (Michou, 2016).

Comelli (2010) states that, in 2008, the total trade volume between Egypt and the EU, reached €20.66bn. During the same year, Egypt's exports to the EU increased by 13.1 per cent, and the EU's exports to Egypt reached 22.2 per cent. From what Comelli stated, it is obvious that the EU was Egypt's first trading partner. Bolous (2007) sheds the light on the cooperation between both sides at ministerial and senior official levels and the parliamentary level through close contact between the European Parliament and the Egyptian Parliament. Bolous assures that the EU places a high priority on peace, security and regional cooperation and the need to contribute to the stability and prosperity of the region.

Indeed, the Association Agreement influenced both sides. It deepens and broadens the relation through closer cooperation in areas of mutual interest and frequent political dialogue. The agreement helps to provide the framework for political dialogue between the two partners to meet the goals of the people of both shores of the Mediterranean. It also enhances bilateral cooperation in a number of key sectors, including trade and investment, energy, education and reform efforts. From one side, the EU pursued free trade arrangements with Egypt to abolish tariffs on industrial products and agricultural products and opening up the vision for greater liberalization of trade in services and farm goods. In addition, the agreement opens up the outlook for greater liberalization and offers requirements on freedom of establishment and liberalization of trade in services, farm goods and free movement of capitals. From the other side, Egypt suffered from the barriers that the EU imposed to prevent non-EU products from entering its internal market. Finally, it is clear that the Association Agreement between the two sides is beneficial, mainly economic in nature, and focuses on furthering regional integration with a view of creating an area of shared prosperity and closer economic, social and cultural relations.

6.2 European Neighborhood Policy and European Union – Egypt economic integration

ENP is launched in 2004 and aims at fostering stability and security between the EU and its southern neighbors. The ENP skips the dividing lines between the enlarged union and Southern Mediterranean countries. The ENP is composed of four different areas: good governance, economic and social development, cooperation in the security sector and migration and mobility.

To achieve economic integration between the two partners, the EU provides different instruments as MEDA and ENPI. The European Parliament adopted MEDA program to foster the economic cooperation between the two sides. The main goal for the MEDA program is to enhance the bilateral support of economic structures to implement the targeted FTA which reached €8.5bn for the period 2000-2006. Also, the European Neighborhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI) is considered the most important instrument of the EU in its cooperation with Mediterranean Partners under the umbrella of the EMP and the ENP, which reached €14.9bn for the period 2007-2013 (Michou, 2016). Apparently, the ENP moves to a significant degree of economic integration including the internal market to foster the free movements of goods, services, and capitals. For Egypt, trade, cooperation and regional integration with the EU are considered as essential, in contrast with the cooperation and regional integration with Arab countries (Askar, 2014).

The ENP enhances the EU–Egypt partnership at economic and trade level and is considered as the main framework for relations between the two partners. The ENP offers Egypt such benefits as being in the internal market and involving in EU programs. It prevents the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbors and offers them the chance to participate in various EU activities through greater political, security, economic and cultural cooperation for the people of these neighboring countries. The launch of the ENP helps and introduces new instruments to reinforce its commitment to promote democracy in the region. At the same time, the EU started to develop a more specific regional strategic vision for democracy promotion and created an explicit positive political conditionality, which is based on the negotiation, implementation and monitoring of the bilateral action plans.

As a conclusion, from one side, the ENP brings added value to both Egypt and EU. The implementation of the ENP itself aims at moving beyond cooperation to a significant degree of integration. The ENP supports the economic reform in Egypt and prioritizes the bilateral relations between Egypt and the EU. From the other side, the ENP was not a transformative policy that should be able to transform Egypt and bring its political system more closely into line with the EU. It can be summarized that before uprisings, the ENP is mainly considered as a joint partnership between the two actors that gives them closer relations to integrate economically in both markets, but it is less vulnerable to be affected by the political problems standing in the way of more ambitious multilateral activities.

6.3 European Union–Egypt action plan

EU–Egypt Action Plan is a foundation stone to their relations because it fulfills the provisions of the Association Agreement. With the Action Plan, both parties are willing to achieve their pledges to improve quality of life, increase employment chances, cut down poverty, maintain social security, develop education, promote the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, take part in political life effectively, increase rates of economic growth and investments and expand production and exports capacities. Bolous (2007) states that the European Commission has agreed to allocate €558mn as a financial support package for its implementation for the period 2007-2010 to boost Egyptian internal reforms in different areas, such as democracy promotion, human rights, the judiciary, the health

system, and to foster the country's economic competitiveness. Behr (2012) asserts that the EU–Egypt Action Plan gave a high priority of cooperation in the areas of trade, investment and economic growth which enables Egypt to integrate with the EU's economic structures to achieve the balance between the dynamic implementation and the modernization of the Egyptian economy.

Practically, Action Plan pursues the intensified integration in the global economy through deeper relations with one of its most important partners. The main goal behind the Action Plan is to establish an area of peace and stability. It aims at sharing ownership, common interest, reciprocal commitments, shared values and implementation of national plans and reform programs. The Action Plan helps both sides to achieve progress in cooperation in different fields. For the EU, it affords further integration into the economic, social and technological structure. For Egypt, it increases the possibility to advance trade and investments and gives an opportunity to integrate economically with the EU.

The Action Plan offers Egypt a number of privileges including increased financial support, technical assistance and a significant degree of economic integration to Egypt. It enables Egypt to fight against organized crime, human trafficking, money laundering and drug trafficking. Finally, the EU is considered as a political dwarf but an economic giant that never managed to impose its political will on any partner state which gives an early indication of the position of the Egyptian Government toward subjects such as democratization.

6.4 Union for the Mediterranean and its impact on democracy in Egypt

UfM is the latest addition to the framework of Euro-Mediterranean relations which moves from the multilateral framework of the Barcelona Process to the more intergovernmental one that is considered as a worrying sign of increasing marginalization of democracy issue in the EU's foreign policy agenda for the Mediterranean (Comelli, 2010).

According to Wouters and Duquet (2013), all cooperation frameworks between the EU and Egypt, with the exception of the UfM, focus mainly on the significance of democracy and let the door opened to the application of the principle of conditionality if the neighbor countries do not make sufficient progress. Wouters and Duquet have referred to an implementation deficit in the area of democracy, and they have explained that both security and stability dominated the scene and gained priority concerns over a strong commitment to promoting democracy.

Overall, Egypt's reaction to Sarkozy's idea of launching the UfM was positive for two reasons. First, in contrast with the ENP, the UfM placed much more emphasis on co-ownership and less on EU-led reforms. Second, Egypt was given the Co-presidency together with France. The UfM has focused on some projects such as women empowerment and education frameworks while democracy is totally absent. It has not delivered the expected results and needs to be reformed to realize its potential.

To sum up, the philosophy of the UfM implies a strategy to promote peace and development based on flexible cooperative projects, involving the public and private sectors, in key socio-economic areas. Before Arab uprisings, the core objectives and the main goal of the EU's policy toward Southern Mediterranean are the integration into EU's internal market. The EU pretends to act as a normative power in the international arena, but it is always conditioned by both security and stability concerns in areas as control of illegal migration or the fight against terrorism. Also, the EU has been very unwilling to apply the principle of promoting democracy, despite a significant deterioration of the situation of democracy in Egypt.

7. European Union democracy promotion in Egypt after Arab uprisings

On January 25, 2011, Egyptian protesters flooded into squares and captured the scene; they were willing to push for a radical change of regime, while the EU adopted the idea of only a political reform rather than regime change. On 4th February, the European Council did not clearly request Mubarak's resignation but advised the Egyptian authorities to meet the aspirations of the Egyptian protesters with a real radical change in its political arena not merely a cosmetic change or repression. Following the collapse of Mubarak's regime, the EU changed its tone and sent a clear message to the EU to pave the way to adopt a new approach to relations with Egypt (Khalifa, 2012).

Indeed, Europe did not pay close attention to the radical changes that dominated the Mediterranean region and caught by surprise because of what happened in Tunisia in 2010 and in Egypt in 2011. Besides the weak and the cautious response of the EU toward the uprisings, its member states did not know how to react. At that time, the EU avoided any criticism of the ruling regime with a slogan of promoting democracy and protecting human rights.

7.1 *European Union–Egypt association agreement*

The main concerns behind the renewal of the bilateral Association Agreement structures in 2015 are primarily peace, security and regional cooperation. Renewing the agreement does not signify a change of the European agenda and views toward its Mediterranean neighbors, but it is considered as a reinforcement of the past efforts.

The EU's main goal is to reach more ambitious objectives than the previous attempts; it hopes to open up societies through introducing dialogue via bilateral or multilateral relations, enhancing trade and investments, and the utmost goal is to deepen the economic integration with the Mediterranean Basin. In addition, the EU favored security, controlling the illegal immigration and regime stability in the short run, ignoring the idea of promoting democracy and human rights norms. Despite the bilateral and the multilateral relations between the two partners, the EU in practice has not shown any determination to take the idea of democracy into its consideration (Sundsten, 2013).

The EU preceded rapidly the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade in manufactured goods while it proceeded very slowly in agricultural products trade. For this favoritism, the EU has to be blamed because the south European countries hindered severely opening up the door for Southern Mediterranean agriculture products to keep their products (Silvestri, 2005).

To sum up, the agreement, from the European viewpoint, is considered as just a trial to be protected from the flow of migration rather than a true partnership that achieve real cooperation. Although both bilateral Association Agreements between the EU and each country and multilateral document attached great importance to the progress of democracy and human rights, in practice, the EU has not shown any determination to promote democracy in the region. Although the AA is based on respect for democratic principles and fundamental human rights, it failed to achieve progress in the area of promoting democracy and was a way from settling democratic principles. More or less, the agreement is mainly economic in nature and provides furthering regional integration as well as providing a framework for closer economic relations only between the two parties.

7.2 *European Neighborhood Policy and European Union – Egypt economic integration*

The uprisings are considered as a key shift in the European policies toward promoting democracy in the Mediterranean region. Since that time, the EU tried to revise its policies to cope with what happened in the region, especially in Tunisia and Egypt. Indeed, revising the

ENP was one of the key commitments the EU made in response to the uprisings, and the reforms demonstrated the shift in thinking about how to promote democracy but with lack of response to stability and security shifts in the region (Bicchi, 2009). The new EU document outlines the main gear of the reviewed ENP adopted in 2011. It stressed that the goal of the new approach is to build healthy democratic and political reforms that go along with stability and security as well to pursue sustainable economic integration that cannot be achieved without convenient political sphere to apply democratic reform.

The EU pledged itself to increase its funds allocated to the Mediterranean countries, but with a sincere commitment to the promotion of deep democracy. In 2011, the EU adopted a new method to support political transformation processes. Duquet and Wouters (2015) stated that the SPRING initiative was adopted in 2011 with a budget of €350mn for the period 2011-2013 to be funded under the ENP as a response to the challenges occurred in the Mediterranean region, and the EU pledged itself to support their neighbors to promote democracy that based on the more for more principle.

The new approach applies conditionality as one of its pillars, and the EU's support will depend heavily on the progress in building democracy and respect for the rule of law. The more and the faster a country progresses in its internal reforms, the more the support (money, market and mobility) it will get from the EU to support political transformation (more for more). On the contrary, for those countries that do not show a sufficient commitment to democratic reforms, the EU will reconsider or even reduce funding (less for less) (Hatab, 2019).

Khalifa (2012) explained that the ENP did not provide enough incentives and put far more emphasis on democracy, human rights and sustainable development but brought on the table more funds, trade and cooperation for the south that increased the European effects on the region in terms of economic development, sustainability and human rights. Consequently, both the employment rate and poverty reduction remain the genuine issues that challenges the Mediterranean countries,

To conclude, The ENP itself suffers from a structural ambiguity and seems less likely to be affected by the political problems in the area. The EU failed to be a really transformative policy and bring Egypt's political and economic systems more closely into line with those of the EU. Egypt views the ENP as a partnership between equals, and on this ground, it rejects any EU's attempts to interfere in its internal affairs. The ENP failed to reduce poverty and to create an area of shared prosperities and values both in the region and in Egypt. It does not witness concrete benefits in both political and economic reform.

The ENP undergoes lack of finance and deals with Mediterranean countries with deficiency of appealing incentive to be the leader of the region. From the Egyptian view point, the whole package the EU offers to Southern countries is vague and the democratic reform should be clear enough to create a real competition between the two sides.

7.3 European Union–Egypt action plan

EU–Egypt Action Plan is measured as an *ad hoc* program that is created by the EU as a response to the uprisings that does not reflect any strategic vision on the role that should be played by the EU in Egypt. Consequently, this lack of strategy leads to a serious violation of democracy occurred in Egypt and keeps on a deterioration of the situation (Farouk, 2014).

Comelli (2010) sees that the implementation of the EU–Egypt Action Plan from the point of view of reforms is not very encouraging. Indeed, the Egyptian regime has always been conflicting to any advancement of the relationship with Brussels that might enable the EU to interfere with Egyptian domestic political system. Balfour *et al.* (2016) assert that the

Action Plan has returned to business with Egypt, and the core views of the Action Plan have remained largely unchanged, no more than a remapping of already existing priorities and approaches.

To sum up, the EU quickly returns to old forms of prioritizing economic development, leaving the claim of deep democracy as a rhetoric device. The EU–Egypt Action Plan is doubtful to have a noteworthy impact or to translate into a new role for the EU as a promoter of sustainable stability in Egypt. Actually, the EU performed some cosmetic changes after the Arab uprisings rather than radical changes toward deep and sustainable democracy. From the Egyptian side, the Action Plan was seen as a proof of long-lasting ties between the EU and Egypt as well as another starting point for long-term cooperation. The EU is considered as a political dwarf but an economic giant that never managed to impose its political will on any partner state. This gives an early indication of the position of the Egyptian Government toward subjects such as democratization. The implementation of the EU–Egypt Action Plan from the point of view of its reform potential is not very encouraging, and the EU's transformative power reveals its limitations when applied to Egypt.

7.4 Union for the Mediterranean and its impact on democracy in Egypt

The UfM framework contradicted with what it suggests to support regionalization and development. It represents all the problems that high-level political regionalism implies. It is considered as a poor substitute for the EMP and does not add to the previous policies. The European efforts to promote democracy in Southern countries are vague. The UfM offers any new ideas to overcome the constraints which have hindered Euro-Mediterranean cooperation from the beginning. It is supposed to foster the initiative a higher profile than the EMP by pushing the partnership to the intergovernmental level (Blockmans, 2013).

The UfM priorities are supposed to be directly geared to concrete activities that will provide jobs and infrastructure, support new industries and improve the standard life of the population. In practice, it spelled more bureaucracy, connected new burdens and focused on state-to-state diplomacy rather than business or civil society engagement.

Finally, it is obvious that the new UfM has neglected to include policy commitments on democracy support besides raising questions over the possibility that will weaken existing reform commitments toward Arab partners. UfM is simply viewed as an alternative layer of changes in the EU policy which adds vagueness and complexity. The UfM focused less on economic regionalism and more on a form of regionalization through supporting joint projects in essential sectors. The philosophy of the proposed new Union was a departure from the bilateral focus of the ENP which was seen as a departure from the EMP's regionalist discourse.

8. The impact of European policies on democracy in Egypt

The partnership between the EU and Egypt is important for the stability and prosperity of the Mediterranean. It builds peace and tackles political and economic challenges. It also reinforces the exchange of information on major regional and international challenges that affect both sides (Aydin, 2012). The impact of the European policies on democracy in Egypt before and after uprisings varied and was limited. It introduces conceptual and institutional change to the framework for the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. A clear trend to more cooperation in the implementation of political dialogue and democracy assistance testifies to the EU's capacity to shape bilateral relations with Egypt.

Before 2011, the EU policy pushed for political stability which is considered the guard against challenges facing the EU such as security, terrorism and immigration. The EU

democracy promotion policy tries to emphasize the importance of the democratic procedures by pushing for free and fair elections as a starting point for establishing a democracy. The EU used ENP carrot policy to achieve political reform by making economic assistance and support conditional on political reform. One of the impacts of European policy on democracy is “conditionality” that highlighted in the theme of common values as a base of cooperation, but the EU took no attempt to exercise that. However, the European policies did not attempt to challenge the nature of the political regime, as it cooperated successfully with the EU; it was characterized by a dilemma between the EU’s stability and democratization goals. The EU uses different financial instruments, before Arab uprisings, to foster its relation with Egypt. The EU improves its record in terms of democracy assistance and tries to assist democracy as well as reinforcing projects to keep the region balanced to achieve its stability.

After 2011 events, the EU decided to rethink of a new set of relations with its Southern neighbors and highlighted the priority of democratic reform, good governance and human rights. The impact of EU’s policies on democracy focused mainly on different concepts. “More money” concept was hindered by the failure to commit more resources from member states because of the financial crisis. “More market access” concept was hindered by the failure to break down the European trade protectionism and remove obstacles to FTA. “More mobility” concept was hindered by the confusion among some EU member states because of few mobility options. “Political conditionality” concept was hindered because of the inability of the EU to put forward conditions of leverage, attractions and incentives to perform effective conditionality. This situation demands that the EU must redefine its conditionality policies with ethical bases away from the traditional contradictions in supporting authoritarian regimes ([The Association Council, 2017](#)).

The impact of EU’s policy on democracy in Egypt witnessed an inactive process to promote democracy. Within the EU, there is a clear absence of political will to revise approaches to democracy support. The EU has tried to promote democracy in Egypt along with preserving the political stability of the authoritarian regime because of its strategic and geopolitical significance, for its role in the fight against terrorism and illegal migration and for its importance to secure energy routes.

The European policies have shown a lack of commitment that has not produced a clear or strategic approach to reform. This vision declines the capacity of the EU to have a clear picture of what it wants to achieve in the field of democracy in Egypt. The lack of a clearly defined strategy can make programs relatively successful in the short-term but totally irrelevant in the long-term. Besides, the EU’s capacity to exert some degree of leverage on Egypt was highly limited, and its policies on deep democracy in Egypt run the risk of passing from the inconsistency and double standards of the past to the irrelevance and impotence of the present.

Genuinely, the EU offered a limited relationship to help the neighbor countries to fulfill their commitments to strengthen the rule of law, to promote democracy, to promote market-oriented economic reforms and to cooperate on key foreign policy objectives such as counterterrorism and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It has to seek such a process to support the existing policies without overriding them.

Following the uprisings in Egypt in January 2011, the EU was not able to articulate a fully clear attitude as to which side to support, the regime or the people. It opted for a wait and see approach, avoiding taking a clear stance against Mubarak’s regime. When it was clear that Mubarak’s regime was no longer a durable solution for the future of Egypt, the EU supported the new line of action. But the EU was always behind the events, reactive instead of proactive, and some EU member states were much more decisive than others.

The European member states focused on strengthening ties with single countries, putting a stronger emphasis on bilateral agreements rather than genuine and effective participation to promote democracy. The EU itself continued to offer enhanced socio-political support while refraining from political intervention in countries where it was clear that democratic change did not place a priority on the European agenda. This inconsistency lowered the EU's normative credibility and showed that the EU was not aware of new concepts of democracy. This insufficient reaction to the relevant events in Egypt demonstrates that the political backing of member states is a crucial component for coherent and effective action in the field of democracy.

Likewise, the European response to the new scenario in Egypt does not stem from a strategic vision on the part of the EU about its new role in such a key region. The European policies can be described as a buildup of new policies sponsored by some European member states rather than as a targeted strategy within the EU's bodies. Practically, the EU conducts many bilateral relations aiming at reinforcing its relations but in many cases, they reflect a relation of inequality, one side needs the benefits of this relation than the other. The EU has shown a lack of commitment that has not produced a clear or strategic approach to reform.

Additionally, the uprisings have acted as a wake-up call for the EU that supports authoritarian stability in Egypt for decades, regardless of the lack of commitment to democracy. The European policies created a false democratization–stability dilemma, claiming that the EU challenges supporting democracy and stability in Egypt at the same time. But, the best way to guarantee long-term stability and security can be achieved through a firm commitment to democracy.

In conclusion, the EU's capacity to exert some degree of influence on Egypt was highly limited, and its policies on deep democracy in Egypt run the risk of passing from the discrepancy and double standards of the past to the irrelevance and ineffectiveness of the present. European policies to promote democracy in Egypt prove that the uprisings are considered as a missed opportunity for the EU to build a new base with a strong relations with its neighbors. Unfortunately, the EU did not work effectively with civil society organizations to work on human rights promotion. Despite both the recognition of past mistakes by the EU and the new rhetoric about deep democracy, the EU has not freed itself from old politics and attitudes which focus only on security and stability rather than a real integration. Actually, promoting democracy in Egypt reflexes a moderately pessimistic view of democracy policies within the EU's neighborhood.

If the EU really wants to promote democracy in Egypt, it has to devise new approaches and policies to support and promote democracy rather than having only slogans. The EU should rethink about its policy toward its neighbors. It must focus on a real integration between the two sides instead of focusing only on security and stability. Additionally, the EU has to seek and adopt more dialogue on the nature of the concept of democracy inside and outside European borders. Notably, the EU has to get rid of its double standards policy, lack of credibility and the old dynamics of stability that are considered the main deficits of the EU to pursue an ambitious democracy agenda and deter at the same time its capacity to have a significant impact on Egypt's democracy performance.

9. Assessing the European Union's democratic policies in Egypt

The EU's democracy promotion in Egypt before and after Arab uprisings brought some successes with variations which are marked by contradictory outcomes. The European policies in Egypt witnessed modest results, contradictions and even failures in some areas compared to the costs of the process. On the one hand, the EU succeeded in important reforms in trade liberalization. It is able to develop a strategy and to express a political

vision apart from the problematic issues. On the other hand, the EU did not bring clear changes in the political and social order of the region over the times. The EU as a whole has appeared to be merely able to develop tactics to cope with specific necessities, but never a strategy for a long-term assessment of the broader picture.

The policies the EU pursued to promote democracy in Egypt witnessed high level of contradiction. In [Balfour et al's \(2016\)](#) opinion, the EU's actions as a response to the Arab uprisings are considered as tools-based rather than strategy-led. [Tocci \(2012\)](#) states that the concept of deep democracy has simply vanished in recent EU documents which means a long-awaited paradigm shift in the EU's policies *vis-à-vis* the Southern Mediterranean. In the case of Egypt, there is nothing new; most of the democracy policies and programs are a continuation of previous ones. Furthermore, the EU has adopted a discriminating approach, giving priority to certain issues such as the death penalty, women's rights, torture and dialogue on human rights and gives a blind eye to other critical issues as institutional and global reforms as well as a real will to promote democracy ([Kurki, 2012](#)).

One of the main hindrances facing an effective EU policy on democracy is simply that the member states are not united ([Virgili, 2014](#)). As has been underlined by [Blockmans \(2013\)](#), this division among the European member states was much deeper and showed that the EU has been hesitant and uncertain about how to respond to recent developments in Egypt which have raised serious doubts about the EU's role as a credible and influential actor. In addition, the European foreign policy has a dual nature. From one side, it has an intergovernmental character, but from the other side, the EU is assuming more and more functions ([Morillas, 2012](#)).

[Khalifa \(2012\)](#) states that the EU has tried to promote democracy in Egypt along with maintaining political stability of the authoritarian regime for its strategic and geopolitical significance, for its crucial and sincere role in the fight against terrorism and illegal migration, for its importance to secure energy routes from North Africa and for its ability to detain the rise of political Islam in the country. [Pace and Cavatorta \(2012\)](#) argue that relations between the EU and Egypt are based heavily on the dilemma on how to promote democracy without risking stability and security in Egypt and in the entire region.

To conclude, during and after the Arab uprisings, the EU witnessed a global decline in its extensive influence in the Southern Mediterranean region. The new political scenario in the region has intensely affected the EU's position *vis-à-vis* Egypt, where other emerging actors are trying to increase their economic and political roles. As has been remarked by [Youngs \(2014\)](#), one of the side effects of the shift in political dynamics in Egypt is that the EU's conditionality of aid in democracy could be seriously weakened. Also, donors are alleged as showing less regard for environmental and labor standards and for the democratic permits of recipient governments. In this scenario, the EU will have less influence to push for democratic changes in Egypt and, consequently, the European model will lose its appeal that used to have in the past.

[Manning \(2006\)](#) finds that the EU does not seem likely to strengthen its influence owing to the financial crisis which the EU has been facing since 2008, and the political confusion surrounding the European integration project. Simply, the EU lacks the economic and political strength to play carrot and stick which helps to decline the EU's capacity to have an expressive influence in Egypt's transition to democracy.

10. Conclusion

The uprisings in January 2011 clearly illustrate the failings and weaknesses of the EU approach to the promotion of democracy in Egypt, paving the way to legitimate criticisms of selectivity, double standards and lack of effectiveness. The EU was hesitant and adopted a

cautious approach, “wait and see”, until it was clear that President Mubarak had no option but to leave power.

The uprisings have not only signified the failure of authoritarian ruling regimes but also of EU policies toward the region. Most evaluations of the EU’s democracy promotion policies in Egypt proved that these policies were very ineffective and limited. Then, the EU tried to adapt to the new scenario and reviewed some of its policies and instruments *vis-à-vis* the whole Mediterranean region, including Egypt. The EU is not reacting effectively against the deterioration of democracy in Egypt. It is challenged with an old dilemma, and it prefers security and stability in Egypt over democracy. The EU’s capacity to exert influence on Egypt has been dramatically reduced following the uprisings which push the EU to open a strategic reflection about its role in the Southern Mediterranean as a whole, particularly in Egypt.

Finally, the European policy should be tailored to each Arab country considering the varying levels of democratic development to determine appropriate timelines for implementation. It is unreasonable to think that an action plan negotiated with and for one country will be suitable for another. Countries that have already taken steps toward political and economic openness, such as Morocco and to a lesser extent Egypt, should not be exposed to the same requirements as regimes that continue to exercise state control over the entire public sphere such as Syria and Libya. Consequently, the European policies should draw a distinction between spreading democracy and holding a free election which is only considered as an individual component of democracy. Besides, the EU should identify clear criteria and measurements to suit Southern neighbors to make sure that funds reach countries which deserve and fairly adopt reforms to support democracy.

References

- Askar, I.K. (2014), “Limits of EU democracy promotion in the Arab Middle East: the cases of Egypt and Morocco”, *Uluslararası Hukukve Politika*, Vol. 44 No. 38, pp. 33-67.
- Association between the European Union and Egypt (2017), “EU – Egypt Partnership priorities 2017-2020”, The Association Council, Brussels.
- Aydin, S.E. (2012), “European Neighborhood Policy: the case of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, occupied Palestine and Tunisia”, *The Journal of International Social Research*, Vol. 5 No. 22, pp. 234-235.
- Balfour, R., Fabbrini, S. and Youngs, R. (2016), “Report on democracy assistance from the European Union to the Middle East and North Africa”, EU Spring Report.
- Behr, T. (2012), “The European Union’s Mediterranean policies after the Arab spring: can the Leopard change its spots?”, *Amsterdam Law Forum*, Vol. 4 No. 2, p. 78.
- Bicchi, F. (2009), “Democracy assistance in the mediterranean: an overview”, *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 61-78, doi: [10.1080/13629390902747459](https://doi.org/10.1080/13629390902747459).
- Blockmans, S. (2013), “Egypt and the EU: where next?”, CEPS Commentary, 2.
- Bolous, R. (2007), “How does the EU promote democracy in Egypt? A European strategy put to the test”, Bachelor Thesis, Institut für Politikwissenschaft, available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/f196/f2af15c371a84d45d32cece64e9ad1e3dae3.pdf>
- Comelli, M. (2010), “Dynamics and evolution of the EU-Egypt relationship within the ENP framework”, Istituto Affari Internazionali, available at: www.files.ethz.ch/isn/124970/iai1002.pdf
- Duquet, S. and Wouters, J. (2015), “Search of green shoots: assessing the EU’s SPRING programme”, IE. Mediterranean, pp. 230-232, available at: www.iemed.org/osservatori/arees-danalisi/arxius-adjunts/

[anuari/med.2015/IEMed%20Yearbook%202015_Panorama_GreenShootsEUSpringProgramme_SanderijnDuquet.pdf](#)

- Farouk, Y. (2014), *More than Money: Post-Mubarak Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf*, Gulf Research Center, Dubai.
- Hatab, S. (2019), "Deepening democracy or stabilization? European neighborhood policy (ENP) and the 'Arab spring'", *Review of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 20-37.
- Hollis, R. (2011), "Europe and the Middle East: has the EU missed its moment of opportunity?", *Middle Eastern Studies/Ortadogu Etütleri*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 37-38.
- Khalifa, S. (2012), "Europe and the Arab revolutions. From a weak to a proactive response in a changing neighbourhood", 39 KFG Working Paper, Vol. 7.
- Kurki, M. (2012), "How the EU can adopt a new type of democracy support", working paper No. 112, FRIDE, March.
- Manning, R. (2006), "Will 'emerging donors' change the face of international co-operation?", *Development Policy Review*, Vol. 24 No. 4, pp. 371-385.
- Mari, A. (2017), "Democracy promotion and stability in Egypt and Tunisia", Master thesis, Leiden University.
- Michou, H. (2016), "EU-Egypt bilateral relations: what scope for human rights advocacy?", *EuroMed Droits*, pp. 8-9, available at: <https://euromedrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/EuroMed-Rights-EU-Egypt-report-external-EN.pdf>
- Morillas, P. (2011), "Institutionalization or intergovernmental decision-taking in foreign policy: the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty", in Cardwell, P. (Ed.), *EU External Relations Law and Policy in the Post-Lisbon Era*, T.M.C. Asser Press, Springer, Germany, pp. 122-123.
- Pace, M. and Cavatorta, F. (2012), "The Arab uprisings in theoretical perspective – an introduction", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 125-138.
- Silvestri, S. (2005), "EU relations with Islam in the context of the EMP's cultural dialogue", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 10 No. 3, p. 388.
- Smith, K.E. (2005), "The outsiders. The European neighborhood policy", *International Affairs*, Vol. 81 No. 4, pp. 757-773.
- Sundsten, A. (2013), "Did the Arab spring change the European Union's democracy promotion in the Middle East? The EU's democracy assistance in Egypt and Jordan before and after the uprisings", A Master Degree, Uppsala University, Uppsala.
- The Association Council (2017), "EU-Egypt Partnership priorities 2017-2020", Brussels.
- Tina, F. Sandra, L. Frank, S. Tatiana, S. and Anne, W. (2015), "Models of EU democracy promotion: from leverage to governance", pp. 10-24, available at: www.researchgate.net/publication/304876193_Models_of_EU_Democracy_Promotion_From_Leverage_to_Governance
- Tocci, N. (2012), *One year on: A Balance Sheet of the EU's Response to the Arab Spring*, Opinions on the Mediterranean, Op-Med, Washington, DC, pp. 2-3.
- Van, V. (2009), "EU democracy promotion in the Mediterranean cooperation against all odds?", KFG Working Paper No. 9.
- Virgili, T. (2014), "The Arab spring and the EU's democracy promotion in Egypt: a missed appointment", *Perspectives on Federalism*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 42-75.
- Wouters, J. and Duquet, S. (2013), "The Arab uprisings and the European Union: in search of a comprehensive strategy", 98 Working Paper, Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, p. 9.
- Youngs, R. (2002), "The European Union and democracy promotion in the Mediterranean. A new or disingenuous strategy?", *Democratization*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 40-62.
- Youngs, R. (2014), *Europe in the Middle East. Opportunity or Exclusion?*, Vol. 6, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Further reading

Jonasson, A.K. (2013), "Constructions of democracy: meanings of 'Democracy' in the EU's relations with the Mediterranean region", *7th ECPR General Conference*, Bordeaux, Vol. 3.

Knüpfer, C. (2014), "The shallowness of deep democracy? EU democracy promotion in the MENA region after the Arab spring", Master's Thesis, University of Amsterdam.

Preamble of the Barcelona Declaration (1995).

Corresponding author

Alaa Hosny Zahran can be contacted at: doctorpolitics123@gmail.com