



With the Arab Spring the EU's weakness in promoting democratic reforms in its southern neighborhood came to the fore.

Assessing the EU's and Turkey's Democracy Promotion Policies in the Post-Arab Spring Era: Dynamics and Limitations of "Joint EU-Turkey Cooperation" in MENA

Arap Baharı Sonrası AB ve Türkiye'nin Demokrasi Teşvik Politikalarını Anlamak: Ortadoğu ve Kuzey Afrika Bölgesinde AB-Türkiye Ortaklığının Dinamikleri ve Limitleri

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Özet

Bu çalışma, Arap Dünyasındaki son gelişmelerin ışığı altında ilk olarak, AB ve Türkiye'nin demokrasi teşvik politikalarının Arap Baharı öncesi ve sonrası tarihsel gelişimini, içeriğini, dinamiklerini ve engellerini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, bu çalışma her iki aktörün farklı çıkarları ve özellikle halk ayaklanmalarının olduğu Arap ülkelerinde İslamist partilerin iktidara gelmesiyle ilgili olarak ayrı algulamalarının olmasına rağmen demokrasiye destek ve demokratikleşme alanında değişen Ortadoğu ve Kuzey Afrika bölgesinde bir AB-Türkiye ortaklığının etkin olarak hayata geçirilip geçirilemeyeceğini sorgulamaktadır. Söz konusu bölgede Batı'nın kendi demokratik modeli çok işlevsel olmadığından, demokrasiyi teşvik alanında AB-Türkiye stratejik ortaklığı -bu ortaklığın limitleri olmasına rağmen- bugün çok daha önemli bir hale gelmiştir. Bu ortaklık, Türkiye'nin kendi demokratikleşmesini hızlandırması ve "demokrasiyi teşvik edici" yeni rolüyle bağlantılı ek bir sorumluluk olarak iç ve dış demokrasi destek faaliyetleri arasında bir paralellik kurması açısından Türkiye için yararlı olacaktır.

One of the largest paradoxes regarding the EU's external democracy assistance towards the Mediterranean appears to be the EU's single and standardized democracy approach. Since the 1990s the EU has promoted a specific European version of democracy by focusing on human rights and socio-economic development.

Abstract

In light of the recent developments in the Arab world this study first aims to assess the historical evolution and content as well as the potential and limitations of the EU's and Turkey's democracy promotion roles before and after the Arab Spring. It also intends to assess whether joint Turkey-EU cooperation in supporting democracy and democratization in the changing MENA region can be effectively operationalized despite the two actors' differing interests and perceptions, especially with the coming to power of popular Islamist parties in these Arab Spring countries. Since the Western democratic model does not necessarily work in MENA, joint strategic EU-Turkey cooperation in democracy promotion appears vital despite its limitations. This cooperation would be beneficial for Turkey, forcing it to accelerate its own democratization efforts, and, thus, to establish a parallelism between its domestic and external democracy supporting activities as an added responsibility associated with its new democracy promoter role.

Keywords: *democracy promotion, Arab Spring, Turkish foreign policy and democracy, European Union, Turkey, the MENA region*

Introduction

Since the start of the Arab upheavals in late 2010, the EU and Turkey, as two important actors in the MENA region, have continuously adjusted their foreign policies to the new realities in the region. Up to now, three consecutive periods can be seen when assessing the way the EU and Tur-

key have pragmatically and strategically recalibrated their foreign policies vis-à-vis the rapidly changing domestic conditions in the reforming Arab countries as well as the systemic changes in the region. In the first months following the outbreak of the popular protests, which started in Tunisia in late 2010 and moved to other Arab countries, namely Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain, the EU and Turkey had low-profile and ambivalent policies toward the reversal of the authoritarian Arab regimes they had long been supporting. In this "hesitation" period, both were caught by surprise by the unexpected start and expansion of the popular uprisings, and quickly moved from their earlier status quoist policies to actively and openly supporting democratic transition.

In the second period, which followed the initial shock, the EU's and Turkey's initial cautious attitude toward the revolts was then slowly replaced by a "cooperation period" between the two actors which lead to the reinforcement of existing ties between them. It was after the Libyan crisis that the two actors began to get more and more involved in the MENA region through political, economic and societal means. In addition, NATO's Libyan intervention underscored the necessity of a real revision in the EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and of increasing cooperation with other regional powers, especially in the field of democracy promotion. In this cooperation period, the worsening Syrian crisis created a strategic turn in European and Turkish foreign policies and has not only become a litmus test for Turkey's and the EU's roles and capabilities in the region, but also has provided a

platform for a Turkish-European cooperation in the MENA region.¹

Another development which opened up a new period in Turkey-EU post-Arab Spring cooperation was the 3 July 2013 military coup in Egypt that removed Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's first democratically-elected president, from power. In this period of "divergence" Turkish leaders' condemnation of the military coup and their strong criticism of the West's silence on the coup added new complexities to possible cooperation in the MENA region as the two actors were on different sides. Turkey's reading of the recent Egyptian crisis has largely differed from the EU's, which seems to have sided with stability over democracy. Another and the most recent, controversial issue which seems to have moved Turkey and the EU apart was the 21 August 2013 Syrian "chemical attack" crisis.

Against this backdrop and given the new circumstances which has made EU-Turkey cooperation in democracy promotion difficult, this study first aims to assess the historical evolution and content, as well as the potentials and limitations, of the EU's and Turkey's democracy promotion roles before and after the Arab Spring. It also intends to examine the mechanisms and instruments that these two actors could jointly promote democratization in the changing MENA region despite their differing interests and perceptions, especially with regard to the rise to power of popular Islamist parties in the Arab countries. This study's novel contribution to the existing literature on Turkish foreign policy and European studies will be to assess the potentials and limitations of the EU's and of Turkey's democracy promotion roles in the post-Arab Spring, and to investigate whether joint Turkey-EU cooperation in supporting democracy and democratization in the changing MENA region can move beyond rhetoric.

From the EU's democracy promotion dilemma in the MENA to revisiting the democracy promotion rationale

Since the 1990s, democracy promotion has been one of the EU's principal instruments in its ex-

ternal relations. It has generally been acknowledged that the EU's own liberal-democratic and capitalist type of governance and its successful structural processes can be emulated in its neighborhood. While the EU's political liberalization and democratization policy has achieved positive results in its Central and Eastern European neighborhood, which led to the accession of the former communist eastern bloc countries to the EU in 2004, the same political processes have faced several constraints and challenges in its Mediterranean neighborhood.

A retrospective look at the EU's democracy promotion toward the Mediterranean

One of the largest paradoxes regarding the EU's external democracy assistance towards the Mediterranean appears to be the EU's single and standardized democracy approach. Since the 1990s the EU has promoted a specific European version of democracy by focusing on human rights and socio-economic development. After the implementation of the EMP (Euro-Mediterranean Partnership) in 1995 a new partnership was launched, the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).² The main objective of the EIDHR is to address non-state actors including public and private sector non-profit organizations and it can be used without the approval of the host government.³ Following on from the EIDHR,⁴ in 1999 the EuropeAid Cooperation Office, an agency of the European Commission, was charged with implementing projects in third countries.

With the implementation of the MEDA program in 1996, a democratization program was mainly directed towards regional NGOs, was the aim of supporting the political transition of Mediterranean countries as well as their economic development.⁵ The evolution of democracy promotion from a political commitment into a legal obligation came about with the launch of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in 1993 with the Maastricht Treaty.⁶ After it was implicitly integrated into the EMP in 1995, during the Nice Summit in 2001 democracy promotion was officially acknowledged as a foreign policy objec-



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tive of the EU as its first and second political pillars, and two EU institutions were charged with implementation: the European Commission and the Council of the EU. Then the EU continued to support democracy in its neighborhood through the ENP, informed by bilateral understandings thanks to the Action Plans (AP), the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements (EMAA), the external cooperation program MEDA and finally its successor, ENPI, which also deals with civil society actors in democracy promotion.

It can be argued that although since the 1990s the EU has used some specific democracy promotion tools, such as political dialogue and negotiations, unilateral declarations, conditionality (positive and negative), and democracy assistance targeted at both state and non-state actors (civil society actors)⁷, its democracy promotion has been far from being efficient and consistent, especially during implementation. In ad-

dition, the EU's democracy promotion efforts have been driven by an important number of tools and mechanisms that have drawn mostly on cooperative approaches, instead of such conflictive approaches as sanctions.⁸ For instance, the EMP has often been criticized for its misuse of conditionality provisions, especially in terms of distributing funds that have not been totally linked to the political situation in the recipient countries.⁹ In this regard, Egypt, which has long received a great deal in spite of its semi-authoritarian regime, serves as an example. There is an abundance of scholarly literature that criticizes the EU's MENA foreign policy for being oriented toward the preservation of stability, security and geostrategic gains rather than the promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Most recent analyses treat the democracy-stability dilemma of the EU in the Mediterranean region by focusing mostly on three main argu-

ments. The first is that the EU's democracy promotion and democratic governance policies in the Arab world through the EMP and the ENP were basically driven by a security and strategic imperative rather than an ethical or moral one.¹⁰ The second argument links the failure of the EU's democratization policies in this region to the shortcomings in applying conditionality to the Arab states' foreign behaviors rather than to their democratization and development.¹¹ The third argument stresses that as the EU remains skeptical towards the rise of political Islam or Islamism, a mixture of politico-religious ideas attracting the masses and growing in popularity in Arab societies, it is reluctant to condemn human rights violations against Islamist groups and the oppression of Islamists by Western-friendly authoritarian Arab regimes.¹² This third argument has been partly proven right in the EU's reluctance to condemn the 3 July 2013 military coup in Egypt which ended with the end of a government that had Muslim Brotherhood political roots.

According to Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, even before the start of the Arab upheavals, "both democracy promotion by outsiders and democratization from the inside have arrived at a critical stage in the Middle East" as democracy promotion is considered a Western push and "has been tainted by association with the highly unpopular intervention in Iraq."¹³ As the authors argue, another problematic issue regarding the question of democracy promotion in the Middle East derives from the lack of available experience in the Arab world regarding the democratic trends in other regions of the world since the end of the Cold War. Another consequence is the conviction that outside actors such as the EU and the US could transform the political direction of other societies and regions. A further feature and dilemma which has long dominated the democracy promotion discourse in Western circles is vagueness regarding the path to democracy to be chosen in specific Arab countries.¹⁴ With the start of the Arab upheavals it has been proven that Western democracy promotion efforts do not fit completely into the Arab societies' own reality.

Decoding the EU's reviewed democracy promotion policy in the post-Arab Spring era: Changes and challenges ahead

Before the start of the revolts in Tunisia in late 2010, the EU had already been engaged in a major mid-term review of its ENP. It acknowledged that the ENP should push for more democratic and political reforms in neighboring countries. With the unfolding of the Arab upheavals, the necessity of the ENP's review became a real imperative for the Commission. For academics and policy-makers the reasons behind the EU's failure in democracy promotion in the region are multiple: an underestimation of the domestic equilibriums of the authoritarian regimes; deep socio-economic problems and underdevelopment in the region; incompatibility between Islam and Western type democratic values; and incoherence between the democratic and security goals of the EU's Mediterranean foreign policy.

With the Arab Spring the EU's weakness in promoting democratic reforms in its southern neighborhood came to the fore. As a result, the EU Commission took important steps toward operationalizing the ENP with two new communications, the Commission's March 2011 Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity (PDSP), and its new May 2011 Response to a Changing Neighborhood, which underlined the implementation of three principal imperatives: "more benefits, more conditionality and more partnership with civil society".¹⁵ The principals that the new ENP strengthened are the principle of conditionality, differentiation and bilateralism. While the principle of conditionality would allow for the allocation of more EU funds to countries undergoing domestic transition, the principle of differentiation shows the development of the links between the EU and its transitioning partners.

It can be argued that the 2011 version of the ENP also revealed some limitations in terms of operationalizing the conditionality principle and of the incomplete nature of the new civil society dialogue, mainly due to the increasing number of state and non-state actors engaged in the MENA

region after the Arab uprisings. In the new ENP it still remained unclear whether the EU's southern partners would be rewarded for announced/planned or effectively achieved reforms. Another limitation of the ENP review was that the EU would not apply its conditionality clause until 2014.¹⁶ Furthermore, in the new ENP the funds offered were not real incentives for countries in the MENA region to undertake significant reforms considering the rapidly deteriorating economic conditions after the revolts.¹⁷

In light of these limitations in the 2011 ENP review, it can be argued that new ENP does little to enhance Europe's profile in terms of democracy assistance. In addition, the EU is also engaged in strengthening its democracy promotion agenda through new initiatives such as the launch of the "deep democracy" concept, the European Endowment of Democracy (EED) project,¹⁸ the new Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy Promotion¹⁹ and the Civil Society Facility Program 2012 for North Africa and the Middle East (CSF). Despite these new initiatives, the EU's democracy promotion agenda is still characterized by ontological and structural lacunae. The popular Arab uprisings in the MENA region highlighted the West's "democratic" double standards: pushing some autocratic governments towards democracy, but not condemning the removal of the democratically-elected Islamist government by the military in Egypt, as well as closing their eyes to the other dictatorships in the Arab world which have been supporting Western interests.

According to scholar Richard Youngs, it is of vital importance for the EU to have a pluralist approach to democracy promotion that is not based on one tight "EU model of democracy". He stresses that "the EU should work towards a tightened categorization of what qualifies as democracy aid (not) be supported under the banner of democracy."²⁰ To Youngs, this flexible interpretation of democracy promotion and the absence of a transparent definition of democracy or a catalogue of what constitutes democracy promotion seem to benefit the EU's own commercial and security interests. This flexibility

also allows the EU to cooperate with other partner governments in the world and to adjust its agenda to new international and regional situations and challenges. A content-enriched EU democracy promotion agenda should go beyond focusing on only the electoral process and take into account the other important elements of democratic systems, such as political rights and the horizontal accountability,²¹ in other words the checks and balances in the political system, as well as promoting deliberation based on open dialogue with all the other democratic actors.²² In order to tackle its democracy promotion shortcomings a more reflective democracy promotion agenda is required for the EU in the post-Arab Spring era, one that analyzes the effects of the substance of democracy promotion activities on democratization and places an emphasis on more comprehensive democracy mainstreaming by closely linking policy actions to trade and development policies.

Understanding Turkey's democracy promotion approach in the MENA region: Rhetoric, policy and instruments

Since the Republican period democracy promotion policies have not occupied a central place in the Turkish foreign agenda of successive Turkish governments. Of course, this does not mean that democracy remained a non-issue in Turkish politics in general and in foreign policy in particular. However, since the Cold War the Turkish authoritarian-type of democracy has been severely criticized both in domestic and international political platforms.

Like that of the EU, Turkey's approach to democracy and democratization is problematic. Turkey's own democratic shortcomings and the continuous criticism toward its democracy pitfalls, coming essentially from its Western partners, has long put democracy and democratization at the core of Turkish foreign policy,²³ especially since the 1990s when Turkish-EU relations started to gain institutional ground with Turkey's complex and ambiguous candidacy. Since 1999, when Turkey was officially given EU candidate status, the country has had a rapid democratization

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process at home that has implemented a series of European reforms. While the EU as a norm distributor pursued its democracy promotion policy toward Turkey in the 1990s with the use of indirect and direct promotion mechanisms, Turkey has only timidly raised democratization and democracy promotion abroad, primarily in Central Asia and the Caucasus²⁴ through the launch of the first Turkish model discourse with the newly independent post-Soviet countries.²⁵ However, as the 1990s were marked by successive human rights violations mainly due to rising PKK terrorism, Turkey's democracy discourse abroad failed to yield significant results and, as a result, it remained artificial and thus lacked credibility in the eyes of Turkey's Western allies.

In 2002 with the coming of the AKP to power, Turkey gained a much more nuanced and enriched democratic understanding and expanded its work toward the non-Western world. During the first AKP period (2002-2007) when a significant number of European reform packages were implemented, AKP leaders conceived and promoted their identity as a democratizing force both in domestic and international arenas.²⁶ However, only with the AKP's second mandate (2007-2011) did the issue of democracy start to rise in Turkish decision makers' discourses, public speeches and declarations regarding international and regional affairs. With the implementation of new foreign policy instruments such as mediation, development and civilian capacity assistance and the rise of "humanitarian diplomacy" as a new foreign policy framework,²⁷ especially toward Africa and the Middle East, Turk-

ish foreign policy gained a peaceful, civilian and normative character.²⁸ Referred to as "global development diplomacy efforts," Turkey's civilian capacity initiatives increased considerably in the last decade, and combined with a strategy-based multi-dimensional and balanced humanitarian oriented foreign policy²⁹ largely contributed to the emergence of Turkey on the international scene as a "newcomer" in democracy promotion.

Nevertheless, despite all these AKP government efforts to institutionalize Turkish foreign policy's democratic stance abroad, Turkey's close political and economic ties with the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and Eurasia prevented it from developing an official and transparent democratic promotion agenda. Furthermore, the difficulties that the AKP government envisaged in the last three years while putting into practice its principle of "zero problems with the neighbors", the non-resolution of the Kurdish problem and the considerable slowdown in the democratization process at home, which is associated with some authoritarian tendencies in the government's political style and practice, as seen partly during the recent Gezi Park protests in May 2013, have also proven that there is an ambivalence and inconsistency in Ankara's pro-democracy policies at both domestic and international levels.

From this perspective, it can be argued that while the Arab popular protests have strengthened Turkey's hand in external democracy promotion by accelerating Turkey's push for democracy outside its borders,³⁰ they have also showed the

degree to which Turkey's success in its external democracy promotion activities is highly dependent on the progress in democratization at home. This last point has been proven right when Turkey's emerging democracy-centered approach in foreign policy started to lose credibility and accountability in the eyes of its Western allies after the Gezi Park protests in May 2013.

Obviously, with the start of the Arab revolts Turkey's conservative approach to democracy promotion was gradually replaced with an active but inconsistent policy that was mostly rhetorical. Here it is worth remembering that in the first months of the Arab uprisings some up and downs were seen in Turkey's initial response to these revolts. For instance, when the Arab revolts started, Turkey did not side immediately with the pro-democratic forces seeking reform. Rather, Turkey first adopted a cautious, low-profile and "wait and see" approach like most of Europe. However, this short "hesitation and shock" period moved to a "democracy-centered, humanitarian and justice-based normative approach and discourse". Prime Minister Erdoğan's early appeal for Mubarak's resignation and his famous speech on secularism during his 2011 visit in Tunisia and in Egypt are all indicative of the changes in Turkey's democracy promotion agenda toward the Arab countries under reform.

Particularly, the increased tensions as a result of the Syrian crisis throughout 2012-2013 pushed Turkish leaders to pursue a more pronounced humanitarian and normative diplomacy that prioritized democracy, justice and rule of law in the MENA region. Turkey's strong rejection of Egypt's President Morsi's removal by the army on 3 July 2013 clearly shows that there is continuity in Turkey's democracy-centered foreign policy. However, Turkish leaders' strong identification with the Muslim Brotherhood movement and its heavy "democracy" and "justice and moral"-centered discourse has been criticized by both its Western allies and Arab neighbors. Another sign of Turkey's moral diplomacy can be seen in the Turkish leaders' strong criticism of the existing UN-based international order and of its international humanitarian intervention

and justice understanding which is, in their view, unable to respond to the needs of the changing international system. This critical discourse by Turkish leaders became more apparent after the Ghouta chemical attack by the Syrian regime on 21 August 2013, which rapidly turned into an international crisis around whether to launch a limited and targeted military strike against Syria as punishment.

In the light of the latest developments, it is still too early to argue that Turkey's new "democratic" discourse and direct/indirect democracy promotion activities will generate productive results in the MENA region in terms of emancipation and of institutionalization of democracy. The rise of external democracy promotion and assistance as an effective diplomatic tool in Turkish foreign policy has many elements. First, Turkey's rising power status in today's changing international system is closely linked to the increasing attractiveness of its particular political and economic model. This has enabled it to pursue pro-democratic diplomacy and assistance which aims to help democratic and civil actors fight against dictatorial or semi-authoritarian regimes. Secondly, the loss of democratic momentum in the world since the middle years of the last decade³¹ and the significant loss of credibility of the US and the EU and of the global political and economic governance models in the eyes of developing and transitional countries with the 2008 global financial crisis pushed Turkey and other rising powers to adjust and reform their democracy support agendas and instruments.³²

In line with this reasoning, the argument of Thomas Carothers and of Richard Youngs about "rising democracies" is also interesting.³³ They conclude that there is a growing need for Western democracies to engage with these rising democracies, which have been recently expanding their role and influence in supporting democracy and human rights in accordance with their own understandings and choices and not in response to pressure from the West.³⁴ For instance, new Arab regimes under transition might more comfortably enter into dialogue with these rising democracies due to shared historical trajectories and legacies.



The weakness of secular parties, the lack of constituency-based organizations and the lack of institutions and processes that can allow for political competition are important obstacles to real democratization in the post-Arab Spring MENA region.

In the MENA context, among the five “rising democracies” identified by Carothers and Youngs (Brazil, India, South Africa, Indonesia and Turkey),³⁵Turkey appears as the most important actor as it has the ability and potential to promote democratization policies. The fact that in the rise of Turkey the West occupies a central place, and that Turkey has historical, cultural and economic affinities with the MENA region, gives it a special status and a differentiated role among the other “rising democracies” which, in contrast, have pursued low-profile foreign policy toward the Arab revolts. In this context, Turkey’s subordinate role in the revamped democracy promotion policy matrix vis-à-vis the MENA region of the major powers—especially the EU—has become crucial.

Is a common European-Turkish commitment to democracy promotion possible for the MENA region?

With the Arab uprisings it has become clear that the EU’s indirect approach to democracy promotion, such as supporting economic reform, civil society and women’s rights, all of which were politically attractive to the domestic conditions in the donor countries, could not succeed in producing real democratic change in the Arab countries. In the Arab world now Islamic groups or organizations have a much broader popular base of support than the narrowly based elite organizations supported by the EU and the US. As clearly seen in the Egyptian case even two and half years after the immediate retreat

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of Mubarak from power, and despite some progress on the political and economic fronts, a real democratic transition has not been carried out.³⁶ In contrast, the country's short-lived transition toward democracy has ended up with an immediate return to state authoritarianism by the military. Here what is striking is the huge gap between the West's reading and perception of the political, economic and social reasons behind the Arab revolts and their reality. This gap also makes possible joint EU-Turkey cooperation in the MENA region more complex.

On the other hand, most of the political organizations and movements with the largest popular constituencies today have an Islamist origin such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and these groups remain skeptical about democracy and democratic institutions. The weakness of secular parties, the lack of constituency-based organizations and the lack of institutions and processes that can allow for political competition are important obstacles to real democratization in the post-Arab Spring MENA region.

The EU's failure to condemn the 3 July 2013 military coup in Egypt is clearly at odds with Turkish government criticism of it. The Egyptian coup highlighted not only the dilemma in the EU of a democracy promotion policy that is based on stability versus democracy, but also of Turkey's new external democracy promotion agenda. The rising debate on Turkey's "worthy solitude/precious loneliness" is a good indicator of diverging perspectives between Turkey and the EU on the recent Egyptian crisis. Regarding the Syrian crisis, in contrast to the arguments of some ob-

servers, it would be false to argue that Turkey and the EU have totally been at odds. In fact, the EU has no real consensus on how to peacefully tackle the recent Syrian chemical crisis. Despite some differences in their Syrian policies, the EU and Turkey seem to share common goals, such as the ousting of Assad and the hope for a democratic transition in Syria. It should also be noted that since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, Turkey has appealed for a more active international involvement in support of the Syrian opposition. In doing so, Turkey has pursued a "diplomacy first" approach and remains open to alternative diplomatic solutions to be sought at Geneva II. On the other hand, it is important to remind that Turkey's reading of the Syrian chemical crisis and its approach to solving it has many commonalities with that of France, one of the leading EU countries and which has considerable political weight on both the EU's diplomatic and security concerns.

Given the current challenges and despite the differences in their responses to the new crisis in the MENA region, there is still a need to find a convergence between the EU and Turkey on a common strategic MENA vision that puts democracy promotion policy at the center. Like the EU, Turkey has also long lacked a strong strategic rationale for its support of democratic change in its MENA neighborhood. According to some observers, the lack of an adequate strategic perspective also applies to the reassessment of Turkish-EU relations in the light of the Arab Spring and has pushed the EU to prioritize closer coordination with Turkey in the Arab world.³⁷ Some scholars even point out that spe-

cial attention “in recent years has shifted from Turkey as an EU candidate country, to Turkey as a necessary regional partner.”³⁸ This can help not only the EU but also the US when they develop common strategies with Turkey, particularly in the area of democracy promotion thanks to its closeness to the key political and civil actors of the MENA region.³⁹ The biggest advantage that Turkey holds today in its neighborhood in terms of democracy promotion is that since the foundation of the Republic it has embraced most of the democratic and liberal values and norms of the West.

Despite these potentialities, some limitations exist in implementing EU-Turkey cooperation on democracy promotion. Compared with experienced donors such as USAID, EuropeAid (the Directorate General for Development and Cooperation) and SIDA (The Swedish Aid Agency), Turkey’s aid agency, TİKA (the Turkish Cooperation Agency), has not developed clear “democracy” and “civil society” strategies and mechanisms to engage a diverse range of NGOs both in Turkey and in recipient countries and to actively promote development and democracy. The lack of greater cooperation between TİKA and NGOs both in Turkey and abroad is a principal obstacle to its effectiveness in development and democracy assistance. In this regard, regular dialogue between DEVCO-EuropeAid and TİKA is a must, both at the level of policy planning units and in specific countries where TİKA and the European Commission are working.

Given the close contacts between Turkey’s political parties and civil society organizations and Islamist groups in the Arab countries, such as with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the al-Nahda Movement in Tunisia, and Hamas in Palestine, Turkey’s contribution to newly launched instruments of the EU such as the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) and the Civil Society Facility Program 2012 (CSF) is also crucial.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Today it has been proven that “the Western model does not necessarily work in MENA and the

EU must therefore adapt to local, regional, social and religious settings in this region.”⁴¹ In this regard, joint EU-Turkey cooperation in terms of democracy promotion appears more vital and valuable than before. In order to be conceived as a legitimate pro-democracy actor in the region, Turkey should increase coordination with its Western allies on a common strategic ground based on a delicate balance between interests or values. As seen clearly in the recent Egyptian and Syrian crisis, abstract and idealistic foreign policy discourse centered solely on values carries the risk of Turkey’s isolation and of alienating its Western allies.

In this regard, a stronger emphasis on democracy promotion in its external policies toward the Middle East would be beneficial for Turkey, and would force it to accelerate its democratization efforts at home and to establish linkages between its domestic and external democracy supporting activities. As a result the added responsibility associated with being a democracy promoter in MENA may also contribute to revitalizing Turkey’s own stalled democratic reform process. A joint strategic cooperation between the EU and Turkey in democracy promotion would not only reinforce Turkey’s attractiveness in the region but would also improve the image of Turkish democracy in the eyes of European governments, which still remain skeptical about Turkey’s eventual accession to the EU.

Last but not least, as scholars, Tanja A.Börzel and Thomas Risse argue, the EU’s democracy promotion role can be described as a “learning by doing” process.⁴² Similarly, Turkey, as a newcomer to democracy promotion, and the EU need time to learn how to coordinate their efforts in the changing Arab world in order to make their direct and indirect democracy promotion mechanisms more effective. As a starting point the recent democratization and human rights package declared by Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan on 30 September 2013 could serve in strengthening and legitimizing Turkey’s new democracy promotion role in its region.

ENDNOTES

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