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Two years on from the start of the "Arab Spring" and many key questions of international cooperation remain unanswered

By Annabelle Houdret and Markus Loewe,
German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)

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Bonn, 10 June 2013. It is now over two years since the "Arab Spring" shook the political systems of five countries to the core. The old regime in Yemen restored its rule under new leadership, while Syria finds itself in the grips of a full-blown civil war. Egypt, Tunisia and Libya were the only countries in which the government was actually toppled, yet even in these nations the revolutionaries of the first hour are now left bitterly disappointed for the most part. Economies have been devastated and violent conflicts between political camps are rife. New governments have been formed through democratic processes, yet they have so far been unable to reach a consensus within society on the way forward for their countries. The recent jail sentences handed down to members of foreign political foundations in Egypt, including the *Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*, show that, even under the new regimes, the rule of law and political freedom are by no means a certainty.

There are also undercurrents of discontentment with the political and socio-economic situation in many other Arab nations, though these have not yet led to any fundamental change in the authoritarian power structures of these countries.

At the same time, there has been no significant change in German and European policy towards the Arab countries, with decisions only based to a limited extent on whether or not the government of a given country is democratic. There are numerous questions to which it has failed to provide a consistent answer:

How should we deal with autocrats? Most Arab countries continue to be ruled by authoritarian regimes which ban opposition parties, set limits on free speech, and mistreat political prisoners. Are there not lessons to be learned about cooperation with such regimes from the years of support provided to Egypt under Mubarak and Tunisia under Ben Ali? Is it right to continue to judge each case according to different standards? If completely severing relationships with autocratic regimes is no way to respond to the "Arab Spring", then neither is refusing to reflect on the issues and adopting a business-as-usual approach. Ultimately, the aim must be to keep dialogue open, while positively influencing reform processes at the same time. Cooperation with authoritarian regimes can be worthwhile, particularly if it helps to improve living conditions for the general population. However, problems arise when cooperation shores up non-democratic regimes, thereby decreasing the pressure for political and economic reforms when it should be increasing it.

What criteria are used to select new cooperation partners after a regime has fallen? How do we deal with the representatives of old regimes and with the new authorities? How do we respond to attempts to intimidate, such as the aforementioned issuing of jail sentences for representatives of German non-governmental organisations? How should we interact with religious actors, and how can we do so in a way that gives due consideration to the wide variety of groups involved, from the peaceful to the radical?

What is it that we are seeking to achieve in our work with Arab countries? Given the scope and breadth of German and European development cooperation, we need clear guidelines. Is our primary objective to improve people's socio-economic conditions, or are we also seeking to promote human rights, political participation, and good governance? Or is our aim to ensure political stability, regardless of whether or not it is based on democratic principles? Or could it even be all about securing sales markets for German products?

How do we deal with conflicting goals? Of course, development cooperation can serve several of the aforementioned goals, but this raises the question of what to do when these goals end up conflicting with one another. For example, when development cooperation promotes agriculture and industry, but the European Union's trade policy prevents products from these sectors being exported to Europe, or when we extol the virtues of the rule of law, but at the same time supply arms that could be used to quell demonstrations. And how are we to deal with the dilemma of 'security verses democracy' as we go forward? For far too long, Germany has worked closely with autocratic regimes in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, supposedly promoting stability, yet supporting their secret

services, security forces and Internet censorship activities to the very end.

It is in such situations that a contradiction is often identified in development cooperation between promoting individual interests and upholding recognised values. Many decision-makers have admitted in the past that, when it comes to development cooperation with Arab countries, Germany and Europe are not concerned with promoting development and reducing poverty, but rather with ensuring stability along the Suez Canal and securing oil and gas supplies for Israel. Despite repeated warnings from regional experts, many failed to see that such a policy only brought short-term, superficial stability to Arab partner countries at the expense of human rights and democratic principles.

Developments over the last few years have shown that Europe's own interests do not have to conflict with values of development cooperation. Whatever benefits citizens in Arab countries is precisely what is good for Germany and Europe in the long term. We should prioritise the achievement of sustainable socio-economic and political stability in Arab countries over the short-term improvement of Europe's balance of trade, because without such stability, there will be no peace, and migration flows to Europe will increase on an unprecedented scale.

What can Germany and Europe offer Arab countries? What can we do to promote social, economic, political and environmental development in this part of the world, and how can we do so in a way that serves the objectives mentioned above?

The scope of development cooperation is far too limited for this, and, at the same time, we are neither the only foreign actor in this region, nor the most significant. Only when people in the Arab countries see realistic prospects for a better life will the economy experience an upturn and democratic principles and processes be established. Germany and Europe can only offer such prospects if they strategically coordinate key areas of their outward-looking policies to this end. Foreign, economic, trade, environmental, arms and migration policies all offer potential in this regard. It was the prospect of full European Union membership that was key to ensuring that the transformation of the Eastern European countries after 1989 took place peacefully and without any major setbacks at a time of social upheaval. While there is no such prospect for the Arab nations, Europe should at least offer to open its markets fully to goods and services from these countries and to be more generous in its policy towards Arab migrants.

Dr. Annabelle Houdret
Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)

Dr. Markus Loewe
Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)