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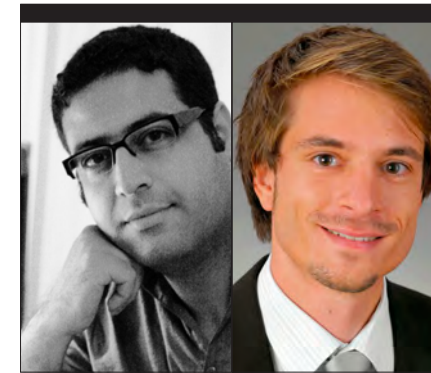
Europe from the Outside

Expectations of Europe's
External Cultural Relations

the culture of violence to mean those cultural aspects incarnated by religion and ideology, language and art that serve to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence. “If the opposite of violence is peace, then the opposite of the culture of violence is the culture of peace, that is the aspects of a culture which would serve to justify and to legitimise direct peace and structural peace.”

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A yearning for emancipation The Arab Spring was perceived in the Arab world as a final act of decolonisation. People are finally in a position to decide their own fates. Europe can now make a lasting contribution to the democratisation and development of the Maghreb through cultural and educational policy initiatives. In doing so, it can provide an effective blueprint for future policies towards other Arab countries in transition.
By Anis Ben Amor and Edmund Ratka



Union and its Member States. These could offer an effective response to the challenges posed by Arab states such as Tunisia that are in the process of transition.

The mass protests in Tunisia and other Arab Spring countries such as Egypt were, among other things, an expression of a yearning for emancipation, and in particular emancipation from their countries' authoritarian rulers. Their patriarchal rule was met by popular demands for self-determination and for a life free from state despotism and with equal economic opportunities for all.

For Tunisians, 14 January 2011 was the dawn of a new age that shed its light on the whole Arab world. The fall of President Zine el Abidene Ben Ali after two decades of ruling Tunisia with an iron fist marked the start of a complex and lengthy process of transformation. The break-up of the existing rigid political and social structures also presented new opportunities for culture and education in the country. By promoting and supporting development in these two areas, Europe can make a lasting contribution to the democratisation of Tunisia and, in so doing, provide an effective blueprint for future policies towards other Arab countries in transition. In this article we recommend five potential courses of action for future external cultural and educational policy initiatives on the part of the European

Encounters of equals

However, this process of emancipation, this 'reconquering' of the state by its citizens, also has an important global dimension. The protests against regimes that were often Western-oriented or indeed supported by the West were viewed by the Arab world as a final act of decolonisation that finally gave people their independence. It soon became clear that questions of national identity and national sovereignty need to be handled with much greater sensitivity in relations with 'post-revolutionary' Arab states.

With some of its countries burdened by their own colonial past, Europe can react at two different levels. First of all, it can adopt educational and cultural policies that treat the Arab states as equals, despite certain concrete imbalances (particularly in terms of budgets). This means accepting right from the start that cultural and educational relations are a two-way process. For example, European students could be encouraged to spend a semester in Tunisia, rather than just the other way round. The new Erasmus Plus programme is a step in the right direction and needs to be actively promoted. It is important for countries that have committed themselves to the process of democratisation to be allowed to benefit fully from the programme. Facilitating mobility between countries is also essential in order to promote cultural and academic exchange. For people in the Arab world, the issue of (temporary) access to Europe is a key indicator of just how serious the Europeans are when they promise genuine partnership with Arab states.

True partnership

Secondly, Europe needs to recognise that true partnership means actually involving the target groups of European programmes in the design and development of these programmes from the outset. This is particularly true of civil society, which is experiencing an unexpectedly powerful renaissance in Tunisia. The fall of authoritarian regimes such as that in Tunisia or the moderate reforms taking place in countries such as Morocco and Jordan have opened up new opportunities that need to be exploited. It is heartening to see that not only political actors such as the European External Action Service (EEAS) but also intermediary organisations like the European cultural institutes have in fact been

making strenuous efforts to implement such a bottom-up approach since the Arab Spring.

The ‘Revolution of Dignity’ is a term often applied to the popular uprising in Tunisia that toppled a regime generally regarded as kleptocratic family clique. The self-immolation of a young street vendor in rural Tunisia at the end of 2010 sparked mass protests. Many Tunisians identified with the economic injustice and arbitrary treatment that he had suffered at the hands of the authorities. Demands for an end to the kind of clientelism that was at the heart of the Ben Ali regime continue to this day. Even since the revolution, there have been regular protests against the recruitment processes adopted by public bodies. In January 2014 protests broke out in Gafsa against an environmental agency over suspicions that it was still riddled with corruption and nepotism.

In the past, European policies – including cultural and educational cooperation programmes – may have also unwittingly contributed to strengthening the system of clientelism in countries such as Tunisia. During Ben Ali’s time in power, grants from bodies such as the German Academic Exchange Service (GAES) for students to study in Europe were often allocated by the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education, so abuses of the system cannot be ruled out.

Since the revolution, institutions such as the GAES have taken the opportunity to contact their Tunisian target groups more directly by setting up their own offices in Tunisia and increasing the number of lectureships on offer at universities. This strategy should con-

tinue to be encouraged. In addition, advice and application processes should be designed in such a way (especially with regard to language) that as far as possible no stratum of society is excluded.

Despite the fact that there has been successful regime change in Tunisia, large parts of the state apparatus and other key public institutions are still dominated by the same elites and mentalities as before the revolution. Wherever possible, European cultural institutes should look beyond their normal practices and established relationships with local partners and endeavour to give opportunities to young people by offering then specific programmes with open, direct and transparent selection processes.

Anger at the growing levels of corruption and clientelism in the Ben Ali regime was not the only driving force behind the revolution. There was also a growing divide between the centre and outlying regions, between the well-to-do coastal regions and the country’s neglected inland areas. In the years leading up to the revolution, there had already been a number of protests in provincial towns, such as the mining town of Gafsa. In the end it was not the country’s capital but the poor region of Sidi Bouzid that provided the spark for the successful uprising.

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Bridging the divide between the centre and the periphery is now a major challenge, not only for Tunisian policymakers but also for European cultural and educational cooperation. There is no doubt that the cultural life of the capital Tunis and other coastal cities is far more dynamic and visible than elsewhere. The quality of the universities in these cities also helps them to attract research partners from around the world. European cultural institutes and other intermediary organisations must guard against the temptation to concentrate only on these particular hotspots.

Of course the search for suitable partners in the provinces is more laborious and it takes more time and effort for projects to be successful. But the European cultural institutes can provide assistance – and not just for the deprived sectors of society – by setting specific programmes for marginalised regions and either opening local offices or at least establishing fixed local contacts and partners. By making it clear, for example, that access to culture and education is the right of citizens from all regions of Tunisia they can send a powerful message to the elites in the Tunisian capital.

Setting an example through dialogue

After many years, the region’s authoritarian regimes have finally been forced to relax their iron grip on their countries. However, in some Arab states this has led to the emergence of cultural lines of conflict over the question of identity, whether ideological, ethnic or socio-economic. These lines of conflict have

intersected with struggles for the realignment of power, fanning the flames of civil war in Syria and spawning violent clashes between supporters and opponents of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

Even in a country like Tunisia, which is going through a relatively peaceful process of transition, the question of identity has assumed major importance. Mistrust is rife, particularly between the secular and Islamist camps. The political and public arenas have seen a great deal of controversy and debate about the precise role of Islam in the new constitution and how to deal with Salafist groups, some of which seem prepared to resort to violence to achieve their aims. This is probably the second biggest area of contention within Tunisian society after the centre/periphery issue and is reflected in the country's party system, with the Islamist Ennahdah and the secularist Nida Tounes representing the opposite ends of the political spectrum.

The fact that the end of decades of authoritarian rule in the country was accompanied by the repression of political Islam means that a new debate over the issue of the country's collective identity is unavoidable. There are two ways that Europe can help to ensure that this process takes the form of peaceful and constructive dialogue. Firstly, key European actors should set an important example by seeking dialogue with all groups that renounce violence. If only one side is seen to be receiving support, there is a danger that differences of opinion within the country over the issue of collective identity will become even more accentuated.

Secondly, European cultural and educa-

tional policies can create appropriate platforms for internal dialogue within Tunisia and provide programmes that will bring different groups together to discuss key issues. For example, all new parties, whatever their political persuasion, have a vested interest in developing an effective and democratic youth organisation. European intermediary organisations could offer assistance to all parties in this respect, which could incorporate joint seminars and educational trips.

Europe and its external cultural policy have reacted relatively quickly to the recent changes in North Africa. The EU and many Member States, including countries such as Germany that do not actually border the Mediterranean region, have already set up their own support programmes. Tunisia in particular is reaping the benefits from these.

However, transformation is a long-drawn-out process and this emergency aid for culture and education needs to be consolidated in the form of structural cooperation. Ad-hoc measures alone are not enough to meet the challenges facing cultural and educational policy in Tunisia and to establish Europe as a credible partner. All too often, such measures only benefit media-savvy groups that already enjoy high visibility and strong international networks.

If we look beyond financial issues, it is clear

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that European cooperation in the area of culture and education should be concentrated in two key areas. First of all, there needs to be a stronger focus on developing structures and creating multipliers. In concrete terms, joint projects with universities could involve students and lecturers alike. Universities could also be helped to redesign their curricula and set up research networks and graduate schools.

At a time of transition, when a country's citizens tend to put everything under the microscope, this kind of approach may well be the best way forward. In the Tunisian education sector people are acutely aware of the need for modernisation and internationalisation and so are keen to work with European partners.

Need for more regional integration

Secondly, projects by European cultural and intermediary organisations should not be launched only when the political climate means that funds are available. There needs to be a long-term commitment to such projects, including helping to guarantee their long-term viability, which includes efforts for secure follow-up funding. However, European cultural and educational policy stakeholders who make efforts at local level to work with these kinds of objectives in mind are often hampered by technical budgetary restrictions, such as the fact that funds cannot be carried over to the following year, and – particularly in the case of EU programmes – highly complex application procedures.

The protest movements of the Arab Spring took a remarkably parallel course. They were effectively a cross-border, pan-Arab phenomenon with young activists networking and inspiring each other. They also shared ideas (often only virtually) with people of like minds in other parts of the world, such as members of the Occupy and Indignados movements. The fall of authoritarian, power-hungry regimes in the Maghreb opened up new possibilities for regional integration in the future.

In addition, the popular uprisings all brought with them a feeling of national liberation (which in Egypt then took on a more nationalistic character during the difficult process of transition). National symbols such as flags and anthems were and still are an important component of the demonstrators' arsenal in the Arab Spring countries.

At a time when tensions are running high, Europe can make an important contribution to helping countries develop an enlightened and open sense of national identity that is not simply based on xenophobia and conspiracy theories but which opens the door to greater regional and Euro-Mediterranean integration. For this to happen, Europe itself needs to set an example. The rise in often xenophobic populism in many European countries and their restrictive immigration policies, especially towards the Arab countries in transition, means that Europe has seriously lost credibility over recent years.

In spite of these fundamental problems, external cultural and educational policies can still help to break down national barriers. On the European side, it is important to recognise that a trend towards the communitisation of cultural and educational policy is neither possible nor desirable, as individual national characteristics in this area are a reflection of Europe's cultural diversity. However, individual Member States' approaches should still be

incorporated into an overall European strategy in order to avoid duplication and competition and encourage multinational projects. For example, German Foreign Office funding regulations have made it difficult to involve nationals of other EU countries in special programmes for the Arab world within the framework of inter-university projects.

On the other hand, partner countries also need to be encouraged to commit to cross-border cooperation projects. The role of religion or the political marginalisation of young people and their lack of financial prospects are important issues in the whole of North Africa. Cultural and educational projects could create the platforms and networks needed to facilitate the sharing of ideas and experiences and in the medium term help to make progress towards greater political and economic integration.

In many instances, the euphoric sense of hope triggered in the early days of the Arab Spring has been destroyed by government brutality, ideological radicalisation, social polarisation, economic stagnation and geopolitical interests. However long and laborious the process of transformation proves to be, there is no doubt that the successful popular uprising in Tunisia in 2011 heralded the dawn of a new era in which European-Arab relations are increasingly being placed under the microscope. Over the years to come, joint cultural and educational projects that are adapted to the needs of the transition process and that take a long-term, dialogue-oriented and multinational approach based on partnership can certainly serve as role models.

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Seize the Spring Europe pursues a somewhat contradictory policy when it comes to the Middle East and North Africa. It flies the flag for the values and ideals of freedom, the rule of law, respect for human rights and solidarity. But then it goes on to pursue its own, largely economic, interests in its policies on trade, security and immigration. How can Europe make better use of the new opportunities for dialogue that have opened up as a result of the upheavals in the Arab world? *By Isabel Schäfer*



the intense dissatisfaction felt by civil societies with regard to their deficient political systems (lack of democracy and freedom, human rights abuses); socio-economic inequalities; unequal access to basic commodities such as accommodation and food; widespread corruption at all levels; and the effects of unbridled capitalism and the neo-liberal economic system on the national economies of the countries of North Africa and the Middle East.

The protest movements have also created a new relationship between people and politics. Until this point, civil societies had suffered what sometimes proved to be massive oppression at the hands of the region's authoritarian regimes. Now they have found their voice and are increasingly exerting their influence on political decision-making processes. After decades of repression and lack of political freedoms, the fall of the regimes suddenly revealed how political engagement on the part of individual citizens can bring about changes to the political system.

Certain civil society actors have opened up new spaces and instruments for political debate (such as in the new media and social

In the wake of the upheavals that have shaken the Middle East and North Africa since 2011 and rocked the societies of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, relations between Europe and the region are now undergoing a process of transformation and redefinition. The ties and relationships that bind these two extremely complex and culturally diverse regions with their very different institutions have always been politically difficult, burdened by their historical and cultural baggage and economic asymmetries. The historic turning point of the Arab Spring – even if this is no longer a spring – may now be used as an incentive to turn the spotlight on these relations, bring them up to a new level and give them a new, constructive impetus.

These upheavals were largely a result of