

Event Report

"Shaping Change in the Middle East" Presentation of KAS Position Paper on Political Cooperation in the Middle East/North Africa

Brussels, 31st May 2011

On Tuesday, 31st May 2011 the Multinational Development Policy Dialogue of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) in Brussels organised an Expert Roundtable Discussion on the occasion of the presentation of the KAS Position Paper on Political Cooperation in the Middle East/North Africa "Shaping Change in the Middle East". The author of the paper, Dr Martin Beck, who is Resident Representative of KAS in Amman/ Jordan, was present in Brussels in order to present the position paper and to engage in a general discussion with European experts on the region.

The position paper for political cooperation in the Middle East, which has been finalized immediately before the Arab uprising, has as its basis ten principles that address development in the Middle East and Political Cooperation in the form practised in the region by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. It is to be understood as a positioning of the work of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in this important region of the world, and shall represent the groundwork for the further development of the overall strategy of the foundation's work for the upcoming years. At the same time, the position paper also represents the wish to shape the current discussion about a deepened strategic cooperation with the countries of the Middle East and aims to convey impetus and impulse for it.

After a short introduction of the structure of the paper, Dr Beck explained the spirit and the relevance of the Position Paper. He clarified that the paper is an attempt for a forthright analysis concluded before 2011, which is why the paper does not contain a prognosis of the Arab Uprising and its outcomes. Yet, well before the uprisings, the Middle East was a region experiencing a comprehensive crisis. The diagnostic analysis of the crisis constitutes a core element of the paper. And for any future engagement in support of reform processes the understanding of its root causes becomes of outmost importance. Albeit, the relevance of the paper is twofold: firstly, it provides a profound dissection of the socio-political and socio-economic problems in the region; secondly; it will continue to serve as the bases from which the overall strategy of the Foundation will be further developed for the forthcoming years.

In his presentation, Dr Beck elaborated on all the ten principles of political cooperation with the Middle East.

The 1st principle presents the finding that the Middle East (Mashriq, Maghrib, Gulf) has been in a comprehensive crisis that exerts an influence on almost all aspects of political and socio-economic life for decades. The only Middle Eastern states to which this does not apply are Israel (member of the OECD, consolidated democracy, higher gross domestic product per capita than some of the EU member states', high level of education) and Turkey (belongs to the set of more highly developed countries, in process of democratisation). With regards to the strategy of political cooperation in this respect, Beck mentioned that KAS is fundamentally guided by values that derived from the Christian view of humanity but that are also universally comprehensible and applicable (such as Freedom, Justice and Solidarity) and that the aim should be to find productive ways out of the crisis together with local partners.

The 2nd *principle* states that the primary challenge is not poverty but the inefficient and unequal distribution of resources. One cause of the crisis seems to be the fact that the Middle East relies so heavily on its income on rents like no other region in the world. The strategy of political cooperation should thus be to acknowledge that the problems are rather the structures and the rents, and neither the people nor the rentiers. The principles of social market economy should therefore be promoted, as these are in a position to provide a framework of political order to make it possible to conduct sustainable economic activity in an equitable and socially responsible way.

In the 3rd *principle* it is being stated that we need to speak about an economic and a social crisis at the same time. The strategy of political cooperation would therefore be implementing the guidelines of Social Market Economy, being solidarity and subsidiarity.

Principle 4 states that the Arab Middle East and Iran remained untouched by the Third Wave of democratisation and that - at least until 2010 - no democratisation processes could be recognized. Promoting smart democratisation with a top-down approach through enhancing Good Governance and the Rule of Law should therefore be the aim.

Principle 5 addresses the problem that the political crisis also results from a lack of participation as well as highly manipulated elections. Beck stressed that this affects both sexes, yet women remain subject to even greater constraints. Here a bottom-up approach of cooperation with the civil society could endorse equality for women as a cross-sectional task.

In *Principle 6* it is being stressed, that the ruling regimes are without development perspectives and visions and that the organised opposition remains primarily Islamic (at least until 2010). Here, critical dialogues and an emphasis on cross-cultural and cross-religious continuous exchange regarding human rights and democratic participation are needed.

Principle 7 presents the finding that due to its significance for trans-national Islamist terrorism, the Middle East, is one of the world's most crisis-ridden regions. This trend should be countered by promoting a security policy based on the concepts of 'interlinked security' and 'human security'.

In *Principle 8* the fact that environmental and energy problems besetting the Middle East have long been ignored is presented. Thus, renewable energy sources should be promoted by incorporating the private sector.

The 9th *Principle* deals with the low degree of modernity in the education systems as well as with the problem of illiteracy (particularly amongst girls) and unequal opportunities. Modernisation of education systems and promotion of freedom of expression and research are of utmost importance.

The last and 10th *Principle* addresses the accumulation of trans-national ethnically and religiously charged conflicts, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular. Peaceful settlement of conflicts, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian one, through promotion of confidence building and creation of preconditions for peace in the minds of the people are needed. As far as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is concerned, the vision of the peaceful coexistence of two states is supported.

After presenting the ten principles of political cooperation with the Middle East, Dr Beck elaborated on four possible scenarios for the Arab Uprising: *scenario one* being that the regimes repressively contain the Arab Uprising, *scenario two* being that the regimes are toppled by revolutions, *scenario three* being that the political reforms lead to liberalized autocracies and *scenario four* being that political reforms lead to democratisation processes. The strategy for political cooperation in all four scenarios must be the promotion of the European but also universal values of freedom, human rights, participation and social market economy based on the principle of partnership.

As the first respondent, Honorable Michael Gahler, MEP (EPP), Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Sub-Committee on Security and Defence, agreed with the ten principles presented and underlined their validity in the context of the Arab Spring. He even added a fifth scenario, the one of an uprising that might lead to a reform process ending in a theocracy. Michael Gahler not only highlighted in his response the universal character of democratic values but also admitted to a status-quo fatigue in EU foreign relations which towards the MENA-region had overemphasised stability on the expense of democracy. In his description of the challenges a new EU neighbourhood policy has to face, he remarked that partnership of neighbours needs compatibility of values (in a democratic framework) but not only on the elite level but also within the broader societies. The German Member of Parliament underlined that most of all country specific approaches will be needed and the discourse should not take only place between us and them but also should lead to a dialogue amongst the countries in the region.

Prof. Annette Jünemann from the Helmut-Schmidt-University of the German Armed Forces in Hamburg was the second respondent. She stressed that the civil society needs to be included in order to work out strategies for the Middle East. Yet, one needs to ask the question of who the civil society is and how it can be addressed. Moreover, who decides on who is included by the term 'civil society' – are Islamists also part of it? Moreover, she explained that the conflicts and problems in the region do not prevail due to the fact that the population is Muslim. She criticised that before the uprisings many Westerners simply assumed that people in the Middle East and the Arab world did not want change and that the conflict is simply the reality of Huntington's theory of a clash of civilisations. However, Prof Jünemann argued that this is incorrect and that there is no clash of civilisations prevailing and that the protests of the (mostly young) people who demonstrated in the streets of Northern Africa were not religiously motivated.

According to Prof Jünemann what needs to be focussed on now are the structures. It needs to be asked how change can be brought forward and how a precise plan could look like.

She stressed once more that accepting stability in the Arab world means accepting internal violence since change was violently repressed for the sake of stability. The EU must face the fact that it backed up the former regimes in the Arab world for the sake of fighting for stability. This is widely known in the Arab world and it will not be easy for the EU to credibly convey that its view has changed and that its motives are different now.

People in the Arab world want immediate change and the question is how much support can the EU actually give. Europe needs to accept that this change may be painful for Europe as it does not like to change itself nor adapt to the ideas of an open market or mobility in partnerships due to the widespread fear of instability.

So the question really is what kind of society Europe wants to see in the Middle East and the Arab world. Will Europe try to implement its belief and value system on others?

In his response to the two discussants, Dr Beck argued that the people who participated in the Arab uprisings share our values and that the problems do not exist due to a problematic mentality but due to problematic structures. Here, foundations can play a very important role in the creation and enhancement of a well functioning civil society. However, it is important to include local partners who can better and more clearly see the details of the problems.

Moreover, he stated that the EU has to accept that there will be times of frustration since democracy cannot develop over night. Dr Beck compared the process to the democratisation process in Eastern Europe. A major difference between the two processes is, however, that the gap between the rich and the poor was much smaller in Eastern Europe. In the Arab world the rich perceive democracy as a threat.

With regards to the question of who should be part of the civil society he explained his opinion that Islamistic parties must also be included in the process even if they are not democratic. However, one major precondition must be that they are willing to enter non-violent negotiations and talks.

The subsequent discussion over dinner addressed in its key points the dilemma to opt for stable liberalised autocracies or to head immediately for instable democracies. The question of “How to overcome the credibility gap of the EU democracy support in the MENA region?” featured prominently in the discussion. Controversy was not so much about the what – as all participants agreed to the need that democratic values need to be enrooted, but more about the HOW, the modus operandi of European democracy assistance. A solid partnership approach and high levels of transparency were mentioned as key elements. The importance of assistance to principal sectors –political institutions such as parliaments but also the armed forces and their relations with each other (e.g. democratic control of armed forces) were mentioned as crucial for any valid support initiative.

The discussion, however, made it equally clear that on both sides, European and even more amongst the societies in the respective countries, expectations remain high. And Europe has to be aware that it might reach a point when the question arises – where are we going to end and how much support are we capable to deliver?