

Social Mobilization and Democracy in the Arab world

Susana Mangana

UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DEL URUGUAY
MONTEVIDEO-URUGUAY
smangana@gmail.com

Abstract

The phenomenon called Arab Spring produced a new political scenario where traditional parties mixed with new associations and fought together to expel the ancient regimes of Arab countries. Democratically held elections in Tunisia and Egypt ended up with victory on the side of conservative Islamic groups, often regarded unable to uphold democratic values, at least from a Western perspective. There is growing concern in the Middle East region but also in the West, about how parties clinging to Sharia law will achieve justice and economic progress without sacrificing individual freedom and rights in the name of God.

Keywords: Arab spring, democracy, Islamic, protests, Internet.

Movilización social y democracia en el mundo árabe

Resumen

La Primavera Árabe produjo un nuevo escenario político en el que partidos tradicionales se mezclaron con nuevas asociaciones para luchar por el derrocamiento de los regímenes que tradicionalmente gobernaron los países árabes. Las elecciones celebradas democráticamente en Túnez y Egipto, dieron la victoria a grupos islámicos conservadores, considerados a menudo incapaces de respetar valores democráticos, al menos desde la perspectiva occidental. Aumenta la preocupación, tanto en Oriente Medio como en Occidente, por saber cómo harán estos partidos que defienden la ley islámica para alcanzar la justicia y el progreso económico sin sacrificar derechos y libertades individuales en nombre de Dios.

Palabras clave: Primavera árabe, democracia, islámico, protestas, Internet.

1. Reasons behind social protests in the Arab world

Much has been said all throughout 2011 about the reasons behind popular unrest in the Arab countries. However, it is still important for the purpose of this paper to state that prior to the start of Tunisian revolution after Mohamed Bouazizi's own immolation in December 2010, there was a similar scenario in all Arab countries. From the Maghreb to the Persian Gulf, citizens lacked basic freedoms and were unable to perceive real changes in the way their Governments run their economies, granting huge privileges to co-opted elites while keeping millions unemployed and under the poverty line. The independence wars fought in the 50's by officers like Gammal Abdel Nasser from Egypt meant that once the Military reached power they held on to it for decades, treating Arab citizens as immature children that were never fit to reach adulthood and its implied responsibility and independence.

At first the majority of Arab governments invested large amounts of money in educating their people, apart from exceptions like Yemen or Somalia, and hence the Arab youth today attend universities and technical institutions resulting in a big pool of graduates that desperately seek qualified and well-paid jobs that in many cases are rare to find. However, mismanagement of the economy and bad practices such as corruption, nepotism and heavily State dependent administrations has consequently kept Arab countries underdeveloped, except for the oil producing monarchies. Arab middle classes have systematically lost their purchasing power.

Rather than introducing political liberalization and sound economic policies, Arab Governments chose authoritarian rule and continued with their repressive methods even after the Islamic awakening threatened their stability back in the late 80's and more specifically with the outbreak of civil war in Algeria after the Government frustrated, in conjunction with the Armed Forces, the victory obtained by the Islamic group ISF (Islamic Salvation Front) in the second round of elections in 1991. Thus, politics and repression contributed to increasing poverty in many countries in the Middle East region and North Africa (Guzman, 2012: 67-94) and it is fair to say that these are two of the most relevant causes for popular mobilization in the Arab world today.

Weak political representation of the masses, the inexistence of a democratic basis, the desire of former military politicians to stay in power forever, one party system, election frauds and dictatorship finally pushed Arab citizens to organize themselves and protest against their leaders and firmly demand their exit from power as the first step to achieve deeper changes.

Nevertheless, Arab citizens are striving to obtain two basic things: dignity, both as individuals and collectively as a nation and secondly a better distribution of wealth. They are fully aware that autocratic regimes wasted many chances in the past to develop their countries and improve their living conditions. But today, they are no longer ready to let them kidnap their future.

2. Arab revolts defy orientalist myths in Western imaginary

The social protests that took place in most Arab countries last year, and which are still happening today in Yemen or Syria, ignited a phenomenon by which civil society realized worldwide that their voice could be heard and that actions led by large amounts of anonymous citizens in Israel or Madrid attracted renewed interest, at least on the side of the mass media. Ironically the unsatisfied Spaniards that took to the streets of Madrid and other major cities in Spain, who soon became known as 15-M movement, took inspiration in the Tahrir¹ events of early 2011. The awakening of the Arab societies took the West by surprise and it suddenly broke away with several myths that we are still fighting to expel from our imaginary.

The first of these myths is the false idea that Arab societies are passive and unable to stand up for their rights. Although it is true that years of fear and political apathy prevented them from obtaining rights they should have attained long ago. Today citizens in Egypt or Tunisia clearly got rid of their passiveness and are experiencing the triumph of collective action. In other countries like Syria, the brutality of the repression carried out by the State has fuelled anger and the desire to push for the fall of the regime even if this means having to launch an asymmetric war. Thus, the West must urgently rewrite its narrative vis a vis Civil Society in the Arab world and start recognizing their serious work. NGO's working in the sphere of human rights, workers unions and syndicates as well as other student organizations across the Arab world took to the streets to force their dictators out of power and without clear political guidance from more structured and traditional parties, including those with a religious background. With the exception of perhaps Bahrain and Yemen, political parties in the rest of the Arab countries did not lead the revolts. This was precisely the biggest threat to the revolutionary wave that shook off the mentality of skepticism and submission that kept Arab societies silent from the 70's till today.

Since no political party was ready to stage such a protest against Mubarak's regime, which in fact dates back to earlier times in post-inde-

pendence Egypt, the divisions and lack of consistency among protesters was soon capitalized by the Military that tried to refrain the revolutionary spirit in an attempt to hold on to power. The Muslim Brotherhood decided to join the social mobilization in Egypt relatively late. Indeed, they realized that many of their sympathizers had already gathered around Tahrir square without waiting for directions from the Brotherhood's leadership. Hence, they decided to join protests once they understood the scope of the mobilization and the huge opportunity it meant for their group in terms of positioning their candidates for the transition period offered by the Armed Forces that took control of the revolution and prior to seize power, as they finally did when Mohammed Morsi won the Presidential elections last June.

At this point, it is only natural to question ourselves why there had not been a social outburst of the same magnitude before. The state of relative apathy was perpetuated by means of a cultural hegemony but also through means of systematic repression as it was already said. Fear and the lack of substantial results from previous mobilizations led to frustration. However, there is a sort of dialectics between repression and social outbursts that ultimately turn dictatorship weaker than a regime based on hegemony. (Conde, 2012:33-46).

This is the reason behind the lack of credibility of the options offered, even during the revolts last year, by left wing parties, secular nationalism or religious fundamentalism. This scenario contributed to the spontaneous character of the revolts, but at the same time it created serious limitations in terms of offering credible unified strategies and alternatives. History reminds us that when two groups are incapable of defeating each other, a third party enters the scene and takes the initiative.

The reaction from Western countries and some of its allies in the Middle East also caused surprise since in countries like Libya they clearly took on the side of revolutionaries while in others they almost supported the regime like in Bahrain or Yemen. Syria remains a puzzle since Western countries have undertaken the role of a spectator merely limiting themselves to condemning violence without really pushing for Al Assad's exit from power.

The Arab Spring has caused major geopolitical changes to the point that the West is now puzzled as to what type of diplomacy and bilateral relations should adopt vis a vis the new Governments resulting from elections and after the fall of well known administrations such as the Mubarak or Ben Ali regimes.

Arab revolts of last year also revealed the futility of the proclaimed desire of Western powers to promote a democratic process in the Middle

East. Arab civil society showed the world that they are perfectly capable of leading their own political lives. In fact the Arab spring undermined dictatorial regimes that had a status quo in favor of US control. Social unrest and the crisis affected Republics and Monarchies alike. Unsatisfied citizens have protested in high income societies (Bahrain, Kuwait) and in poorer ones (Yemen).

In most cases the contested regimes had been US allies for decades. Although Libya had maintained its independence from the US and moreover, an open confrontational stand many times, since 2003 (invasion of Iraq) Kaddafi decided to renew its alliance with the European Union and the US. However, they never fully trusted each other.

Hence, protests in the Arab world were successful in casting doubts over the continuity of regimes that had been until last year docile to world powers.

The Arab Spring has also destroyed well installed orientalist stereotypes such as arguments posed by senior scholars like Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington that Islam is inclined to dictatorship. Events of last year clearly push away this myth. It is one of the intangible results of the revolts.

Other myths refer to gender issues and the immutability of the role of women in Muslim societies. Massive female participation in demonstrations in Yemen and Bahrain, two deeply conservative societies prove the orientalist myth wrong. Even in Syria in the early days of the revolts many females took part in the protests, but repression and violence forced them to stay away. Today, in the climate of civil war being fought many females have been injured, taken to prison or are suffering the consequences of ethnic and religious sectarianism.

The West has maintained an attitude of superiority towards the Arab world even after 11-S when it was clear that years, not to say centuries, of misunderstandings between both civilizations have only widened the gap between cultures that share more than they wish to acknowledge. Citizens in the Arab world demand democratic changes, social and economic improvement. Hence, religious demands have not played a key role in the mobilizations as it may have been predicted in the West. In any case, the participation of Islamic groups and leaders in the mobilization challenges existing prejudices about the viability of democracy in Muslim countries.

Christians, Shi'a and Sunni Muslims all gathered together to protest against their rulers, at least at first before the regimes and their allies fuelled sectarianism as they have always done for example in Bahrain and Syria. This fact per se is a clear sign that unity among the people, albeit temporarily,

can set the basis for renewal of citizenship in the Arab region. This type of supranational citizenship also casts aside prejudices about societies in the Middle East. (Conde, 2012:33-46).

Revolts in Bahrain and the revolution carried out in Libya proves wrong those that argue that democracy cannot be achieved in oil producing countries due to the existence of a deterministic attitude. Although it is also true that countries like Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have consistently gained time by pouring money into their citizens' pockets. This generosity on the side of the Government helped alleviate social pressure for political liberalization and democratic changes. In the particular case of Bahrain, the scope of the mobilization and the determination of protesters required more radical methods than just pouring money into society. The seed of unrest planted by protesters in Bahrain was hastily crushed by Saudi Arabia and other neighboring Arab countries in the Gulf when they sent the Peninsula Shield to the small kingdom.

This proves that the aging rulers of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are fully aware of the risks surrounding them and this explains, in part, why they chose to help opponents to Kaddafi or rebels in Syria. Since these regimes had been declared enemies or at least a nuisance to most Western powers, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, to mention the two most active players in the Gulf region, decided to help topple down dictators like Kaddafi only to make sure they finance and support parties and leaders that are considered to be ideologically close to their wahabbi philosophy, such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

One cannot forget that the Syrian regime consists of Alauite members that have an alliance with Iran, the long time rival to Saudi Arabia in terms of leadership of the Islamic Umma. Hence, helping to install a Muslim Brotherhood candidate as President in Egypt or Libya can only benefit a conservative and rigid administration like the Saudi Kingdom.

In summary, social contrasts in the Arab world worsened with globalization and the triumph of neoliberalism. Arab societies have rebelled despite the myths constructed by Western academics and political analysts that defended the immutability of Arab political regimes, either due to its cultural and religious nature or to its wealth thanks to the abundance of oil. Arab citizens have decided to gather strength building upon their difficulties and take history back into their hands. (Conde, 2012:33-46).

3. Mobilization and Communication in the Arab world: old claims, new methods?

The present chapter aims to reflect on how the Internet and the new technologies played a key role in the social uprising in Arab countries since its outbreak, facilitating new strategies for summoning protests and providing citizens with effective ways to express honestly and freely their opinions and will of change. The focus of this analysis is to explain how new forms of communication are empowering civil society to unprecedented levels and hence, provoking deep geopolitical changes in the MENA region.

The Arabic spring caught everyone by surprise. The protests in the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea and their rapid expansion to the rest of the Arab countries, have forced the multidisciplinary analysis, besides reconsidering the traditional forms of social organization and calling to protest. Indeed, social networks and access to Internet have turned into powerful tools that facilitate popular protests in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria, only to mention a few countries that witnessed unrest all through 2011. Certainly, access to Internet and the number of its users is not comparable between Tunisia - highly urbanized - and Yemen where, according to several statistics, hardly half a million citizens use Internet. Nevertheless, mobile telephony and social networks have constituted the principal engine of the anti-regime manifestations since they not only broke through strongly established hierarchies, and hence, democratized the protests, but they also helped avoid official censorship. Thus, leaders of the protest movements escaped early arrest by the all-powerful and omnipresent security forces.

On the other hand, facebook or twitter made it possible for the long repressed Arab citizens to express themselves openly, losing their fear of future reprisals. Once the rebellion started and ignited the Arab street, citizens were eager to pour out their opinions, propose actions and promote debates which thanks to technology became very dynamic and with instantaneous feedback.

The digital world offers both material environments (cybercafés) and virtual ones (social networks, MSN, Multiplayer online games) where youth explore, express, exchange and exist and ultimately develop new identities (Balaguer, 2012). The generation gap in Arab countries, where on average 65 % of the population is under 21 years old, in fact meant that the young benefitted from the anonymity of social networks to the point that they could avoid family reluctance to allow women to participate in politics, let alone social protests. The PC screen allows the younger ones to

travel around the world without actually leaving the safety of their homes. In addition, given the characteristics of these social networks which allow the interconnection and simultaneous participation of a large number of people, certain predictability is achieved in the calls for protest. This happens because citizens can register themselves on line to join the proposed marches. On the other hand, the ICT, especially Internet with all its tools; such as forums of chat, blogs, massive mailing campaigns, etcetera, have in turn helped to produce a multiplicity of political actors with a common interest who are now claiming their right to take part in the process of building their country's future and who also want to contribute to the establishment of a new political model that should respect individual freedom, citizens' civil rights and in short, dignity.

How did the private turn public? Without going into a very detailed explanation it is important to realize that cell phones and instant messaging like SMS help maintain connectivity even if users are not physically in the same place. They also develop creativity in terms of writing, video filming and they provide an excellent channel to obtain visibility and reputation. The possibility of entering the world of fame is the main reason behind the uploading of thousands of videos to YouTube (Balaguer, 2012).

Technology experts distinguish between three types of participation in virtual social networking: hanging out, messing around and geeking out. The latter seems more appropriate to the case of youngsters in the Arab world today. As Balaguer points out, geeking out goes beyond mere socializing and this has to do with what ICT users can actually do with technology. They can claim it for themselves, align it with their interests so as to using it in a more sophisticated way and generating specialization. On the other hand, there are technologies that promote thinking while others inhibit reflection, like television. While TV is there to be watched, the Blog is there to be commented and it remains open to public scrutiny. Blogs are hence the way to make introspection public in today's culture, where screens increasingly occupy time and space, and in which subjects are very often disconnected from themselves, only occupied with consumption. In that sense, blogs function as a way of pouring out one's identity and a vehicle to rethink one self and the others, instead of passively watching TV shows. Blogs become social diaries and a catalyst for emotions and thoughts published online which are later read and commented by others (Balaguer, 2012).

The fragmentation of active live forces in Egypt or Tunisia today means that groups and social actors considered marginal in the past, and with no impact in electoral campaigns during the time of Ben Ali or Mubarak, nowadays protest against injustice. Long time enemies such as Nasserites and

Muslim Brothers joined together with other citizens to force the Supreme Council of Armed Forces in Egypt to deliver power to the people. Thus, whereas at the beginning of the revolts religion was neither the trigger nor the engine of the protests today religious groups of diverse nature compete with one another to attract voters. Sufi, salafist (traditionalists) and the Muslim Brotherhood face lay movements that still refuse to be governed by a party with a religious motto and theme. On the other hand, residual forces from Mubarak's era in Egypt (fulul) and loyal communities to the Alauite (Shi'a) regime of the Assad family in Syria - Christians, Druze or Kurds - incite the fear of the fundamentalism and the Islamic fanaticism in an attempt to win time and avoid the collapse of a regime that they historically support and that often lavished important privileges between these groups.

Recent legislative and presidential elections in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt or the early announcements made by the Libyan NTC (National Transition Council) after Kaddafi's death, do not leave room for doubt. It is not a question of deciding whether Islam will interfere in politics or not, but rather to which extent religion will count in the new political systems that start to arise in the aftermath of the protests. In other words, how the Sharia law will adapt itself to the new political scenario that will eventually emerge in Arab countries. Hence, it is very interesting to research about the use of new technologies and the changes they are bringing about in the Middle East. And also to learn how Arab citizens identify with new communication skills and social platforms that are totally different to their traditional tribal system of family ties and relations based on solidarity to the clan. Time is ripe to continue studying how the Arab world, still perceived in the West as culturally backwards and a source of permanent threat, has appropriated for itself forms and communication styles only existing up until now in developed countries. Furthermore, it is imperative to analyze to which extent Internet has made it possible for Arabs to escape official narratives which refrain them from achieving higher levels of freedom of expression and intellectual growth and thus revealing a world of opportunities to them, not only to learn about other cultures but to have access to uncensored literature. It is a paradox that the western press hastily titled the protests as the awakening of the Arab world when in fact the Arab spring inspired the indignation movement that spread in Europe, Israel or the USA. At the same time many in Latin America complain about the loss of moral and social values and resent a cultural trend that the famous Peruvian novelist Vargas Llosa calls the *banalyzation* of culture², rendering it into something superficial.

What can be the link between protesters in Tahrir claiming freedom, justice and dignity and the call for real democracy by the *indignados* of the 15-M? It seems as if all these movements of protest are part of a global trend of people requesting the same essential foundations of life or as Professor Wade Clark Roof from the University of Santa Barbara, California, says: principles of common humanity³.

However, the press in the West has relatively played down the importance of another key communications player in the Middle East. We refer here to the Qatar based television channel Al Jazeera, which paved the path for Arab protesters by creating awareness and informing them of events taking place in distant cities from Hama in Syria to Manama in Bahrain or the resilience of Kaddafi's loyal forces in Sirte. Al Jazeera has drastically changed the way Arabs see their region by bringing them stories, news and images that no other state television will care to broadcast. It is of vital importance to analyze the impact of this key actor in the political transformations that are taking place in the Maghreb and Middle Eastern region and to compare and evaluate to what extent Al Jazeera, considered by many as the unofficial speaker of the Government of the State of Qatar, has been even more influential than Internet and facebook in overthrowing Mubarak.

Finally, the shift of the political axis of the Arab world from Egypt to Saudi Arabia raises doubts about how devoted Islamic candidates will implement democracy once they reach power. Division between Sunni and Shi'a is polarizing the Middle East region and is forcing other international actors such as Russia, Turkey or Iran to react and take a stand, thus defending their strategic alliances with different sectarian groups. After decades of discrimination and growing resentment, the Shi'a has managed to reach power and to establish a peculiar trilogy between Teheran- Damascus and Beirut and is now in politics in post-Saddam Irak. This schism between the two mainstream branches in Islam threatens to divert attention from the protests, turning the region into a game of chess once again.

To conclude, there is still much to be said about how the Internet and the new technologies have managed to change the course of events in the Arab world by providing three basic elements that finally crystallized in rebellion: organization capacity, independent sources of information and last, but not least, a window to the outside world and to other social and political realities. This paper aims to explore all these situations and to highlight the major changes taking place today in the Arab world, with special emphasis on the new forms of organization of Arab civil society today.

4. The day after the revolution: challenges facing democracy

Having stated already that major political and social changes have taken place in countries like Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, social mobilization and Democracy in the Arab world still face several obstacles.

a) Democratic social movements do not automatically generate democratic institutions. Rather, these are built by the citizens' political participation and the strength of civil society. In that sense it is highly worth of praise the Egyptian case since the first democratic elections ever celebrated in the country (May-June 2012) resulted in the arrival of the Muslim Brotherhood to power. This association was always in the opposition but never in power, and was often forced to operate clandestinely for the last 80 years.

b) It is imperative that all Governments in the Arab world, especially those facing economic crisis and upheaval, improve their economic and financial systems so as to reduce poverty. Failure to achieve this will only result in further social frustration.

c) Governments recently elected in Arab countries must reformulate their international relations, paying due attention to neighbors such as Israel and avoiding confrontation with the US, even if they wish to assert their independence and minimize foreign interference in their countries. Prudence is the key word.

d) They should also seek democratic changes in all institutions and generate the necessary conditions for the renewal of the elites in the military and economic establishments as well as in the State bureaucracies and radical religious groups. These are the social forces that can nurture a counter-revolutionary process that could in turn co-opt popular resistance movements. Egypt's recent moves in that direction have been both promising and shocking since few believed President Morsi would force Field Marshal Mohamed Tantawi to retire so soon after his election.

e) Even if Islamic candidates reach power in post-revolutionary countries they will have to be very pragmatic in order to re-launch their economies. Tunisia and Egypt rely heavily on revenues from tourism. Hence they will not be able to pass laws forbidding consumption of alcohol or foster intolerance for example with regards female garments. This may in turn create tensions with Saudi patrons if they allow interference from Gulf monarchies.

f) Finally, Arab leaders and Governments must invest in education but making sure that all levels of society have equal opportunities. Opposite to what happens today in Europe the Arab world has a surplus of labor but

not all individuals are adequately qualified. Money allocated to innovation and research is still insufficient. In order to develop their economies they will need to improve their labor skills so as to become competitive in the face of fast growing economies in the South-Pacific region. Even if the Arab youth wants to continue immigrating to Europe they will be in a far better position if they have the technical skills demanded by European industry.

Democracy seems nowadays a general concept that means slightly different things in different countries. Hence, the West must not overcast high expectations with regards democratic changes in the MENA region since these may take a while before materializing. Citizens in the Arab world are learning today how to put pressure on their rulers and the revolutionary process has not followed the same path and pace in all countries. Thus, some states will need longer time to implement changes and others will go through a phase of trial and error.

The newly elected Governments will have to apply themselves to strengthening institutions and rewrite Constitutions to achieve real changes.

Chaos and anarchy are two ghosts that must be kept under control in order not to reproduce the Irak scenario where disintegration of the establishment paved the way for sectarianism and fragmentation of society. In countries still anchored in tribal conservative mentalities, like Saudi Arabia, or with ethnical differences still playing a role (Kurds, Druze or Amazigh) a transition period is desirable. Democracy is in itself a goal to strive for but it cannot be achieved without establishing the foundations to regain stability and economic improvements for all citizens.

5. Conclusions

From the beginning of 21st Century civil organizations across the world and other movements gathering peasants, workers, students and intellectuals strive to protest against the negative impact of globalization and to propose the construction of a model of universal coexistence which should be more pluralistic, equitable and democratic (Lope, 2012: 47-65).

Social mobilization in the Arab world is embedded in this systemic framework of resistance and it has have achieved major results in terms of popular mobilization and political goals. The *manifesto* or document entitled "United for a global democracy" which was signed by different organizations and intellectual assemblies and distributed in October 15th, 2011 among protesters in 951 cities in 82 countries clearly recognized the events in the Arab world as part of the resistance movement against neoliberal globalization.

Many consider our time as the post-modern era where the world is decentralized and hence, there is a global trend that demands a shift of power from the center to the individuals.

The crisis that hit US global hegemony in 2008 also meant that social movements that arose in the Arab world after that date, were not crushed down, neither by hegemonic global powers nor via the unconditional support given until then to regional State elites that operated precisely in favor of US hegemony.

The battle for the search of fair and democratic structures will put to the test the capacity for organization and cooperation of these resistance movements, both at the internal and regional level. Today, it is possible to identify three social forces that can increase their protagonist role in order to develop Arab social structures: the working middle class, globalized youth and moderate religious groups.

The massive protests staged by Arab citizens in the MENA region buried the mentality of submission and apathy that characterized civil societies in the Arab world until 2011. The strong desire of Arab citizens to regain control over their lives and shape the future of their countries helped them unite in the face of decadent tyrannical rulers.

Conservative countries like Saudi Arabia and oil rich states like Qatar wish to install candidates with an Islamic political program⁴ in power so as to gain leverage.

The new political scenario in countries where democratic elections were celebrated shows a high influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in light of their high numbers in Parliament and the Government. The oil producing monarchies in the Gulf are quite happy to see these changes in Egypt and Tunisia. It still remains to be seen how easily influenced the new Presidents will be. On the other hand the status quo has changed for other countries like Israel, European Union and the US who are now questioning what the future will bring in terms of stability, peace agreements and their bilateral relations with former allies.

The current division between Shi'a and Sunni and their constant rivalry shapes the alliances that support regimes in some countries and help plot against others. However, it must not be forgotten that religion was neither the first nor the most important demand from citizens protesting in Arab countries. It was rather the weapon used by all parties involved in the crisis to fuel divisions, resentment and violence among citizens in countries like Bahrain, Syria or Yemen.

The European Union and Western powers will have to reformulate their diplomacy in light of the major geopolitical changes achieved by Arab revolts.

More time must be given to recently elected governments so as to allow for the building of a strong civil society in the Arab world. However, given the deep changes they have achieved and the dear price they have paid for it in terms of lost lives and internal migrants, refugees etcetera, Arab citizens are to be taken for serious today and have proven to be not only courageous but capable of incorporating new methods of communication, thus removing doubts still existing in the West as towards their ability to adapt to modern times.

Thousands of well-educated Islamic youngsters are participating today in politics all across the Arab world, setting the basis for new political forms that will necessarily contemplate more democratic ways of government in light of the social protests that awoke the collective conscience in their societies.

Presidents recently elected in Tunisia and Egypt as well as long time monarchs in Jordan or Saudi Arabia should take good notice of the transformation undergone by their societies. The one party system has collapsed and there is a wider spectrum of associations and parties that demand to be heard and to participate more actively in politics. Youths across the Arab world are bolder today and they know how to exploit the ICT for their benefit.

There is still a long way to go since democratically elected Presidents in Egypt or Tunisia, still have to find the way to negotiate with the prevailing military institutions how to regain control of the country and hand in power to society. Failure to achieve this will only increase social discontent, disappointment and frustration.

The success of Arab revolts is not only important for the region but for the whole world in light of the geopolitical interests invested in the MENA region and the large amount of natural resources existing there.

Notes

- 1 Tahrir is one the biggest public squares in Cairo where protesters gathered since January 2011 to demand Mubarak's exit from power. It means liberation in Arabic. It will remain a symbol of the revolution in Egypt that also inspired other Arab revolts in 2011.
- 2 Reflections made by Vargas Llosa at the Lectio Inauguralis given at the Universidad Católica de Uruguay, 2011.

- 3 Conference given at the “XVI Jornadas de Alternativas Religiosas en América Latina”, Punta del Este, Uruguay, November 2011.
- 4 This program should be in line with the Wahabbi vision of Islam and hence we are implying here that Sunni Islamic groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood are therefore preferred.

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