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The Arab Spring: A Game Changer in Turkey-EU Relations?

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Abstract

We argue in this paper that the Arab Spring has opened a window of opportunity not just to create stability and democracy in one of the most unstable regions of the world, but also for revitalizing Turkey-EU relations. In theory, Turkey-EU cooperation can make a decisive difference in determining the outcome of the triangular relationship between stability, development, and democratization in the Arab region. In normative terms, as an opportunity, it must be turned into an advantage. From a practical perspective, however, transforming the window of opportunity into policy output is linked to the policy leadership of the sides involved to undergo a paradigm shift in their approach to the region and toward one another.

Key Words:

Arab Spring | democratization | revitalizing Turkey-EU relations | paradigm shift | policy leadership

Notes

[1] Authors' interview with Muhammed Sarmini, a member of Syrian National Council, October 27, 2011, Ankara.

[2] We would like to thank to Ahmet Davutoğlu (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Turkey), Ali Hussein Bakeer (USAK researcher, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey), Ambassador Naci Koru (Deputy Minister of MFA, Turkey), Andrew Tabler (senior researcher, WINEP, USA), Eduard Soler i Lecha (political scientist, Spain), Erşad Hürmüzlü (Chief Advisor to the Turkish President Abdullah Gül, Turkey), Fatih Tayfur (international relations scholar, Turkey), Fuat Keyman (political scientist, Turkey), Graham Fuller (former vice-chair of the National Intelligence Council, USA), Heiko Schuß (expert on Middle Eastern economies, Germany), Hüseyin Bağcı (international relations scholar, Turkey), İbrahim Beyyumi Ghanem (political scientist, Egypt), İhsan Bal (political scientist, Turkey), Michael Hudson (political scientist, USA), Michael Lemmon (Ambassador R, USA), Michele Dunne (political scientist, USA), Misbah al-Ahdab (politician, Lebanon), Mouayed Alwindawi (political scientist, Iraq/Jordan), Muhamed Ayoob (political scientist, USA), Muhammed Sarmini (member of Syrian National Council, Syria), Özdem Sanberk (Ambassador R, Turkey), Rabi al-Hafidh (Arab scholar, Iraq, UK), Ross Wilson (Ambassador R, USA), Sayyar al-Jamil (historian, Iraq/Qatar), Sedat Laçiner (political scientist, Turkey), Ted Piccone (senior researcher, Brookings Institute, USA), Vehbi Dinçerler (former state minister, Turkey), Yaşar Yakış (former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Turkey), Ziya Öniş (political economist, Turkey).

[3] Authors' interview with senior Turkish diplomat Ambassador (R) Özdem Sanberk, November 23, 2011, Ankara.

[4] Authors' interview with Sayyar al-Jamil, professor of Modern History and Contemporary Thought Senior-Advisor in Arab Centre for Research & Political Studies, October 27, 2011, Ankara.

[5] Author's personal observation in the Arab world enforces this argument. Also see Telhami (2011).

[6] Dataset is retrieved from Republic of Turkey Ministry of Economy.

[7] Particularly reform packages regarding the amendment of the constitution articles are very attractive for some circles in the Arab intelligentsia. Authors' interview with İbrahim Beyyumi Ghanem, a renowned Egyptian political scientist, June 23, 2011, İstanbul.

[8] Authors' interview with İhsan Bal, one of the architects of the democratic initiative in Turkey regarding the Kurdish problem, September 28, Ankara.

[9] Authors' interview with Misbah al-Ahdab, a Lebanese politician who is currently the Vice President of the Democratic Renewal Movement in Lebanon, October 27, 2011, Ankara.

[10] Ersel Aydınlı, a leading Turkish scholar stated his ideas on this issue in the conference on Turkish-Israeli relations organized by USAK on February 25, 2011, Ankara.

[11] Authors' interview with Naci Koru, Deputy Undersecretariat of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey, December 12, 2011, Ankara.

[12] Authors' interview with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, December 7, 2011. The Turkish version of the interview is published in Analist, No. 11, January 2012, pp. 6–15.

[13] Authors' interview with Rabee al-Hafidh, Secretary General and Head of Arab-Turkish Unit, Forum of Muslim Thinkers, March 6, 2011, Ankara.

[14] See note 9.

[15] Authors' interview with Eduard Soler i Lecha, a Spanish political scientist mainly focusing on Mediterranean politics, October 27, 2011.

[16] Without any exception, all of our interviewees underlined this point.

[17] See note 3.

[18] One of the authors' conversations with Ambassador (R) Ross Wilson in Washington DC on December 19, 2011.

[19] Authors' interview with Fuat Keyman, a leading Turkish foreign policy professor, April 24, 2011. Our interviewees from the Turkish Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs also acknowledged this point (interviews are conducted between September 15 and December 15, 2011).

[20] We would like to thank to Ambassador Naci Koru for providing us the relevant dataset.

[21] See note 4.

[22] Many of our Turkish interviewees seem to be optimistic on this issue. The Arabs, on the other hand, are quite sensitive. They in principle back trilateral cooperation yet they by no means accept any mechanisms to be “imposed upon them.”

[23] Authors' interview with Heiko Schuß, a German scholar from the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg focusing on economy of the Middle East, October 27, 2011, Ankara.

[24] See note 3.

[25] See note 12.

[26] See note 15.

[27] One of the authors' conversations with Ambassador (R.) Michael Lemmon on December 16, 2011, Washington DC. Lemmon also stressed the importance of giving up the lens of “old school” while approaching the region.

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