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The New-Old Elites and their Relations with the EU: The Cases of Egypt and Tunisia

Cengiz Günay

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The New-Old Elites and their Relations with the EU: The Cases of Egypt and Tunisia

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Introduction

Europe's southern neighbourhood is in turmoil. Over the last few years, the states in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have undergone fundamental societal, political, structural, demographic and economic changes. These transformations cannot take place without effects on their foreign policy behaviour and international relations (IR). In contrast to most of the literature and policy analyses dealing with Euro-Mediterranean relations from an EU perspective, this paper aims to switch sides and analyse relations from a southern angle. Drawing on liberal IR theory, the paper suggests unpacking the state. It aims to look into social dynamics as drivers for foreign policy-making. As Moravcsik (1997, p. 513) highlights, "societal ideas, interests, and institutions influence state behaviour by shaping state preferences, that is, the fundamental social purposes underlying the strategic calculations of governments." These strategic calculations consider external structures and dynamics as they are defined by domestic power balances. Putnam (1988) speaks in the context of the interaction of external and internal factors of a two-level game where political actors use one level to leverage their own political interest on the other level. Although Putnam mainly refers to democracies, the need to keep balance between external, structural constraints and opportunities, on the one hand, and the interests of domestic constituencies, on the other, does not only apply to democratic governments. Authoritarian regimes are rarely independent from domestic power balances. In most of the cases they also need to integrate domestic interests and consider public opinion and expectations. However, they can more easily control media and public discourse.

Elites have a strong impact on the public discourse and the foreign policy direction of a given country. But who are the elites?

The configuration and size of the elites vary according to the political system. Elite configurations of democratic systems differ from those in semi-authoritarian and authoritarian regimes (such as single party and military regimes). Moreover, the formation of statehood, the institutional setting, socioeconomic factors and historical developments affect elite structures.

Political turmoil, such as uprisings and revolutions, often entails the reconfiguration of the relevant elites. However, there are also examples where the dominant elites have endured political changes. This paper sets out to develop the question of whether the uprisings in the MENA region had an impact on the composition of elites and if so how this has been reflected in foreign policy behaviour towards the EU. The paper deals with the cases of Egypt and Tunisia; two countries where long-standing

authoritarian leaders fell as a consequence of mass protests. Transitions in both countries, however, took entirely different directions. The different trajectories have induced different elite reconfigurations and diverging foreign policy behaviour towards the EU. The paper builds on insights gained from a research project entitled "The Normative Impact of EU Foreign and Security Policies in the Middle East", funded by the Anniversary Fund of the Austrian National Bank. Discourse analysis, based on media reporting and interviews with EU representatives, Egyptian and Tunisian officials and diplomats and party members as well as civil society representatives in the framework of the project provided rich material for this paper.

Who Are the Elites?

Understanding how and where power lies in society and where decision-making processes take place usually entails the study of people with power: the elites. But who are the elites?

While Marxist Theory conceives elites as a social class whose dominant position is mainly explained by possession of the means of production, elite theory in contrast is rooted in classical sociology and is mainly concerned with authority structures. It highlights that each system yields its own elites. In socially differentiated societies, elites are usually not a homogeneous group and elite members do not share the same amount of power. One can therefore speak of elite sectors where elites emerge from different organisations, institutions and movements and where power comes from different sources (Lopez, 2013). Thus, elites cannot and should not be understood as a monolithic power bloc but rather as a set of individual actors with individual interests, bundled at different levels in multiple centres.

Political, societal and economic structures certainly shape the composition and character of an elite and determine the conditions for access to power resources and how and where different segments of the elites matter. Compared to democratic pluralistic societies, where elite structures are diverse and complex, in authoritarian systems elite structures are hierarchic. The number of persons who are part of the elite is usually rather limited. Depending on the character of the regime and the country's historical development, they have a similar ideological, ethnic, religious, regional, institutional or socioeconomic background. In authoritarian systems, elites are also characterised by high internal competition. They compete because otherwise they lose power (Brichs & Lampridi-Kemou, 2012). Competition, ideological shifts and changes in economic policies can and usually do entail changes in the composition of the elites. While some segments lose power, other segments and groups might gain influence.

Brichs & Lampridi-Kemou (2012) see competition among the elites over resources as a conservative factor in the sense that it does not bring about social change for the broader population but rather perpetuates and preserves the incumbent system. Accordingly, societal change that also affects relations with the elites can only take place through popular mobilisation (Brichs & Lampridi-Kemou, 2012). When popular mobilisation and cracks within the elites (fierce competition that cannot be appeased) coincide, this can lead to the breakdown of a regime.

The Traditional Elites in the MENA Region

Despite many differences between the countries of the MENA region, a common feature of most of the modern Arab countries is the prevalence of a centralised, authoritarian state. Many of the structures are a legacy of modernisation policies. Lacking an independent national bourgeoisie, in most cases, the state was the major political and economic actor. The omnipresence of the state supported corporatism and patrimonialism (patron-client networks) at different levels. In most of cases, the state and the regimes have merged. The respective regime's security has been re-interpreted as national security.

As most of the authoritarian regimes are all but transparent, the definition of which persons can be accounted as members of the elite is rather difficult. Quite often, real powers are hardly consistent with the formal bodies and institutions. On the one hand, authoritarian regimes have no interest in transparency and hardly see their decision-making processes as being accountable to public opinion. On the other, formal institutions and positions often barely reflect the real power centres where decisions are taken. People in public positions are usually appointees with no political power base and no political agenda. Their mandate is limited to the implementation of policies defined elsewhere. In many cases, even ministers are not part of the decision-making processes and they only have limited influence on shaping discourses (Perthes, 2004). A common practice in Egypt during the Mubarak era or in Tunisia under President Ben Ali was to appoint unknown technocrats and experts with no power base as ministers. Rather than defining policies and making decisions they were expected to manage the implementation of the decisions, taken in the presidential palaces. Hence, despite their official functions, ministers could hardly shape policies in their own ministries. They could only direct their implementation and to a limited extent influence the personnel policies at middle and lower levels within the ministerial bureaucracies.

Another common practice of authoritarian regimes has been the rotation of ministers, high level bureaucrats, generals and officers within the state sector. Rotation was to prevent the establishment of single personalities and their accumulation of power.

At the same time, however, appointments constituted one of the most important sources of patronage. These practices made large parts of the elites dependent on the regime and strengthened the power of the leaders, but at the same time they weakened the capacity and effectiveness of the state apparatuses. One can observe the de-politicisation of the formal political arena and the informalisation of power relations.

Therefore, the mapping of institutions and positions does not reveal the full picture. A high dose of informality, a common feature of most authoritarian regimes in the region, makes the study of Arab elites and their impact on foreign policy particularly difficult.

It is not only difficult to determine who really belongs to the elite but also to track the individuals and groups that directly and indirectly affect foreign policy. Moreover, it is challenging to measure their impact on foreign policy decisions. In countries such as Egypt and Tunisia with a rather long history of authoritarian rule and a national security state in place there is hardly any accessible documentation.

One can therefore hold that despite a broad literature on political structures in the MENA region, knowledge about the decision-making processes has generally remained vague. Acknowledging the importance of informal networks, Perthes (2004) suggests a broader perspective and looking into the "politically relevant elites." The "PRE comprises groups of people in a given country who wield political influence and power in that they make strategic decisions or participate in decision-making on a national level, contribute to defining political norms and values (including the definition of 'national interests'), and directly influence political discourse on strategic issues" (Perthes, 2004, p. 5). PREs thus encompass political decision-makers (government, administration and political leaders) as well as persons whose positions enable them to influence political decision-making directly, substantially and regularly. This might in some cases also apply to opposition leaders, dissenting voices or temporary elites as well as to ad hoc leaders of mass movements (Perthes, 2004).

Asseburg and Wimmen (2015) structure the politically relevant elites in Arab regimes in three circles; an inner circle that consists of the authoritarian ruler's (president's or king's) personal entourage, made up of friends, confidants and members of the extended family who consult and guide him; a larger, secondary circle that comprises top bureaucrats and top ranking businesspeople who try to "wield influence on the centre and trade loyalty for shares of resources and local or sectoral franchises of power" (Asseburg & Wimmen, 2015, p. 6); and a third circle of so-called tertiary elites, consisting of religious leaders and influential journalists.

The existence, outreach and influence of the third circle strongly depend on the liberal, ideological and economic character of the regime and on the degree of its consolidation.

In authoritarian regimes with controlled party pluralism, representatives of the legal opposition can be considered as part of the third circle. However, different from

democratic systems, they can hardly put public pressure on the regimes; instead, their participation in the controlled system is usually conducive to the survival of the authoritarian regime and enables some, albeit limited, influence on decision-makers (Albrecht, 2005). However, the impact of this tertiary circle increases in times of crisis. In such situations, they have more opportunities to set and influence agendas (Asseburg & Wimmen, 2016).

The Rise of Cronies: "Business Affairs" Becoming "State Affairs"

Changes in the composition of elites (defining the representation of professional, institutional, political and other backgrounds) have occurred after changes in the leadership, ideological re-orientations, economic reforms and regime after revolutions.

In Egypt and Tunisia, the regimes were the legacy of charismatic authoritarian leaders who were determined to transform and modernise their societies. Gamal Abdel Nasser (1954-1970) in Egypt and Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987) in the case of Tunisia created highly hierarchic authoritarian state structures with the presidency at the very centre of the state, with hardly any horizontal accountabilities. The tacit authoritarian bargain of the time meant that in return for obedience the regimes provided free education, university graduates jobs in the public sector, healthcare, housing and other welfare services (Kandil, 2017).

In both cases, the middle class was the major beneficiary of modernisation policies. In Egypt, President Nasser established an authoritarian power system, which conferred on the central bureaucracy and the military an important role in the maintenance of the system. Nasser's welfare policies not only enlarged the middle class but also incorporated it through recruitment. While members of the lower middle class benefited from public education and found jobs either in the bureaucracy or state-owned enterprises, members of the higher middle class filled the higher ranks of the bureaucracy or found jobs in the management of state-owned companies. The Arab Socialist Union, the regime's single party, was established as an instrument that should incorporate most parts of the middle class and channel its political demands. Incorporation and the benefits of the welfare state were traded against Nasser's widely unrestricted rule. Ultimate political and economic powers were bundled in the hands of the president, who stood above the institutions.

Similar to Egypt, the Tunisian regime built by Bourguiba strongly relied on the middle class. However, in contrast to Egypt, where before Nasser the middle class had been excluded from English and French schools, members of the Tunisian middle class were mainly trained in the French education system. Secularism and radical modernisation after the model of France, the former colonial power, were seen by many as necessary requirements in order to overcome underdevelopment, backward institutions and traditional social habits. State-led modernisation policies not only provided jobs for members of the educated urban middle class but also invested them with the ideological mission of modernisation.

In both countries the successors to the charismatic leaders (Anwar al-Sadat in Egypt and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia) introduced economic opening policies. The shifting away from state-led modernisation policies enabled the reshuffling of the elites. The middle classes gradually lost importance for the regimes. The new leaders

got rid of the more ideological old guard, dissolved or transformed the regime parties and reconfigured their power bases. Instead of a broader-based constituency, comprising the middle classes, the new leaders rather aligned with emergent, economically potent forces and foreign capital.

Economic opening policies induced the creation of a new economic elite. A small number of loyal businessmen, closely connected with the presidential families, gradually conquered entire economic sectors. While some of these emergent businessmen were representatives of the old elites, others had emerged from the middle class. A case in point is managers of the state-owned enterprises in Egypt who were able to make use of their personal networks and rise into the new business elite.

One can hold that, from the 1980s on, Egypt as much as Tunisia was increasingly exposed to neoliberal interventions. Economic opening policies under authoritarianism fostered cronyism and helped supply clientalistic networks with financial benefits, and buttressed neo-patrimonialistic, monarchic presidential systems.

In both countries, state policies accommodated the emergent "networks of privilege" (Heydemann, 2004) through protection from external competition through tariffs on trade, preference in public contracting, subsidised energy, land appropriation at low prices and other means. In that regard, Tunisia was more protectionist and partisan than Egypt. Nevertheless, one can argue that economic opening policies transformed authoritarianism in "ways in which the interests of ruling domestic elites and (global) economic elites became increasingly intertwined" (Bogaert, 2013, p. 215). The emergent oligarchs developed close relations with Western capital and political circles.

However, neopatrimonialism created dependencies on both sides. As much as businesses could not operate without the regime's consent and support, the regimes had become dependent on the large businesses it had created. Political co-optation was to bind interests closely together and guarantee loyalty. The ruling parties played an important role as formal platforms for the co-optation of the emergent business elites. "If you were a young businessman who wanted to get ahead, or a small trader who did not want to be harassed by the police, you joined the party. So a lot of this membership was accommodation without commitment" (Kandil, 2011, p. 35).

From the early 2000s on, in Egypt the appointment of prominent cronies to ministerial posts became a common practice. In many cases, the ministerial responsibilities

overlapped with their business activities. Examples are Mohamed Mansour, one of Egypt's most important car dealers, who became Minister of Transport; Zoheir Garranah, active in the tourism industry, who became Minister of Tourism; while Ahmed El Maghrabi, the owner of Egypt's second largest real estate developer served as the Minister of Housing. Another prominent example is Ahmed Ezz, who with the support of President Mubarak became the largest steel producer in the whole MENA region. Ezz became a member of the NDP's influential Policy Committee and in 2005 he chaired President Mubarak's election campaign (Kandil, 2011; Chekir & Diwan, 2013). Accordingly, the lines between political positions, business relations and interpersonal and family relations became increasingly blurred.

The rise of the businessmen was to the disadvantage of other elite groups, such as higher bureaucrats, the old guard and as in the case of Egypt the military. The military, once the main pillar of the regime, had become largely "sterilised". Mubarak rather relied on the Ministry of the Interior to maintain the regime's stability (Kandil, 2011).

Nevertheless, the composition of the elite became more diverse under President Mubarak. Mubarak pursued a policy that can be best defined as co-opt, control or crush. Whoever accepted the supremacy of the regime was integrated into the institutional setting. A case in point was the regime's dealings with the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), the country's largest oppositional movement. The MB was denied legalisation; instead the regime tolerated their activities as long as they did not cross its political and economic interests. MB members were even allowed to participate in parliamentary elections. A similar attitude towards civil society enabled the emergence of a government-friendly civil society sector.

The Tunisian regime was more restrictive in its dealings with social and oppositional movements and civil society. When President Ben Ali came to power he removed the top elite representatives of the Bourguibian era and replaced them with a younger generation of technocrats and cronies. As he continued to rely on representatives of the Francophone bourgeoisie from the coastal region (the Sahel) and Tunis, one can speak of an exchange of personalities within the elite, rather than of shifts in the power bases of the regime.

Ben Ali's political reforms in the early 1990s also did not alter the structure and character of the authoritarian system, nor the social, cultural, political composition or the political philosophy of the relevant elites (Perthes, 2004). Despite decolonisation, French had remained the language of higher education and of elite schools. Arabic,

in contrast, has been taught at the lower levels of the education system to expand public education and literacy rates. The outcome of these policies was a schizophrenic system in which Arabophone mass institutions for the "rank-and-file" co-existed with Francophone elite schools for the "best-and-brightest". The expansion of public education for an Arabophone majority, while at the same time maintaining an elite system for a Francophone minority, strengthened a hidden cultural and class bias into the education and labour system. Language became an instrument of social apartheid differentiating the secular bourgeoisie of the coastal regions from the poorer, more religious people from the hinterlands (Erdle, 2010).

Economic opening policies, although more restricted than in Egypt, deepened the social and cultural gap in society. While the higher middle class was part of the Francophone culture and its discourses, the Arabophone lower middle class has been considered more conservative and susceptible to Islamist discourses. While the former were mostly somehow co-opted by the Ben Ali regime through its secular outlook, the latter often felt increasingly culturally and politically isolated.

From the mid-1990s on, Ben Ali's rule resembled that of a monarchic presidency. The palace developed into a parallel government apparatus, where decisions regarding foreign and trade policy and social and home affairs were taken (Erdle, 2004).

The extended presidential family became a major actor, particularly in the field of the economy. They were the major profiteers of economic opening policies. The top echelons of the elite pyramid were rather interwoven. Prominent politicians married into prominent business clans and vice versa. The result was an intertwined small elite, held together by an amalgam of political interests, business interests and interpersonal ties and family relations (Erdle, 2004). This had the effect that state affairs became inseparable from family interests.

Being close to the palace became a major condition for business success, foreign investment and legal safety. The Tunisian private economy was dominated by the so-called 60 "Ruling Families" associated with five clans, all somehow connected with the presidential family. One hundred and fourteen entrepreneurs, considered to be members of the extended presidential family made 21.3% of all net private sector profits in Tunisia (World Bank, 2014). Regime cronies mainly thrived in highly-regulated sectors, where close government relations increased profitability such as real estate, construction, transport, media, businesses relying on imports such as cars, and purchase of state-owned assets (World Bank, 2014).

To prevent predation, smaller entrepreneurs tried to keep their profits low and remain under the radar. Many of them considered "constraints as a 'price' to be paid for certain advantages. […] 'What weighs on us is also what protects us,' while another affirmed that 'this is the price we have to pay.' These business benefits include social peace and geopolitical stability as well as market protectionism, fiscal exoneration, and administrative exemptions" (Hibou, 2006, p. 189).

The rise of cronies into political institutions and government influenced the regime's foreign relations. But they also established personal links with European businesses and policy networks. These links certainly helped influence European attitudes towards the south. A prominent example for such entanglements between cronies of authoritarian regimes and European politicians and their influence on foreign policy-making is the affair around Michèle Alliot-Marie. In December 2010, when protests in Tunisia had sparked off, France's then foreign minister Alliot-Marie travelled on invitation of the Tunisian millionaire and President Ben Ali's crony Aziz Miled with his private jet on holiday to Tunisia. Upon her return, Alliot-Marie offered the Tunisian regime French knowhow and support to quell the protests.

Regime Change, Elite Change or Any Change at All?

Considering the regimes' merger with business affairs, it is no surprise that the mass protests that would later seize most of the MENA region first sparked off in these two countries. The rise of crony capitalism had led to the erosion, not to say the dissolution, of the social contract. The increasing "economisation" of power politics and the rise of cronies to billionaires were paralleled by the decline of large parts of the once powerful bureaucracy and of the urban middle classes.

Elite theorist Mosca highlights "that in modern times, the elite is not simply raised high above the rest of society; it is intimately connected with society through a sub-elite, a much larger group which comprises, to all intents and purposes the whole 'new middle-class' of civil servants, managers and white collar workers, scientists and engineers, scholars and intellectuals. This group does not only supply recruits to the elite (the ruling class in the narrow sense); it is itself a vital element in the government of society" (Mosca in Bottomore, 1993, p. 5).

However, due to economic opening policies and the widening social gap, instead of being the source of recruitment to the elites, the middle class had become worn down. Many of its members faced pauperisation. In both countries, the urban middle class, once the power base of the modernising regimes, became more and more conservative and the stronghold of mainstream Islamism, represented in Egypt by the MB and in Tunisia by Ennahda.

The protests, leading to the fall of President Ben Ali in January 2011, united members of the middle class and the urban poor. They were a reaction to growing social injustice under crony capitalism and state violence. In that sense, the burning of hundreds of police stations during the uprisings were expressions of pent-up anger against an economically unjust national security state (Mullin & Rouabah, 2018).

Dissatisfaction with social disparity, injustice, nepotism and corruption met with a looming succession question, puzzling the elites. In Egypt, Gamal Mubarak, the president's younger son geared up for his father's succession. Gamal Mubarak fashioned himself as a champion of liberal market reforms and gathered a younger generation of emergent crony businessmen and neo-liberal intellectuals and opinion-makers around him. Gamal's rise within the National Democratic Party (NDP) and its power base, a younger generation of businessmen with stronger links to global capitalist centres, did not only provoke the military but also threatened to isolate the old guard within the ruling party (Kandil, 2011).

In Tunisia, the dominance of the extended presidential family in economic and political institutions increasingly angered other factions within the elite. Most parts of the

Bourguibian old guard, the bourgeoisie and smaller business owners became increasingly disgruntled with the mafia-like practices of members of the presidential family. A potential succession by Laila Trabelsi, President Ben Ali's second wife, whose family dominated many businesses, seemed unacceptable to most of them. Opposition to Ben Ali's monarchic style and the dominance of the families associated with the president over the economy grew within the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD).

The uprisings of 2011 removed the top echelons of the hierarchic power pyramids but many of the structures, procedures, methods and personnel of the old regimes remained intact.

Transitions in both countries took entirely different paths. In Egypt, the military intervened in June 2013 after mass protests against elected President Morsi and the MB. President Morsi's removal and the persecution of the MB and other political actors stopped the transition process and established authoritarian rule with the military as the central actor. The big businesses played an important role in the ousting of President Morsi and al-Sisi's rise. Many of them supported through private media channels the anti-Morsi campaign, others restrained from investing their money in Egypt or put further pressure on the MB government through the withdrawal of their money from Egypt (Adly, 2014).

However, although President Mubarak, his sons Alaa and Gamal and most of the members of the business elite of the previous era were acquitted shortly after the intervention, they have lost their influence within the elite. Cronies of the Mubarak era are no longer able to influence government policies and benefit from public commissioning. While many of the large companies have continued to operate their businesses, they are no longer the regime's primary beneficiaries. They are left to their own devices. Instead, mainly military-owned companies have become the major beneficiaries of the regime.

The new ruling military elite maintain a distance from the Mubarak regime which they see as too corrupt and too lax. Mubarak is blamed for having stayed too long in government and trusted the wrong people.[1] In reference to the Mubarak era, the al-Sisi regime has promised to re-establish order, authority and sovereignty. Under al-Sisi, the regime's elite structure has become much narrower and less diverse. What distinguishes the current elite structure also from the Nasserist era is that the military and its representatives are now at the centre stage. The perceptions, assessments

1 Interview with Egyptian official, Cairo, May 2017.

and interests of a small military elite have now defined national interest and the country's foreign and security policies. Most parts of the bourgeoisie, the big businesses and the bureaucracy are silenced or do tacitly support President al-Sisi. However, they have less influence on the decision-making processes. Oppositional groups, movements and parties as well as the entire civil society sector are persecuted, imprisoned or isolated.

The new military elite also seem to distrust civilian state administration. Internal processes, decisions, institutional collaborations or international cooperation need to be approved by the military elite. Ministers are rotated at a rather fast speed; critical staff is either dismissed or displaced via presidential decree. In particular, those persons who were promoted under President Morsi are facing a hard time. As the Mubarak regime had failed to invest in training, the foreign ministry is lacking young skilled staff. This is why in many cases diplomats continue to serve after retirement.[2] Bureaucrats in ministries complain that the new military elite do not include the knowhow of the administration and like to do things on their own.[3]

One can assume that after the uprisings Egypt experienced elite change and the hardening of authoritarianism. Compared with the Mubarak era, the al-Sisi regime is less inclusive and the elites are less diverse (more homogeneous). Other previously influential segments such as the business magnates are co-opted but they have lost access to the top leadership. The regime's inner circle has been very small and almost exclusively includes persons with a military background. The army has become, besides its military functions, the regime's major political institution. It designs strategies, takes decisions and functions as a platform for the re-distribution of resources. Accordingly, political and economic actors are regrouping around the armed forces and its personnel.

Continuous and speedy rotations in the top bureaucracy have created a highly competitive environment, raising expectations among bureaucrats who are waiting for their turn to come. Many bureaucrats with higher ambitions have competed with their fellows to show their loyalty to the regime. This has entailed the subordination and ardent defence of the military elite's policies and positions. Accordingly, one can say that the military elites' values, priorities and perceptions also became established among civil servants. While loyalty is rewarded, those who do not comply with the military's expectations are dismissed.

In contrast to Egypt, the Tunisian Revolution induced transition to democracy. However, ironically, regime change did not necessarily entail social transformation and a fundamental change in the composition of the elites. The Jasmine Revolution removed the top ranks of the regime, such as the expanded Ben Ali clan, but neither the economic system nor the power apparatus and clientelistic networks that have

2 Interview with Egyptian diplomat, Cairo, May 2017.

3 Interview with Egyptian diplomat, Cairo, May 2017.

infused the state and its institutions were dismantled. What can be best termed as a "passive revolution" in the Gramscian sense generated a system of "bargained competition", characterised by the negotiation on the terms of the (re-)integration of the urban elites of the pre-Ben Ali era and the Islamists into the political order (Boubekeur, 2016, p. 108).

Consensus-building has been strongly promoted by external actors such as the EU. Thus, the incumbent elites have remained highly dependent on foreign financial assistance but also susceptible to norm diffusion.

Attempts to come to terms with the Ben Ali era (such as the establishment of the National Fact-Finding Commission on Abuses; The National Fact-Finding Commission on Cases of Embezzlement and Corruption; and the High Authority for the Realization of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition [the Achour Commission]) could hardly deliver the wanted results. Neither Ennahda, representing the Arabophone urban middle class and the country's southern regions, nor most parts of Francophone new/old elites, comprising an amalgam consisting of the older generation of Bourguibian functionaries, the urban bourgeoisie of the *coastal regions* and Tunis and the business elites, were interested in accounting for the past, reconstructing the state or building new institutions. One can argue that "bargained competition" based on elite consensus guaranteed a relatively smooth transitional process and the consolidation of democracy but it was at the price of the maintenance of authoritarian power structures, institutions and organisations. Instead of change, the rival segments of the elites have tried to win over the business groups and the representatives of the large administration to their side.

Impact on Foreign Policy-Making

The major question arising from the analysis of changes in the composition of the elites in the two countries is whether and how these changes have affected foreign policy-making.

In contrast to realist international relations theory, which sees the interests of a given state independent from its political leadership and other domestic factors, liberal international relations theory sees state behaviour or the political action of states as shaped by "its relationship with the domestic and transnational social context in which they are embedded" (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 513). In other words, foreign policy choices of states are shaped by structural (national, regional and international) constraints but they are also very much reflecting the interests evolving from the internal socioeconomic structure, and particularly the social composition of the ruling coalition (Hinnebusch, 2003).

Governments' preferences are usually biased, reflecting the interests, demands and expectations of more influential groups, whereas others are ignored. In more complex settings (the more liberal and democratic a society, the more complex the elite constellations), more and diverse opinions and interests need to be considered. One can assume that the more diverse the elite composition, the more interests need to be appeased, considered and included in foreign policy-making. The more homogeneous an elite configuration in terms of social class, institutional and professional background, the more biased foreign policy orientations can be expected.

"The state as a structure forms, on the one hand, an arena in which social forces pursue rival strategies and political projects. On the other hand, this arena is structurally biased; that is, the state tends to be more open to some social classes and groups than to others and tends to select or favour their strategies over others" (Jessop in Van Apeldoorn & De Graaff, 2012, p. 33). Which are considered and which less so depends on the political and economic constellation. In times of a globalisation and neoliberal hegemony, the interests of corporates have globally gained influence on the political decisions of national governments.

As early as in the 1980s, Richard Rosecrance observed the emergence of a new trading world that is characterised by economic interdependence, replacing a military-political and territorial system (Rosecrance in Krişçi, 2009). States turn into trading states, encouraging and supporting the "productive and trading energies in society to find markets for their goods" (Rosecrance in Krişçi, 2009). The bigger the share in foreign trade, the stronger the power base for social groups, corporations and other

relevant economic actors and the more opportunities they have to influence foreign policy-making (Katzenstein, 1996).

In a trading world, economic interests do not only affect foreign policy-making in regard to specific countries or topics but also define the national interest. Political actors tend to claim that their goals are the national interest. Therefore, rather than assuming the national interest as the survival strategy and power maximisation strategy of a given state, regardless of its domestic power balances and ruling coalitions as neorealism does, we conceive the national interest guiding foreign policy-making as a social construct; as the product of the interpretation of the ruling elites (Weldes, 1996).

Considering the socioeconomic transformations explored above, one can argue that the emergent business elites had a huge impact on the definition of Egypt's and Tunisia's national interest and foreign policy. This entailed a balancing out of protecting the privileges granted through authoritarian rule and corruption with integration with global capital and therewith connected interests.

Whereas the economic interests of certain economic actors have increasingly found their ways into the economic and trade policies of states, there are also other ideational factors to be considered in the analysis of foreign policy-making. The social learning model focuses on ideational factors such as norms and values and highlights how these factors have been advanced over time. Elites are essential for the absorption and dissemination of norms and standards as, in many ways, they function as transmitters between the international order, the nation state and society. Domestic actors are willing to adopt norms and standards from others when they are compatible with their own internalised identities, values, norms and interests. The likelihood of rule adoption is expected to increase with the identification of the elites with the norms and values. This notion comes close to what Joseph Nye calls soft power. Nye holds that soft power occurs when "a country gets others to want what it wants." This process is more likely to occur if the elites in one country consider the other actor's culture and ideology as more attractive and legitimate (1990, 166-167). What is compatible with internalised values also seems more appropriate. Actors adopt norms without sanctions or rewards through socialisation and normative persuasion. Legitimacy is produced through the osmosis of norms and values from dominant to secondary elites (Ikenberry & Kupchan, 1990).

One can argue that changes in elite configurations and changing opportunity structures can induce changes and adaptations in the foreign policy preferences and the foreign policy behaviour of states (Van Apeldoorn & De Graaff, 2012). New elites

can either advance different norms and values or they can be guided by different ideas, ideologies and economic interests. However, it is important to highlight that radical changes in foreign policy preferences usually occur after political breaks such as revolutions, the resignation of long-term governments and/or the coming into power of emergent new political actors. Even in such cases, changes in foreign policy preferences and behaviour might take some time. Instead of big shifts and the re-orientation of foreign policy, often smaller adaptations can be observed.

Elites and their Role in the Relations with the EU before the Uprisings

Traditionally, Europe has been Tunisia's and Egypt's primary trading partner. In 2017, 29.7% of Egypt's total trade volume was covered by the EU. The EU has an even larger share in Tunisia's trade volume. 64% of the country's trade is with the EU. In 2017, 78.5% of exports went to the EU and 54.3% of the imports came from there (European Commission, n.d.a; European Commission, n.d.b). Among EU member states, France is still the country's most important trading partner. One can say that, even decades after decolonisation, the economies of most states in North Africa are still largely oriented towards Europe and they have largely remained incorporated into the economic and normative power system established by Western imperialism (Hinnebush, 2012).

Therefore, the stance of Egyptian and Tunisian elites towards the EU and its member states cannot be understood without acknowledging the legacy of colonialism. Although, compared with other world regions the period of formal European colonialism in the MENA region was rather short, the impact of conceptions of European modernity on education, institutions, institutional processes and norms, the way of doing things, the set-up of national economies and its trading goods have been long lasting. Many members of the elites in Egypt and Tunisia have been educated in French, British or German schools and many of them have studied in European universities. In terms of culture and ideas, they have quite often oriented themselves towards Europe. This is particularly true for members of the urban bourgeoisie in the coastal areas of Tunisia. Traditionally, they have oriented themselves culturally and economically much more towards the Mediterranean than to their rural hinterlands.

The EU and before that the European Economic Community (EEC) have promoted the liberalisation of trade with the countries of the MENA region. Several states, among them Egypt and Tunisia, signed association agreements that also included the liberalisation of trade in certain sectors. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), initiated by the Barcelona Declaration in 1995, provided a multilateral framework for cooperation in areas such as economy and finances, politics and security, and social issues and culture.

For the regimes and their cronies, intensified relations with the EU opened new opportunities. They hoped to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from Europe, increase exports into the EU's single market, facilitate access to EU development funds and travel into the EU. Moreover, from a strategic point of view, the partnership with the EU offered an opportunity to balance out US dominance in the region.

The EU promoted economic liberalisation as it hoped that it would instigate economic growth, counter radicalisation, contribute to good governance and eventually lead to

democratic change (Kienle, 1998). Schimmelfennig (2010) highlights that the EU tried to expand a multilaterally managed "regulatory framework for liberal markets" according to its own model in the neighbourhood. This entailed the export of European norms, standards and processes.

The old elites adopted those that fitted their interests and ignored others that conflicted with their privileges. In other words, crony capitalists were a driving force behind liberalisation but they were wary of keeping it selected. "The incumbents brokered reforms to suit their interests" (Eibl & Malik, n.d., p. 2). A common practice of partial liberalisation has been that the reduction of tariff barriers has been compensated by an increase of non-tariff measures (NTMs) in sectors sensitive to the economic interests of regime cronies. Eibl and Malik (n.d., p. 4) argue that, due to their organic relations with the regimes, they could often have "insider knowledge and enter a sector in anticipation of an assured NTM introduction."

Accordingly, as liberalisation remained narrow in range it did not lead to "a deepening of the domestic market or the creation of additional commercial links internationally" (Kamrawa, 2004, p. 97). "Therefore, instead of serving as the principal vehicle for greater economic participation globally, international trade policy has been pursued by most Middle Eastern states in a way that has hindered the integration of their economies into global markets" (Kamrawa, 2004, p. 97).

While the crony capitalist systems would have hardly been able to compete under free conditions and only thrived under protection, cheap labour and growing young populations were to attract foreign investment. Trade liberalisation and a favourable tax regime and cheap low-skilled human resources attracted European companies. Tunisia for instance became a country to which large French and Italian companies outsourced assemblage. However, as these investments required cheap labour, employees and workers hardly benefited (World Bank, 2014).

At the same time, FDI became a lucrative business for the top echelons of the regimes. In Egypt, according to the law of foreign investment, multinational companies that wished to operate in the country needed a local partner. These local partners were usually found within the first circle of elites either among members of the presidents' families or powerful people in the ruling party (Baram, 2011).

Besides the business sector, an emergent civil society sector, mainly dominated by educated, secular members of the urban elites, were other important beneficiaries of

EU programmes and instruments. Most of these organisations were co-opted and controlled by the state. Those who managed to keep a certain degree of independence were often subject to harassment and repression.

The EU's normative claims such as "diversity and pluralism", the "rule of law", "democracy" and "good governance" raised the hopes of intellectuals, activists and oppositional groups but hardly challenged the authoritarian regimes. After all, democratic transformation has never been the EU's primary goal. Rather than supporting the extension of popular participation or accountability, intensified cooperation with the regimes was to increase security and support the status quo.

Other beneficiaries of the partnership with the EU were so-called "trans-governmental policy networks" (TGPNs). Freyburg (2011, p. 1001) describes TGPNs as "patterns of regular and purposive relations among like government units working across borders." Such policy networks have been essential in bringing together specialists from within the bureaucracy of EU member states and those of neighbouring countries. Interlinkage enabled the emergence of a transnational network of promoters of liberal governance, also cutting across societal and political differences. İşleyen (2015, p. 675) contends that twinning programmes, funded by the EU under the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), promoted "neoliberal principles of rational conduct, competitiveness, entrepreneurship and risk management." In other words, twinning programmes helped expand a neoliberal rationality. Trans-governmental networks within the bureaucracies then often became multipliers of liberal governance concepts. The EU itself emphasised that "two of the most important, non-measurable but visible results of twinning are network building and change of attitudes and behaviour" (Freyburg, 2011, p. 1010).

Thus, one can argue that EU policies towards the region did not bring about democratic reforms and political change but successfully disseminated neoliberal discourses and paradigms and strengthened the leverage of certain groups within the elites such as pro-government businessmen, pro-government civil society representatives and policy networks within the bureaucracy. These groups have been the primary addressees of EU policies.

The New Elites and the EU

Policies towards the EU radically changed under the al-Sisi government. Due to the EU's suspension of high-level dialogue with the new regime, cooperation remained only limited to technical issues between 2013 and 2016. The al-Sisi regime in turn accused the EU of having supported the MB and President Morsi and suspended any political dialogue.[4]

The EU's interventions in the name of human rights and democracy have been rebuffed as interferences in Egypt's domestic affairs and a breach of its sovereignty. In his resignation speech as Defence Minister, al-Sisi stated in March 2014 that "Egypt is not a playground for any internal, regional or international party and it never will be. We do not interfere in others' affairs, and do not allow for others to interfere in our affairs" (al-Sisi, 2014).

Western-funded civil society organisations have become primary suspects. They have been perceived as the long arm of external forces that aim to change Egypt. A rigorous non-governmental organisation (NGO) law issued in 2017 has inhibited any foreign funding for NGOs and prevented the activities of any foreign organisations on Egyptian territory. As a high ranking Egyptian diplomat put it, "the last thing we need is help with democracy on this question – the support of NGOs behind our back is not good. Do you allow us to establish NGOs in your countries? Europeans take the wrong approach as they do not want to work with Egyptian authorities; they go directly to the NGOs."[5]

Another diplomat stated that: "Egypt will not change to please the EU. We (Egyptians) know best what is good for us, we can discuss, but we do not accept their (the EU's) decisions, "we (Egyptians) reject assistance that is linked to being pushed to do things."[6]

The new military elite is wary of autonomous institutions and initiatives and rather wish to monopolise power and create a hierarchical chain of command that resembles the military.

The regime's ambition to "re-nationalise" and control external relations and the difficult relationship between the new military elite and the EU have also affected the "trans-governmental policy networks" that are mainly represented in the administration. Many of the projects have fallen prey to the military elite's suspicion of foreign interventions. Bureaucrats have also complained that there is no continuity in the top-ranking personnel in the ministries that would guarantee a deepening of the relations. As

4 While President Morsi and the MB had seen the EU as an important external partner for the consolidation of their rule and as an external source of legitimisation for Morsi's beleaguered presidency, the al-Sisi regime has seen the EU as a naïve actor that does not understand the region and the dangers emanating from the MB.

5 Interview with Egyptian diplomat, Cairo, May 2017.

6 Interview with Egyptian diplomat, Brussels, June 2017.

people in charge are often exchanged, no personnel ties can be developed. "However, personal ties with EU officials are essential."[7] The latter statement highlights the importance of the informal dimension in relations with the EU, particularly when it comes to twinning projects but also access to financial sources.

The souring of relations with the EU mainly affected political dialogue and cooperation among universities. In particular, the exchange of data is considered to be sensitive. The ambition to maintain Egyptian sovereignty and defy any kind of foreign (Western) influence has restricted the participation of Egyptian universities in international research projects.

At the same time, the EU's political boycott was alleviated by regional partners such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These regional alliances, building on the common enmity against the MB, had already existed under President Mubarak and have now been re-forged. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have become the strongest financial supporters of the al-Sisi regime. The strong dependence on Saudi and Emirate financial assistance has entailed liabilities vis-à-vis donors, such as the transfer of two islands in the Red Sea to Saudi Arabia. The authoritarian character of the regime and the hierarchic and homogeneous character of the elite allowed the transfer of the islands despite public outcry in Egypt.

The close alliance with the two Gulf countries has fostered new segments within the military elite. Saudi Arabia is heavily investing in infrastructure projects, tourism and the energy sector. Although the al-Sisi government has just implemented a structural adjustment programme in line with the requirements of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (they are requested as a guarantee from Saudi and Emirate donors), the willingness to further and deepen trade liberalisation as promoted by the EU has been low. The military elite has not stood in the way of neoliberal structural reforms but has rather supported partial trade liberalisation as in previous eras to protect its own economic privileges and power bases.

One can say that the EU's role decreased in parallel to the dismissal of the local representatives of a "globalisation" class and the therewith connected discourses.

Tunisia's transition and the country's relations with the EU have evolved in utterly different ways. In contrast to Egypt, Tunisia's politically relevant elite has broadened and diversified. The coalition government, the President and his staff, opposition parties, civil society organisations, trade unions and syndicates as well as media have

7 Interview with Egyptian diplomat, Cairo, May 2017.

been engaged in extensive debates. The EU is considered to be the most important supporter in the phase of democracy consolidation.

Interviews held with representatives of different civil society organisations and political parties including Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda have revealed strong convergence with the norms, values and precepts advanced by the EU.[8] Interviewees did not only highlight the importance of the EU and its crucial role in Tunisia but their approaches, strategies and arguments largely remained in the normative framework set by the EU. Civil society has become an important factor in relations with the EU. They are also considering the stalemate on the domestic political level, the most important driving force for democratisation.

Hence, in contrast to Egypt, in Tunisia relations with the EU comprise not only the economic and security dimension but also include the normative dimension. For many Tunisians, the EU and its member states still represent a model to be achieved. Again in comparison to Egypt there is also hardly any discourse on the question of foreign intervention and the sovereignty of the Tunisian state. On the contrary, the new politically relevant elites in Tunisia have oriented themselves towards the West and Europe. This also comes with certain disadvantages. On the one hand, Tunisia's development has been more and more influenced by the recommendations, impulses and expectations of external forces such as the EU and, on the other, this over-reliance on Western/European guidance has thwarted the advancement of independent and creative home-grown approaches and solutions to domestic challenges.

Again, contrary to Egypt, in Tunisia resistance to EU interventions has not evolved in respect to norms and values promoted by the EU but to the neoliberal economic recipes it has advanced. While the political elites, including the Islamist Ennahda party, have supported the EU's ambition to advance a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), many civil society organisations, with the powerful trade union UGTT leading the way, have strongly opposed trade liberalisation and the neoliberal reforms this would entail. While the former have almost fully adopted – at least rhetorically – the EU's discourse on trade liberalisation as a basis of economic growth, prosperity and democracy, the powerful trade union and civil society representatives have been critical of the privatisation and opening the Tunisian market. The trade unions fear that trade liberalisation will be to the advantage of large domestic companies and international capital but to the disadvantage of employees and workers in Tunisia. The elites of the ruling coalition parties state that there is no alternative to DCFTA. While Ennahda sees DCFTA as a modernising tool that can

8 Interviews with civil society representatives, academics, EU diplomats, Tunisian diplomats, bureaucrats, Ennahda MPs and Nida Tounes MPs, Tunis, October 2016.

break up old structures and the economic dominance of the elites of the coastal regions and Tunis, Nidaa Tounes representatives hope that their business constituencies will benefit from free trade. However, despite critical debates around DCFTA and the economic policies promoted by the EU, none of the members of the politically relevant elite has openly questioned the EU's normative agenda and its role in the process of democracy consolidation.

Whereas under the Ben Ali regime the state has been the only interlocutor of international relations, the foreign policy platform in post-Ben Ali Tunisia has become more crowded and diverse. Among different political parties with international ties, Tunisian civil society has become internationally well connected. The same can be said for trans-governmental networks within the bureaucracy. A thriving civil society sector is also the result of large funds flowing into Tunisia. Many of these funds were diverted into the country after the military's intervention in Egypt.

Conclusion

Whereas the MENA region is considered to be of utmost importance to Europe's security and welfare, the analysis of what defines the attitude and behaviour of countries in the region towards Europe has been rather meagre. Egypt and Tunisia, two major EU partners, have undergone fundamental socioeconomic and political changes with serious repercussions on the composition of the politically relevant elites in each of the two countries.

As liberal IR theory highlights, such changes in domestic power relations cannot remain without effects on foreign policy behaviour and IR. The composition of the elite structure in a country strongly determines the preferences of governments. A broader perspective on elites allows inclusion in the analysis not only of decision-makers but also segments of society that influence these decision-making processes directly or indirectly. The more authoritarian a system, the more homogeneous the elite setting and, at the same time, the more opaque the decision-making processes.

Egypt and Tunisia experienced the rise of crony capitalism from the 1990s. Regime cronies, in most cases somehow connected with the leaders, their families and/or the ruling party, helped establish a neo-patrimonial system characterised by clientelism. Patronage networks functioned as the main instrument of material redistribution. These regime-loyal businessmen have been the primary beneficiaries of relations with the EU and also a motor behind the deepening of cooperation. In both cases, they either had insider information or could even direct liberalisation policies and shape foreign and trade policies.

Regime-loyal entrepreneurs established important links to European businesses and political networks. The EU's normative claims to liberal values such as democracy, human rights and accountability largely went unheard.

Civil society and opposition groups had strongly believed in the EU's transformative power but their hopes were dashed. The EU prioritised security cooperation and trade liberalisation over democratic norm promotion.

Tragically, in Egypt the uprisings resulted in a hardening of authoritarianism. Most of the members of the inner circle of the Mubarak era have been replaced and isolated. The new elite is less diverse and more homogeneous. Almost all leading figures are related to the Egyptian military. The influence of non-military persons, including the previously important oligarchs, on foreign policy-making has remained rather low. The new leadership is interested in EU financial assistance and economic cooperation

but does not accept any normative conditionality. Based on the idea that Egypt has to gain back its sovereignty, the new military elite are wary of any activities that cannot be controlled. This attitude has mainly restricted the radius of action of trans-governmental policy networks within the bureaucracy but also international collaborations of academics.

In contrast, Tunisia's democratic transition led to the inclusion of new, formerly isolated segments into the politically relevant elite. The inclusion of the Islamist Ennahda has diversified the composition of the political decision-makers. At the same time, a vivid civil society sector, profession syndicates, trade unions and media have become important and influential in foreign policy-making. They have been the primary supporters of the EU's ambition to promote liberal democratic norms and values but, at the same time, they have been ardent opponents of the EU's efforts to advance neoliberal reforms and trade liberalisation. One can conclude that, while from an EU perspective, the civil society sector has been an important partner for its democratisation agenda, it has been one of the major obstacles to the implementation of one of the EU's other ambitions: to expand a zone of liberal trade in the neighbourhood.

While in Egypt public discourse has been restricted and can therefore be controlled, in Tunisia public debates have an impact on foreign policy-making. However, despite regime change and the inclusion of Ennahda, many continuities can also be observed. The elites continue to be dominated by the Francophone trained elites, stemming from the coastal regions and the capital. Rather than challenging their predominance, Ennahda has adapted to their pro-European orientation. The EU has been the major donor in Tunisia's democracy consolidation phase. This has further increased dependency and alignment among the political, intellectual and economic elites and prevented the advancement of alternative solutions.

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EuroMeSCo

Founded in 1996 and comprising 102 institutes from 30 European and South Mediterranean countries, EuroMeSCo (the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission) is the main network of research centres on politics and security in the Mediterranean, striving at building a community of research institutes and think tanks committed to strengthening Euro-Mediterranean relations.

The objectives of the network are to foster influential quality analysis and reflection on Euro-Mediterranean politics and policies; to serve as a platform for dialogue between the members of the network and key stakeholders to discuss the key trends and challenges on the region´s agenda; to increase the impact of think tanks and research institutes and to actively contribute to policy-making through dissemination of research outputs of the network to experts and national, European and international institutions linked to Euro-Mediterranean relations.

The EuroMeSCo work plan includes a research programme with five publication lines (Joint Policy Studies, Papers, Briefs, Spot-Ons and reports), as well as numerous activities, including annual conferences, seminars, workshops, presentations, formal and informal meetings with policy makers on the key political and security dynamics. It also includes communication and dissemination related activities (website, newsletter and targeted institutional dissemination) to raise awareness and promote the work of the network and to stimulate debate on Euro-Mediterranean affairs.

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