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## THE EU'S DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND RESILIENCE DISCOURSE AND ITS CONTESTATION

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### ABSTRACT

MEDRESET Work Package 4 (WP4) aims at evaluating the effectiveness of EU policies on democracy promotion and human rights in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) region from the perspective of bottom-up actors' interests, needs, perceptions and expectations, both at the local and the EU level, with the purpose of identifying inclusive, responsive and flexible policy actions to reinvigorate Euro-Mediterranean relations. This paper will firstly provide a background analysis for WP4, based on a critical review of the discourses of the EU and other key international and regional players, discursive positions of civil society actors (including at this stage only documents produced by civil society networks which span the Mediterranean) and the academic discourse. The second part will give an introductory overview on the central role played by civil society in the Arab uprisings and beyond, while the third part will outline the analytical and methodological indications that will inform research and fieldwork in this WP.

### INTRODUCTION

WP4 aims at evaluating the effectiveness of EU policies on democracy promotion and human rights in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) region from the perspective of bottom-up actors' interests, needs, perceptions and expectations, both at the local and the EU level, with the purpose of identifying inclusive, responsive and flexible policy actions to reinvigorate Euro-Mediterranean relations. In particular, the analysis will focus on four country case studies (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon) and will cover the period starting from the early 2000s, with particular attention to the post-uprisings phase (2011–today).

The paper will first provide a background analysis for this work package, based on a critical review of the discourses of the EU and other key international and regional players, discursive positions of civil society actors (including at this stage only documents produced by civil society networks which span the Mediterranean) and the academic discourse. The aim is not only to de-construct the EU's own discourse on democracy, human rights and now resilience; it also juxtaposes it to the discourse of other top-down and bottom-up actors. The academic discourse produced in Europe takes a specific role in this overall picture as it generally sits

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within the larger EU discourse, even though a critical literature is emerging which resists this discourse. It is to this latter literature that this work package seeks to contribute. The second and third parts of this paper, therefore, depart from the Euro-centrism of the literature in two ways. First, the second part gives an introductory overview on the central role played by civil society in the Arab uprisings and beyond. Unfortunately, very little is known in the literature about how individual and civil society actors based in the four country case studies perceive their own role in their countries and which political ideas they are promoting for their countries. The third part of this paper, therefore, outlines a methodology aimed at filling this gap by conducting discourse analysis of relevant documents produced by a selected number of civil society actors in such countries, and conducting recursive interviews with these stakeholders.

## 1. BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

### 1.1 EU DISCOURSE

Issues of human rights and democracy have entered the EU foreign policy discourse from the very beginning, when a shared foreign policy emerged. In 1970, the European Political Cooperation was created and shortly after, in 1973, the nine foreign ministers of the European Communities stated in their "Declaration on European Identity":

Sharing as they do the same attitudes to life, based on a determination to build a society which measures up to the needs of the individual, they are determined to defend the principles of representative democracy, of the rule of law, of social justice – which is the ultimate goal of economic progress – and of respect for human rights. All of these are fundamental elements of the European Identity. (European Union 1973: 119)

Thus, while the European Communities did not yet speak of the (active) promotion of democracy and human rights, but only about its (passive) defence, democracy and human rights was already identified as an issue that would create a shared identity. With the Maastricht Treaty and the setting up of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, one of the EU's key objectives in foreign policy became to "develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (European Union 1992). The EU had turned to the active promotion of democracy and human rights in a new international environment whose *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the time) was characterized by the idea of an "end of history" (Fukuyama 1992) whereby the West-led liberal order would become permanent. In 1995, the Commission stated that in "an international environment in which the universal nature of human rights is increasingly emphasized, the European Union has gradually come to define itself in terms of the promotion of those rights and democratic freedoms" (European Commission 1995: 7). Both were therefore also included on a rather generic way in the Barcelona declaration and the association agreements signed in the framework of the Barcelona process.

While initially democracy as an agenda served as a basis to foster a shared EU identity, it increasingly became a means that would delimit the EU from the other – specifically from its other in the South. Thus, it is an example par excellence of how an identity was produced through the inscription of boundaries which would demarcate the inside from the outside and the self from the other (Campbell 1998: 19). Democracy promotion was a means to make foreign the

areas outside of the EU – it was a classical “boundary producing political performance” (Ashley 1987: 53). Increasingly, the EU depicted itself an enlightened, democratic area of peace and the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean as a backward area of autocracy and instability that had to be uplifted through EU intervention – thereby also protecting the EU from violence from this area. The 2001 Laeken Council Conclusions after 9/11 are instructive on this. They argue that:

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, it looked briefly as though we would for a long while be living in a stable world order, free from conflict, founded upon human rights. Just a few years later, however, there is no such certainty. The eleventh of September has brought a rude awakening. The opposing forces have not gone away: religious fanaticism, ethnic nationalism, racism and terrorism are on the increase, and regional conflicts, poverty and underdevelopment still provide a constant seedbed for them. What is Europe’s role in this changed world? Does Europe not, now that is finally unified, have a leading role to play in a new world order, that of a power able both to play a stabilising role worldwide and to point the way ahead for many countries and peoples? Europe as the continent of humane values, the Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, the French Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall; the continent of liberty, solidarity and above all diversity, meaning respect for others’ languages, cultures and traditions. The European Union’s one boundary is democracy and human rights. (European Council 2001)

This rhetoric of Europe as the “continent of humane values” delimited by a boundary of democracy and human rights from the cruel and violent outside world to which it can point the way ahead is clearly reminiscent of the rhetoric of European colonial empires. It constructs the EU as humane and its outside world as backward. This was also supported by an academic literature which raised concepts such as Civilian and Normative Power Europe (Manners 2002), a vocabulary also used by politicians in their speeches. In line with this role understanding, the EU came forward with the European Neighbourhood Policy which would upscale the EU’s commitment to democracy promotion. In the words of then Commissioner for Enlargement Gunther Verheugen, it would bring the EU’s “greatest success story” to the so-called “neighbours”, thereby expanding the EU’s “area of stability and prosperity” by “promoting our shared values, including those of rule of law, democracy and human rights” (Verheugen 2004).

Just as the EU’s general approach towards the Mediterranean is rather securitized, depoliticizing and technocratic (Cebeci and Schumacher 2017), also this specific discourse which was prevalent in Europe at least until the onset of the civil war in Syria is characterized by its Euro-centrism in three respects, that is *its securitization of the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean which has had an impact on the actors the EU has worked with; a specific depoliticization and politicization of democracy and human rights which has had an impact on the substance the EU has promoted; and the technocratization of democracy and human rights which has had an impact on the instruments the EU has applied.*

#### (DE)SECURITIZATION

As elaborated above, democracy has been treated as a highly securitized affair. The lack of democracy has been singled out as the one key factor that explains instability in the Mediterranean. Thus, it is the undemocraticness of the Mediterranean other which poses a

danger to the democratic Europeans. At the same time, the EU has presented itself as basically unproblematic to the Mediterranean other. In other words, the EU does not problematize the dangers which EU policies in the area of migration, trade or economic reform pose to the human security of the citizens in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean. As a result of these two sides of the securitization coin, the EU has tended to work with specific actors in the Mediterranean – that is, mainly autocratic regimes – as key partners, while working with civil society on a more limited level (Huber 2014). Autocratic regimes were quite successful in taking advantage of the increasing Western fear of Islamic fundamentalism by pushing the narrative of political Islam as a security threat, thus seeking to justify the violations of human rights on the part of a variety of actors associated with political Islam and beyond. Since the West has shown a tendency to perceive Islamists as monolithic, authoritarian regimes were by and large successful in their promotion of the view that transnational terrorism was an “emanation of the violence they claimed was inherent in political Islam” (Joffé 2008: 155, see also Lia 1999: 49-50). While the EU has not securitized political Islam to the same extent as its Member States (Bicchi and Martin 2006), its contacts with political Islam in the region were highly limited until the Arab uprisings when the Muslim Brotherhood and affiliated movements made headway in elections in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya.

#### (DE)POLITICIZATION

Since at least the early 2000s, both the US and the EU, as well as international organizations have highly politicized the issues of democracy and human rights in the Arab world – the US through its “freedom agenda”, the EU mainly through the “European Neighbourhood Policy”, and the UN through various reports and policies. Important in this respect was the 2002 Arab Development Report which identified freedom and women’s empowerment as two key deficits to explain poverty of capabilities and opportunities in the Arab world. This politicization of these issues has not only served to separate the Western and Arab worlds from each other, but the way and the international context in which this was pursued has led to a backlash against democracy and human rights. This is perhaps most evident for the gender issue. This discourse has not only tended to singularly problematize women (taking men as the norm and identifying women as the problem, rather than the structures which inhibit gender equality), but has used gender to delimit boundaries between the “progressive West” and the “backward” Arab world (Khalid 2015: 169). Gender has thus been made an issue through which resistance to what is perceived as an imperial West can be expressed, thereby creating a very difficult context for local civil society groups or movements that work towards gender equality.

At the same time, the EU has depoliticized its own role in sustaining autocracy by its cooperation with autocrats in key areas for the EU, such as trade or migration. Furthermore, it has separated the issue of democracy from issues such as trade, food security, industry, energy or migration. This approach has been perpetuated in the post-uprising period, as the EU continues to keep political rights separate from socio-economic rights (Teti 2012), reflecting its narrow liberal conceptualization of democracy which depoliticizes the role that EU economic power, imposed economic reforms and trade play for the polities, economies and societies of the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean.

## TECHNOCRATIZATION

Finally, the EU has promoted democracy in a rather technocratic way, whereby it has exported the EU model (as opposed to more locally grown and supported models which might put more emphasis on issues such as social justice) without involving local civil society in the agenda setting, thereby denying them agency in policies which have a large effect on their daily lives (Huber 2017). This is reminiscent of what Doty has called the “process of negation” whereby the North has systematically denied agency to the South in what she calls “missions of deliverance and salvation” (Doty 1996: 11). Instead of involving civil society actors, democracy and development are promoted through political deals with autocrats, technical cooperation with bureaucracies, and the privatization of aid. Finally, technocratization also allows for a certain degree of surveillance of the South, as the EU has up to the current revision of the ENP published yearly “progress reports” which monitor and classify “partner countries” – even while partner countries do not similarly monitor the EU on issues such as, for example, homophobia, anti-semitism, the treatment of refugees, anti-immigration and anti-terror laws. At the same time, it should be noted that the progress reports have been perceived as a window of opportunity for local human rights groups to make their demands heard.

Has this approach changed with the Arab uprisings? Securitization of the Middle East has certainly increased, with European politicians and EU officials now referring to the previous “ring of friends” (Prodi 2002) as a “ring of fire” (Bildt 2015). Also the Global Strategy of the EU, published in 2015, speaks of times of “existential crisis” in which the “Union is under threat. Our European project, which has brought unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy is being questioned” (EEAS 2016: 13). At the same time, the strategy no longer mentions the external promotion of democracy as an EU policy. Stating that the EU is now more realistic than idealistic, the strategy instead defines “resilience” as one of the EU’s top priorities in its surrounding regions. Resilience is defined as “encompassing all individuals and the whole of society” (EEAS 2016: 24). Thus, as opposed to the promotion of democracy which aims at the institutional and top-down framework of a state, the concept of resilience is directed at society from the bottom up. As Chandler has pointed out,

Resilience understands the problems of conflict, underdevelopment and a lack of rights and democracy as being self-generated products of communities or societies themselves. For this reason, the solution is not seen to lie merely in transforming policy governance at the level of elites or installing new formal institutional frameworks. The ideological power of resilience is driven by the understanding that ‘we’ cannot fix ‘their’ problems but, equally, that they cannot be expected to break out of the reproduction of these problems or ‘traps’ without external assistance. Changing or adapting behaviour and understandings needs to come from within; resilience cannot be ‘given’ or ‘produced’ by outside actors, only facilitated or inculcated through understanding the mechanisms through which problematic social practices are reproduced. External intervention is legitimised, in fact seen as necessary, but responsibility for the outcomes of intervention is placed squarely on the shoulders of the local actors themselves. (Chandler 2013: 277)

Thus, as the EU’s democracy promotion has failed, as dramatically exposed during and after the Arab uprisings, the EU has not problematized its own liberal development model – it continues to perceive itself as a transformative power. Instead, the EU is now problematizing the “society”



and has switched its approach *within* its liberal development model from a top-down to a bottom-up approach. This switch, however, as Ülgen (2016) has pointed out, has bracketed out the question of how to deal with autocratic regimes, with whom business-as-usual continues. Resilience is also securitized as a concept. For the EU, a "resilient state is a secure state, and security is key for prosperity and democracy" (EEAS 2016: 23). As a "special focus" of the EU's work on resilience, transit countries of migrants and refugees are mentioned. There is no focus on the human security of the people living in the regions surrounding Europe.

## 1.2 DISCOURSES BY OTHER INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL KEY PLAYERS (US, TURKEY, RUSSIA, CHINA, SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN)

The EU has not been the only actor for whom issues of democracy and human rights have been and are security issues. This is valid for all geopolitical key players in the region, as WP2 has shown (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2016, ASI-REM 2017, de Pedro 2017, Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017a and 2017b, Görgülü and Dark 2017, Isaac and Kares 2017, Quero 2017). Indeed, political ideas on who governs, and how, are at the basis of a geopolitical struggle in the region where Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey are all projecting their own ideas, as are the US, EU, Russia and China.

The discourse of the US, and to some extent Turkey, has been closest to that of the EU. The human rights and democracy discourse re-entered the US foreign policy agenda during the later phase of the Cold War, but not towards the Middle East – where the US might in fact have been the one power which has most effectively prevented democracy (Brownlee 2012). It was under US unipolar power in the Middle East after the end of the Cold War, that the level of autocracy (according to its own liberal standards as measured by Freedom House) actually increased in the region (Huber 2015). This changed briefly when the Bush administration singled out the lack of democracy in the Arab world as the breeding ground for "the ideologies of murder" (Bush 2003), thereby making democracy promotion a key US security policy. In the Freedom Agenda democracy promotion became a US mission toward "every nation and culture" (Bush 2005), thus justifying even the most extraordinary means, such as a military intervention that violated international law. While the democracy agenda had a lower profile under President Barack Obama, President Donald Trump has torn down the whole US discourse on the US "model" and democracy promotion as an agenda. He points out that "When the world looks at how bad the United States is, and then we go and talk about civil liberties, I don't think we're a very good messenger" (Trump 2016), and says that he will "stop trying to build new nations in far-off lands, many areas you have never even heard of these places" (Business Standard 2016). At the same time, the actual shift might not be as radical as Trump proclaims, since the issue of "democracy promotion" remains a foreign policy priority in Congress (Carothers 2017).

In some respects, Turkey's foreign policy discourse was also influenced by the Western liberal democracy agenda. In the early 2000s, as part of their own efforts to "promote democracy", both the US and the EU pushed Turkey into participation in this endeavour by singling it out as a role model for the Muslim world, which would sit rather well with Turkey's then evolving self-image as a neo-Ottoman regional power. This was further boosted by the Arab uprisings, when the AKP was framed as a model by Islamist parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia (Huber 2014). This approach did, however, enter in trouble with the coup in Egypt and the resilience of the Assad regime in Syria and so led to the eventual

fall of Turkey's neo-Ottoman ambitions when Prime Minister Davutoğlu (head architect of this agenda) had to resign in 2016, heralding in a more pragmatic Turkish foreign policy.

Russia and China, on the other hand, have viewed Western democracy promotion in the Middle East as a policy of regime change which has driven the region into conflict – a situation which both countries perceive as problematic for their own interests in the region. As Nicolás de Pedro (2017) shows, Moscow has argued that external interference has led to the destruction of traditional governance and security mechanisms. Russia sees the corruption of the autocratic regimes in the Middle East as a problem, but as opposed to Western analysis, Russia perceived the Arab uprisings against these regimes not as a switch to democracy, but as a return to traditional values. It was seen as a "shift of power from the Soviet-educated secular leftist Arab generation to a younger Islamist generation that has less affection and more limited historical ties with post-Soviet Russia" (Dannreuther 2015: 81). For Russia, the root of the current security problems in the Middle East can be traced to Western democracy promotion. As Roland Dannreuther (2015: 82) has pointed out, for Putin "it was precisely this loss of power of the central state, and the devolution of power to the periphery, which resulted in a vacuum that in the North Caucasus, led to chaos, civil war and the rise of a radical anti-Russian Islamist extremist challenge".

In line with this view, Western democracy promotion was seen as causing state disintegration, as in Iraq. Russia, in contrast, fostered the concept of "sovereign democracy" put forward by Vladislav Surkov, Putin's chief political advisor and likely successor. Surkov saw liberal democracy as fit for post-industrializing nations, but not for modernizing and industrializing societies in which it would cause internal disorder and conflict. In the latter, the state would need to play the key role in managing the transition to democracy (Surkov 2006). The concept of resilience might or might not sit well with this approach. If focused on civil society, resilience is problematic for "sovereign democracy" as it entails a liberal and pluralist conception of society. However, if the focus is on state resilience or the resilience of state sovereignty, this would sit rather well with the Russian concept of sovereign democracy.

China, as Jordi Quero Arias has highlighted, focuses instead on development capacities of countries. It puts emphasis on the issue of "sovereign equality", emphasizing how its One Belt, One Road project is in no way meant as an imposition of a particular economic or political model on the participants (Quero 2017). Based on a strong principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, China has mainly focused on economic cooperation – its greatest strength – with the Middle East, or what it calls "shared economic development", while refraining from involvement in diplomacy in the region. This approach can likely converge rather well with the EU approach, specifically also as China is not seeking to challenge Western power in the region. As Scobell and Nader have put it, China plays the role of a "wary dragon" in the region, "eager to engage commercially with the region and remain on good terms with all states in the Middle East but most reluctant to deepen its engagement, including strengthening its diplomatic and security activities" (Scobell and Nader 2016: 76).

Finally, when it comes to Iran and Saudi Arabia, both actors are playing a key role in projecting political ideas in the region. Iran went through a reorientation phase in the late 1980s when its foreign policy moved from radicalism to accommodation (Ehteshami 2009: 332). Rather than exporting its model of governance, Iran's discourse has been focused on anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017a), and Iran has played the role of resisting



US and Israeli power in the region, notably by supporting movements such as Hezbollah or the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. However, its role as the key revolutionary and resistance actor was contested by radicalized Sunni-affiliated Islamic terrorist networks in the 2000s which tried to play exactly this role themselves, as well as posing a threat to Iran (Ehteshami 2009: 324). Furthermore, in 2009, with the crack-down of the green revolution, Iran began to emerge as a counter-revolutionary actor, a position which was stepped up after the Arab uprisings and its support of the Syrian Assad regime (Alsaftawi 2016).

Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, has also sought to boost its soft power by exporting its own version of Wahhabi Islam in the region through investing in mosques, schools and cultural centres. Specifically after the 1973 war, when oil prices quadrupled, this new financial clout enabled Saudi Arabia to enlarge its reach in the Muslim world. As Gilles Kepel has argued, the Saudi export aimed at replacing various local versions of Islam with the Saudi puritan version which is hostile to multitude practices and forms of Islam and to other minorities (Kepel 2006: 70). Today, scholars have pointed out how deeply ISIS draws on the Saudi-promoted Wahhabi doctrine (Crooke 2015, Kamel 2017). Saudi Arabia feels not only threatened by what it perceives as Iran's claim to leadership of the Muslim world and promotion of Shiism by exporting its revolution, but has also viewed the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as a challenge to its state identity and primary position in the Muslim Ummah (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017b, Darwich 2017).

In concluding this section, it is clear that the EU and the US are not the only actors which have promoted specific political ideas in the region. The EU has, however, never looked at its own promotion of previously democracy and now resilience in this context – none of both concepts have taken the role of other key regional powerhouses into consideration in a situation where there clearly is a highly politicized and securitized competition on political ideas. The EU's new concept of resilience which only focuses on domestic dynamics cannot speak to the instrumentalization of sectarian identities in the current geopolitical context in the region which undermines societal resilience. Thus, resilience as a concept, would have to be widened to include the role which all international and regional powers are playing in undermining or strengthening societal resilience.

### 1.3 DISCURSIVE POSITIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

This section will provide a preliminary review of the grey literature concerning EU policies in the SEM region, specifically by civil society networks in Europe and the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean, in an attempt to highlight issues that are important from local stakeholders' point of view. The discursive positions of individual activists and civil society organizations in the four country cases (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia) will be examined in depth in the upcoming research of MEDRESET Work Package 4, for which this paper provides the conceptual framework.

Civil society organizations in Europe and the South have reacted to the new developments in EU foreign policy such as the revised ENP, the Global Strategy, and the ongoing negotiations on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) and Mobility Partnerships. Specifically, the reaction has been that the shift to resilience is seen as a "regression" from a more comprehensive approach (ANND 2015a), and that the EU remains Euro-centric in two main respects: in terms of its security-based approach and in terms of its development model.

Regarding the first issue, civil society networks based in the EU have criticized that the EU not only continues to address terrorism, refugees and migration with a security-based approach (ANND 2016c), but that it has now also begun to shift its external cooperation instruments and tools mainly to stem migration to Europe (PLAN International 2016). Development assistance is increasingly allocated for "helping member states resettle refugees, create reception centres for migrants, integrate those who have the right to stay in Europe and send back those who do not" (Euractiv 2016). The Global Strategy is criticized as being "highly Eurocentric [in] putting the emphasis on the EU's security" (ANND 2016a). At the same time, within Europe anti-democratic trends are intensifying, specifically in terms of legislation on migration and anti-terrorism (EMHRN 2012).

Regarding the second issue, huge economic discrepancies between Europe and the South and East Mediterranean (except for Israel and Turkey) were not diminished by the Barcelona process and risk growing with the opening of the South and East Mediterranean markets for free trade (EMHRN 2012). The EU is criticized for its short-sighted vision in terms of collaboration on trade, investment, infrastructure support, energy and tourism sectors, an approach which does not address the genuine needs of people in the region (ANND 2016c). The DCFTAs specifically are singled out as problematic as they do not safeguard the economic, political and cultural rights of citizens in Arab countries (ANND 2016b). An example is the DCFTA that is currently negotiated with Tunisia whereby civil society is highly critical of a liberalization of the Tunisian service sector which cannot compete with foreign companies, thereby endangering the diversity of the Tunisian economy. The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) has urged the avoidance of "liberalization commitments in services sector essential for fulfillment of economic and social rights, including education, health care, and water" (ANND 2016b).

Finally, civil society across the Mediterranean is itself weakly connected in terms of socio-economic rights. There is no concerted work between European and Middle Eastern civil society on economic and social rights, as most human rights CSOs focus on political and civil rights, and are weakly connected to trade unions, while development CSOs take a traditional development approach rather than a rights perspective (EMHRN 2012).

As for alternative proposals, the following issues are singled out by CSOs:

- Review the European development model to address social gaps among citizens and adopt a comprehensive approach to address inequalities at various levels: geographical, racial and ethnic, religious, age- and gender-based (ANND 2015b);
- Pursue a policy revision on trade, investment, development and aid policies. Mere growth has not led to development, equality and prosperity in the Middle East. In this respect, the ENP implementation should follow clear benchmarks on inclusive growth, so that it ensures equitable social protection, fair wealth distribution, just taxation, as well as the full enjoyment of human rights, food, water, decent housing, education and employment for all. In the private sector, the EU should focus on getting small and medium enterprises out of informality as they constitute the major source of employment;
- Enhance regional integration and recognize peace and human security as human rights; and
- Address shrinking space for civil society by adopting inclusive and transparent mechanisms for civic engagement in policy-making processes at diverse levels and for diverse sectors (ANND 2015b).

## 1.4 THE ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

The post-uprising literature on EU–Southern Mediterranean relations appears to unanimously conclude that, in spite of the new rhetoric adopted in the EU documents about democracy promotion and more civil society participation, there has been no fundamental change in methods, actors involved and outcomes, with a progressive loss of European interest and influence on the Middle East (see Pace 2014, Balfour 2012, Behr 2012, Teti 2012, Bicchi 2014, Heydemann 2014, Catalano and Graziano 2016, Großklaus and Remmert 2016, Bilgic 2015; for Egypt, Pinfari 2013).

Nevertheless, the majority of the post-uprising literature dealing with the SEM region continues to *repeat the same Euro/Western-centric approach* as observed in EU discourse and practice, and remains critical of EU policies within the standards set by the EU, thus implicitly portraying the EU model as a standard which the other should follow (Cebeci 2012: 564). In particular, the literature is fraught with three major problems: it hardly problematizes the neo-liberal framework within which EU policies and discourses are elaborated; it assesses the effects and implications of EU policies in the SEM region with criteria that do not consider the welfare of local people; and it conceptualizes civil society in a narrow, liberal way, implicitly assuming that democracy and political change can only originate from certain types of movements, those close to European values, mainly urban and high/middle class-based. As we will see below, however, among several authors, particularly in the area studies literature, the Arab uprisings have led to a critical rethinking of certain categories of analysis, providing us with useful insights on how to better investigate EU-Mediterranean relations and particularly ensure a bottom-up understanding of EU policies in the field of political ideas.

### “TOP-DOWN”: THE LITERATURE ON POLITICAL SYSTEMS, STATEHOOD AND STATE-BUILDING

In the area studies literature, the 2011 Arab uprisings have led to revision of the prevailing interpretative frameworks in Middle Eastern politics, namely the democratization and the authoritarian resilience paradigms (see Valbjørn 2014, Pace and Cavatorta 2012). The former, which was dominant until the late 1990s, saw the path from an authoritarian rule toward a democratic system as linear and inevitable, and stressed the role of traditional civil society organizations such as political parties and NGOs in promoting such change. The second, which replaced the previous one in the 2000s and was aimed at explaining why authoritarian regimes in the Arab world continued to stay in power, showed an excessive focus on elite politics and totally neglected “the potential unintended consequences” of neoliberal reforms for society (Pace and Cavatorta 2012: 130). Both approaches appear to be based on the “un-problematized belief in the potential of neo-liberal economic development bringing about political change in the MENA” (Pace and Cavatorta 2012: 130). Moreover, much of the pre-uprising literature appears to explicitly or implicitly assume that at the root of political and socio-economic problems in the Arab region was a *selective* implementation of free market reforms, or in other words, their *wrong* implementation, rather than the policies themselves.

Relatedly, this literature has reiterated the sectoral approach of EU Mediterranean policies, dealing with areas such as political reform and socio-economic issues in separate ways. This can be seen, for example, in the way human rights continue to be conceptualized and discussed, that is only in reference to political rights and democracy promotion, while neglecting issues of socio-economic rights and social justice (see Catalano and Graziano 2016, Großklaus and

Remmert 2016). This repeats the narrow, depoliticized approach found in EU documents (for a critique of EU documents post-uprising see Teti 2012). Moreover, the persistence of authoritarianism and the lack of progress on democracy promotion in the post-uprising period are often treated as being unrelated to the acceleration of neoliberal reforms.<sup>2</sup> So, for example, reasons behind the failure of EU policy in the SEM region with regard to democracy promotion range from divisions among EU Member States, the EU economic and financial crisis, and EU priority concerns about security, strategic and economic issues over democracy promotion, to growing interference of non-EU regional actors such as Gulf countries and Turkey in influencing political change in the region (see Risse and Babayan 2015). While such explanations are relevant, a more comprehensive understanding of the persistence of authoritarian regimes in the SEM region that investigates the interrelation between economic and political dynamics is needed.

However, in the post-uprising period a number of studies have set current socio-economic and political problems of the Arab region within the context of neoliberalism and the profound transformations it has generated over the last decades (see Bush and Ayeb 2012, Hanieh 2013, Bogaert 2013, Tsourapas 2013, Bergh 2012a and 2012b). Contrary to the view that too little neoliberal reform is the explanation for the region's job deficit and the persistence of authoritarian regimes, the Arab uprisings are here seen as the result of the "systemic" failure of "neoliberal reforms" (Bogaert 2011: 709-10, Bogaert 2013). Indeed, neoliberal reforms, strongly promoted by international agencies and the EU (through the channel of EU-Mediterranean trade agreements), have profoundly shaped the political economy dynamics in the SEM region at both national and regional levels, by transforming the landscape of work (spreading unemployment, informalization and precariousness) as well as radically reconfiguring the modes of state intervention (see Bush and Ayeb 2012, Hanieh 2013, Bogaert 2013, Tsourapas 2013, Bergh 2012a and 2012b). In such studies, attention has been paid to the implications of free market reforms *for people's welfare* that have increased poverty, informality, unemployment and inequalities in many SEM countries. This has affected women in particular. They have been largely affected by cuts to welfare services, resulting in increasing feminization of poverty and high female unemployment rates.

Similarly, authoritarianism in the region should not be seen in antagonism to neoliberal reforms but as functional to deepen capitalist development in the Arab region (for Egypt, see Hanieh 2013). As Hanieh (2013: 9) argues, "The authoritarian guise of the Middle East state is not anomalous and antagonistic to capitalism, but is rather a particular form of appearance of capitalism in the Middle East context". This has also negatively affected access of women to resources and power. Further, as Abdelrahman (2017) shows, the large power of the police in post-uprising Egypt is central to the reproduction of the neoliberal order, as it permits the repression of discontent and protest on the part of those adversely affected by privatization, dispossession and labour deregulation. Again, this had a major impact on the political participation of women who for fear of social stigma and sexual assault by police also withdrew from expressing their voice and discontent in a social context that remains weary of women role in political affairs.

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<sup>2</sup> "Unsurprisingly, economic cooperation proved to be, once again, one of the main grounds that helped develop good working relations with the Morsi administration" (Pinfari 2013: 462).

The democratization and authoritarian resilience literature on the MENA region area intersects with a literature on statehood and resilience which sits between International Relations and Comparative Political Science but in which the Middle East and North Africa figure prominently in terms of case studies. This literature is relevant for this paper as it directly speaks to the emerging resilience paradigm of the EU, the UN and other international institutions. As Doty (1996) has shown, this literature had its roots in the later 1980s and early 1990s, in the research strand on "quasi states" which portrayed mainly states in the Global South as a problem in terms of their lack of Western sovereignty. As such, they were seen as requiring Western attention and benevolent intervention – thus not only styling the West as the model to follow, but also glossing over the responsibility of the West in generating the conditions for "quasi states", the social inequality inherent in the international system, and how the South has exploited the North's raw materials, access to oil, cheap labour and other resources (Doty 1996: 156). Lately, this literature has picked up again and instead of classifying states as democratic or autocratic as in the 1990s and early 2000s, it now classifies them along the consolidated, fragile/weak, or failing/failed continuum, whereby the first form sits exclusively in the West. The diverse concepts of weak, failing, failed and fragile states are all highly securitized, as such states are seen as a source of conflict, terrorism and organized crime (Boege et al. 2009: 13). The literature on this issue also depoliticizes the role of the West *in creating limited statehood by limiting the state through imposed neoliberal reforms*.

The state is usually defined as having international and domestic sovereignty, with the first entailing international recognition and the second being "the formal organization of political authority within the state and the ability of public authorities to exercise effective control within the borders of their own polity" (Krasner 1999: 4). The literature has moved forward in that today it acknowledges that the Western modern nation-state is the "exception rather than the rule", that the literature contains a normative bias toward Western statehood, and that "governance assistance must pay close attention to local political, social, and cultural conditions rather than trying to implement a global template" (Risse 2010: 25). It calls for the development of "alternative non-state centric approaches to governance, the control of violence, peace-building, and development [...] taking into account the strengths of the societies in question, acknowledging their resilience, encouraging indigenous creative responses to the problems, and strengthening their own capacities for endurance" (Boege et al. 2009: 14). At the same time, *the literature remains deeply rooted in the liberal development model – in fact it moves it even one step further, as the role of the state is further minimized*. It does not take into account how globalization and the minimal state contribute to the fragmentation of societies (Guazzone and Pioppi 2009); it does not question how the global economic system contributes to the exploitation of people in the global "South"; and indeed, puts the blame on them by pointing out ways in which the South could be "helped to help itself".

#### "BOTTOM-UP": THE LITERATURE ON CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE MENA REGION

While most of the literature criticizes the EU for its vague, technical and depoliticized language vis-à-vis democracy and human right promotion, as well as for its lack of a bottom-up approach, it tends to conceptualize civil society in a liberal framework, just as the EU does, failing to account for the variety of civil society expressions. So, it often does not pay attention to more politicized forms of mobilization such as trade unions and labour-related movements, horizontal movements and Islamic groups as object of study. Moreover, a few studies highlight how, by privileging a bottom-up approach and therefore strengthening post-uprising Arab



civil society, the EU continues to actively promote neoliberal policies in the Arab world at the micro-level, by "foster[ing] a mode of subjectivity that is conducive to the EU's norms and objectives" (Tagma et al. 2013: 388). This happens through selecting civil society organizations that embrace liberal values, thus excluding egalitarian and Islamic organizations; putting "material emphasis on empowering small and medium-sized businesses in the economy"; and promoting a "certain type of democracy", a procedural democracy which omits other political ideas such as "social democracy and egalitarian concerns" (Tagma et al. 2013: 380). In addition, often the actors privileged by international donors are those close to authoritarian regimes and therefore not representative of local populations and their needs.

Several authors have increasingly called for a rethinking of the dominant conceptualization of civil society that goes beyond a liberal normative – and depoliticized – connotation to include a variety of different forms of civil society expressions so far neglected: non-institutionalized movements (or the so-called horizontal, unstructured and leaderless forms of mobilization that emerged over the last decade), Islamist groups), labour-related movements, actors from "the peripheries" (e.g., sexual minorities), issue-based movements, and so on (Beinin and Lockman 1998, Chalcraft 2012, Desrues 2013, Stein 2014, Huber and Kamel 2015, Bogaert 2015, Beinin and Vairel 2011, Adely 2012, Allal 2010, Emperador Badimon 2011, Beinin 2009 and 2016, Buehler 2015, Tripp 2013, Schwedler 2012). Contrary to the view prevailing in international agencies and EU institutions that assume homogeneity among civil society actors with regard to economic and democracy models, it is important to be aware of the multiple perspectives and voices of bottom-up actors. While not necessarily questioning democracy and human rights, these actors can have different views concerning the role of the state in the economy, the role of religion within the state, and the framework for rights, freedoms and citizenship, that are distant from the European liberal individualistic view (Tagma et al. 2013; for Tunisia, see Antonakis-Nashif 2015, Asseburg and Wimmen 2015). Moreover, the literature has pointed to the importance of considering the complex and specific political economy processes that shape the action, developments and accomplishments of civil society actors, which can vary from country to country. In other words, in order to avoid a Euro-centric interpretation and therefore to reach a deep understanding of bottom-up perspectives, we need to contextualize civil society actors in the broad political economy environment, including in particular also the social context, taking into consideration that smaller civil society and grassroots actors are generally excluded.

As far as Islamists are concerned, for example, the post-uprising period, with the accession of Islamist parties to power in Tunisia and Egypt, has led some authors to question previous monolithic approaches whereby Islamists are seen as the greatest threat to democracy in the Middle East (for a review of the literature, see Stein 2014). Islamists are now seen as more pragmatic and differentiated, willing to adapt their ideology, priorities and strategies to the existing and changing context (Al-Anani 2012, Dalmaso and Cavatorta 2013). Contrary to the view that political Islam per se is an obstacle to democratization, several authors explain the controversial results of Islamists vis-à-vis political issues and the different positions among them, by looking at both contextual and internal factors: the institutional and political environment within which they operate, characterized by lack of previous democracy experiences (Haynes 2013); the degree of acceptance of Islamism by other political forces both in opposition and in government (Dalmaso and Cavatorta 2013); and internal divisions (Dalmaso and Cavatorta 2013, Merone and Cavatorta 2012). For example, the PJD in Morocco was opposed to the introduction of the new family code because of the undemocratic approach used by



the government which did not involve the Islamist party in defining the content of the reform (Dalmasso and Cavatorta 2013). This example is to show that, across the large spectrum of Islamist movements, one can find a variety of positions vis-à-vis gender issues, depending on country and existing specific political and economic dynamics.

As far as labour-related movements are concerned, although decades of co-optation and repression in the Arab world have left trade union organizations unable to pursue the interests of workers, they are far from being a unified entity and their role varies significantly according to country and time. The Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), for example, although strongly co-opted by the regime since Bourghiba, was a site of internal conflict and contestation under Ben Ali. Local sections of the UGTT backed the 2008 Gafsa revolt against the upper echelons, and their support in the early phases of the 2011 demonstrations facilitated the spread of protests across the country. Unlike the UGTT, which had been critical of free-market reforms since the 1970s, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) never was (Beinin 2016). The Tunisian trade union has a peculiar configuration that has allowed it to play a key role in Tunisian society both before and since the uprising. Furthermore, trade unions tend to exclude women from decision making processes.

As far as horizontal forms of mobilization are concerned, during the 2011 protest days these types of activism were seen as successful because of their ideological flexibility, which made it possible to overcome initial divisions, and the absence of a political affiliation, making it difficult for the security forces to repress activists (Durac 2013 and 2015). However, authors have increasingly underlined the limited capacity of such movements to affect real political transformation in the post-uprising period. Their internal diversity and lack of structure have so far prevented them from generating a broad-based movement and translating their aspirations into a clear and coherent political and economic project (Durac 2015, Abdelrahman 2012). Others stress the external political constraints to mobilization such as the authoritarian nature of incumbent regimes – which, through co-optation, repression, strategies of “divide et impera”, depoliticization tactics and/or a combination of these have contained mobilization efforts (Bogaert and Emperador Badimon 2011, Cavatorta 2007).

Differences in views, beliefs, strategies, gender composition, alliances and relations with incumbent regimes among civil society actors are likely to reflect different class compositions (on the need to adopt a class perspective in studying social movements, see Della Porta 2015). In Tunisia, some associations represent elitist kinds of engagement, such as the ATFD (whose members are highly educated professionals such as lawyers, psychologists, etc., and often with work experience in international organizations), while others represent the lower classes (Antonakis-Nashif 2015). In Morocco, studies highlight the profound differences existing between urban-based activism and rural protest in terms of the content of demands for social justice. While the urban-based activists represented by the F20M focused on reforming the constitution and demanded mainly political change, the population in the rural areas prioritized access to basic infrastructures and services (Bergh and Rossi-Doria 2015).

A class perspective also helps to better understand differences and similarities among Islamist groups. While most Islamist movements base their support on poor classes, their leadership is made up of businessmen (in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt) and a conservative middle class (in the case of Ennahda in Tunisia) (Merone 2015, Paciello 2013). This partly explains why the two Islamist parties have not fully broken with the old system and have not challenged

the neoliberal agenda but have even reinforced it (Paciello 2013). Furthermore, it should be noted that a class perspective needs to be complemented by a gender perspective, as gender is a cross cutting element. Gender issues within society emerge within classes as well as across classes and indeed frequently men from lower classes may have better privileges than women from elite classes in social contexts and vice versa.

Incumbent regimes, depending on country, have deployed a variety of different responses toward civil society actors that can differently affect their discourses, actions and outcomes. In Morocco, while repressing student movements and other protests, the King allowed the groups of unemployed to enter the public arena in an attempt to depoliticize the unemployment problem (Bogaert and Emperor Badimon 2011, Bennani-Chraïbi 2007). The King also enabled a plurality of groups of unemployed to emerge, but their action was weakened through the strategy of "divide et impera" (Cavatorta 2007). On their side, against the risk of repression, the unemployed movement strategically calibrated its degree and means of contesting authorities, by avoiding any politicization and cooperation with opposition movements (Emperor Badimon 2011). So, although the unemployed movement periodically gets jobs for its members, it ends up reinforcing the existing political economy system as it is exploited by the regime to improve its image to outside countries and populations (Emperor Badimon 2011, Bogaert and Emperor Badimon 2011). Other movements such as the February 20 movement have been harshly repressed by the regime and therefore have failed to reach concrete immediate achievements. However, although the movement has progressively lost ground, it has challenged the legitimacy of the power system at the level of discourse, since it transgressed the red line defined by the monarchy.

The literature on social movements and civil society in the SEM region therefore highlights the need to take into account the complexity and variety of such actors, particularly when mapping the stakeholders to be interviewed. It also points out to the importance of contextualizing the civil society actors that will be targeted within the broad political economy dynamics of each country, as well as understanding the specific characteristics of the movement itself (social composition, tactics, outcomes of their action and so on).

#### STUDIES ON GENDER ISSUES

A gender perspective continues to be largely absent in the literature on EU-SEM countries' relations (as an exception in the post-uprising period, see Bilgic 2015). Even more than for political and democracy-related issues, a Euro-centric approach tends to characterize most academic studies on gender issues in the Arab region. This can be easily seen in the fact that women's problems in Arab countries – from early marriage to low participation in the labour markets – are tacitly or explicitly attributed only to cultural factors or Islam-related explanations, completely ignoring how the prevailing political economy context in combination with the existing patriarchal system works against women. For example, trade-oriented policies and the establishment of free trade areas, intensively promoted by international agencies and the EU itself, in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt initially accelerated the employment of young uneducated women in the private sector, particularly in the textile and clothing industry, albeit for low wages and under poor and exploitative working conditions. Since the mid-1990s, however, with the intensification of international competition and the consequent contraction of the manufacturing sector, particularly the textile and clothing industry, employment opportunities for Moroccan, Tunisian and Egyptian women have declined drastically, and working conditions

in this industry have degenerated further.

Moreover, as far as women's movements in the Arab region are concerned, policy makers as well as the literature have generally focused on those that appear to be close to Western values and ideas which are frequently co-opted by the government. However, it is important to acknowledge the variety of perspectives, interests and situations among women themselves. For example, women increasingly appear to be active in other movements that do not raise women's specific goals, such as labour protests and so on (Errazzouki 2013, Duboc 2013). So, when investigating the bottom-up perspectives in SEM countries vis-à-vis EU policies and gender issues, it is necessary to target, alongside women's movements, women who are members of other movements/organizations, and to be sensitive in the analysis how much women are represented in grassroots movements and if they are included in the decision-making group.

As this review of the academic literature has shown, little is known in the literature about how individual and civil society actors based in the four country case studies perceive their own role in their countries and which political ideas they are promoting. We will now highlight the crucial role of civil society in the Arab uprisings and post-uprisings and then outline a methodology to close this gap in the literature.

## 2. THE CENTRAL ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE ARAB UPRISINGS

Civil society has established itself as an essential actor during and after Arab uprisings as a group of associations or organizations, independent of the state and of power. Although the situation differs from one country to another in the Middle East and North Africa region, civil society can be the main vector of political transformations and resistance to the authoritarian state.

The Tunisian which in many ways represents a unique case illustrates the role civil society can play, both in the fall of the Ben Ali regime and in the progressive construction of a pluralistic and democratic society. The Tunisian uprising triggered by the act of immolation of the young street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi would not have succeeded without the leadership of the Tunisian General Union of Work (UGTT) which has been able to distinguish itself from the power leadership and to frame central demands, including work, dignity and freedom. This revolutionary slogan was expressed by the salaried cadres who animate the basic unions of the various corporations (education, health, transport, mines, etc.).

The UGTT enjoys a political weight and a symbolic capital acquired during the colonial period and reinforced by its decisive contribution to the construction of the native state. It is the engine of civil society and the interlocutor of the state in economic, social and political development projects. Its strength stems both from its link with the state and from its partnership with other civil society organizations, in this case the Central Authority, the League of Human Rights and the Order of Lawyers. It was precisely this quartet of civil society organizations that carried out the national dialogue rewarded with the Nobel Peace Prize.

Such dialogue consisted in a "historical compromise" between Ennahda and Nida Tounes, which prevented Tunisia from falling into the violence of civil war (see Libya, Syria and Yemen) or into neo-authoritarianism (see Egypt). Ennahda agreed to a compromise with Nida Tounes, to leave the power to a technocratic government that organized free elections. During their reign under the Troika regime (2011–2014), both participated in the drafting of a democratic and consensual Constitution that combines freedoms and Islamic identity.

Tunisian civil society is not limited to the Nobel Peace Prize Quartet of National Dialogue (M'rad 2015). It consists of influential political parties – secular and from Political Islam – and encompasses a myriad of national and transnational associations which are key actors in the defence of individual and public freedoms. Indeed, in the wake of the democratization of public life following the fall of the old regime, thousands of associations have emerged and have since activated and strengthened the pluralistic landscape. Despite the abuses of the administration, the widespread corruption and the economic and security crisis, a climate of freedom is reigning over Tunisia.

The Arab uprisings highlighted the role of young people and women who participated in street movements and gatherings in public places. They have thus partially broken the prejudices concerning the Arab authoritarian exceptionalism (Ben Achour 2016) and the retreat of Arab women into the private and family space. Women actively participated in the mobilization against the police and the corrupt regimes by claiming, along with men, the right to dignity and freedom.

State feminism, which was dominant before the revolution while making a considerable contribution to the defence of women's rights, has given way to an autonomous and diffuse feminism in all political currents to such an extent that the Code of Status 1956 is regarded as an *acquis* which needs to be strengthened. In the aftermath of uprisings, feminist organizations successfully opposed the attempt of the Ennahda party to inscribe in the new Constitution an article devoting "woman as complement of the man". By mobilizing themselves during the National Women's Day, on 13 August 2012 and 2013, they forced the Islamist party to withdraw its project and recognize the citizenship of women as equal to that of men. This mobilization was led in particular by the Association of Women Democrats, the Tunisian Women's Association for Research and Development and the Tunisian National Union of Women, with the support of the UGTT, secularist political parties and numerous civil society associations. The feminist associations in Tunisia also successfully promoted the criminalization of sexual violence, including harassment, now harshly sanctioned by law. Hardly any research exists, however, on how women active in parties or associations affiliated with Political Islam are framing this issue (Grey 2012).

Finally, the cause of homosexuals, embodied by the Shems Association in Tunisia, is raising public awareness through social networks, even though abuses against this "minority" and moral pressures continue to take place in the public space (Fortier 2015).

To conclude, the defence of minorities championed during the first years of the revolution, thanks to the climate of freedom, is currently being weakened by the resistance of politicians of all parties, who see in these ethnic and cultural demands, especially those of Noirs and Amazighes, a threat to national unity and the stability of the state, fearing it is undermined by the period of transition from authoritarianism to democracy.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Based on the background analysis conducted above, this section will briefly outline the analytical framework and methodological guidelines that will inform research in WP4 (from the map of stakeholders to be selected, to the questionnaire and preparation of the country reports).

#### 3.1 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The above critical review of EU discourses and academic literature highlights the following findings, at the level of EU policies makers and of most academics:

- Concerning *actors*, in line with the EU's securitized approach, priority has been given to authoritarian regimes/ incumbent political elites or to civil society actors close to liberal values.
- Concerning *substance*, a depoliticized and sectorial approach has prevailed, dealing with economic and political issues as separate sectors.
- Concerning *instruments*, a technocratic, Euro-centric approach has informed both policies and academic literature while neglecting the perspectives of local people and their needs.

In order to reach a critical local-sensitive assessment of EU policies toward democracy and human rights in the four selected country case studies, research and fieldwork should be informed by the following approaches:

#### ACTORS: A COMPREHENSIVE AND GENDER-SENSITIVE APPROACH TO CIVIL SOCIETY

Regarding civil society actors, WP4 will broaden its focus of investigation to include those actors in the four countries so far neglected by EU discourses and policies, as well as to take account of the heterogeneity (across gender, class, ethnic, regional lines) of civil society in a specific country. In terms of actors, therefore, WP4 will need to consider a multitude of actors reflecting the complexities and heterogeneity of the societies they live in: trade unions, welfare organizations, civil society organizations, business representatives, activists/bloggers/independent journalists, councils in peripheries, Islamist movements and so on.

From a gender perspective, attention will be devoted not only to investigating the views of women's movements specifically working on women's rights, but also to how the selected civil society actors, not specifically focusing on women, see/assess gender-related issues both in general and in relation to EU policies and discourses.

Furthermore, as far as the sample of EU-based and EU-funded civil society groups is concerned, it should range from employers' and workers' organizations to advocacy and human rights organizations, covering about 30 EU-level stakeholders. Analysis will be sensitive to the issue if women voices and demands are marginalized, also in view of men usually having better access and skills to express their demands and needs.

#### SUBSTANCE: AN INTEGRATED POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH

As a starting point of its research, MEDRESET takes distance from the prevailing academic paradigms discussed above, as well as EU policy and discourse in the SEM region, inasmuch as it problematizes the liberal model that stands behind them and conceives of political and economic issues as strictly interconnected, thus going beyond sectoral approaches. An integrated political economy approach should therefore inform WP4 research across all its different phases. This means, for example, that the policy issue of "political ideas" should be conceptualized in broad terms so as to include both political and socio-economic rights. Accordingly, the spectrum of actors to be taken into account (the representative sampling of stakeholders) should also cover those acting in the field of socio-economic rights. And similarly, the questionnaire should aim at assessing local perspectives toward EU policies in the field of both political and socio-economic human rights. Such an integrated approach is crucial to better understanding the perspectives and needs of local people.

In order to correctly interpret the perspectives of the selected stakeholders, research will have to understand the political economy context within which such actors operate, as well as to study their specific characteristics, such as type of organization, sources of funding, alliances and extent of cooperation with other political forces, types of tactics and so on.

#### INSTRUMENTS: A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH GROUNDED IN THE PERSPECTIVES AND NEEDS OF LOCAL PEOPLE

Rather than technocratically imposing concepts on societies, WP4 starts with the idea that governance must be *legitimate* in responding to the *political imaginaries and needs of local people*. The mass protest movements developed since the advent of the Arab uprisings have highlighted an imminent demand for work and dignity. When, due to reasons related to the financial and political incapacity and unwillingness of the central state, these demands are not satisfied, protest movements have tended to widen. They have raised a conflict between the legitimacy of economic and social demand on the one hand and, on the other, failing legality as a consequence of the appropriation of public goods or the destruction of the symbols of the state. Beyond this conflict, which invites us to rethink the issue of legitimacy seen from above and from below, there is the whole question of social justice and its links with the paradigm of recognition as theorized by Axel Honneth and deepened by Nancy Fraser in her reflections about feminist and identity movements (Fraser and Honneth 2003).

Regarding civil society actors in the four countries and in the EU, WP4 will therefore investigate three sets of issues:

1. Actors: Who do grassroots actors see as key stakeholders in terms of political ideas on the global, regional and local level?
2. Substance: Which ideas do grassroots actors promote with regard to democracy, human rights and gender and are these views conflicting, competing or converging with EU policies?
3. Effectiveness and potential of EU instruments: How do grassroots actors perceive/assess European policies in the Mediterranean area? What are their alternative policy solutions that the EU should implement in the four countries?



### 3.2 METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES

The MEDRESET project is premised on a critical constructivist approach (Huber and Paciello 2016, Cebeci and Schumacher 2016, Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2016), whereby the EU's own discourse on the Mediterranean is contrasted not only by the discourse of other key powers in the region (Cebeci 2017, Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2017c), but also by alternative discourses which are perhaps in resistance, perhaps conflicting, competing, or converging with the dominant discourse produced by and in the EU. This paper has already given an in-depth overview of the EU's own discourse on democracy and human rights, the discourse of other key powers and an initial overview of discursive positions of civil society networks which span the Mediterranean. The research of this MEDRESET work package on political ideas undertakes to explore the discourse of civil society actors in the four country cases (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia) to juxtapose it to that of the EU (and other key powers), aiming to interrogate "predominant interpretations of state practices and to demonstrate the inherently political nature of official discourses" (Milliken 1999: 243). Discourse is understood in this work package as "meaning in use" (Wiener 2009) – and as Thomas Diez has pointed out, "meaning does not simply exist as a given, but [...] has to be fought over and negotiated" (Diez 2014: 28) at different levels, that is the level of the individual, the level of collective actors (such as CSOs) and finally, the level of the overall discourse in a country. Rather than looking at the overall discourse, this work package examines *discursive positions* of individuals and collective bottom-up actors (as well as some state actors). In line with our analytical framework, we will look at their articulations on actors, substance and policy solutions.

In terms of research techniques, WP4 will combine a variety of research tools:

- Extensive review of the grey and academic literature (particularly in Arabic) emerged in each country case study concerning EU policies toward democratization and human rights.
- Content analysis of relevant texts produced by the selected stakeholders who will be interviewed (e.g., published and unpublished reports, interviews, official declarations, videos and so on). It will be important to work on materials that explicitly discuss the issue of EU policies as well as those that make no explicit mention of them.
- Recursive Multi Stakeholder Consultations (RMSCs), an innovative methodology which will allow us to reverse the ordinary approach whereby perceptions and priorities of Southern shore partners are included in the picture only marginally and/or *a posteriori*. In MEDRESET, in contrast, EU-level stakeholders are invited to react and position themselves *with reference to structured inputs coming from Mediterranean partners*. This reversal represents an innovative approach capable of generating fresh and innovative policy perspectives (for further details, see the Guidelines).

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