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The role of EU and its Neighbourhood Policy in changing societies in North Africa

On the 25th of January Egypt has revolted for “change” for its freedom, democracy, social justice and dignity; just a few days after a similar tide of events brought changes in Tunisia. As we write the people of Libya are struggling to overcome the oppressive regime in a violent process. These events, which are spreading throughout the region, have come about because of the action of people, individuals and civil society, and their frustration with the way their countries have been managed over many years.

We (the EPAN working group of CONCORD) believe the EU needs to rethink its strategy in those countries and in the region. The EU needs to re-think how it engages with a country so that the voices of all stakeholders are heard and it needs to ensure that the messages it sends are consistent and based on European values; particularly respect for human rights.

The role of Europe in the region

Europe must be ambitious in promoting the principles on which it is founded; respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights (Article 2 and 3(5) of the TEU). These principles and objectives must be recognizable in Europe’s relationship with all countries and underpin the foundation of Europe’s country strategy with its interlocutors. To be credible as a political partner, Europe must be consistent on these principles with all regions, and in all types of discussions, and it must include the full diversity of voices as it engages politically and economically with other countries.

The role of CSOs in the region

The COSs in the region have a special role related to support post-regime societies. They need long term investment and capacity building to be able to assure democratic governance and inclusive decision making processes.

We encourage all the stakeholders involved in development cooperation in Euro Mediterranean region to include civil society actors in the planning, implementation and evaluation of their country strategic priorities. Only by doing so, the development assistance can make an important impact and lead towards improving livelihoods of the concerned people, particularly the most vulnerable

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groups. By this we understand sustainability of long term interventions coherent with national and local priorities, consultative and inclusive implementation process and finally adequate monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment which is done in close cooperation between local government and civil society organizations.

The EC and the member states need to outline as a matter of urgency concrete new steps that address the real needs of the people in this region while promoting values of democracy, assuring transparency, reaching out to marginalised groups and supporting civil society. Furthermore the EU should readapt its current foreign policy structures which are currently restraining its ability to respond the crisis in the region.

Further recommendations concerning working with local CSOs are included in the mid-term review document of the CONCORD working group EPAN:

http://www.trialog.or.at/images/doku/epan_mtr_egypt.pdf

Lessons learnt from European Neighbourhood Policy

The EU must acknowledge the failure of its policies (the ENP) to bring the voices of local civil society into country strategy planning and programming. Europe's foreign policy focus in the region – which has ignored issues of democracy and human rights and support for civil society – has clearly failed. Better ways of working which are more inclusive and better balance policy priorities, are needed.

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What is EPAN:

The Enlargement, Pre-Accession and Neighbourhood Working Group brings together CSOs and CSOs platforms representatives from all over Europe, whether they are CONCORD members are not, including EU candidate countries. The members all have either practical experience of development cooperation and development education projects in neighbouring and pre-accession countries; or hold policy positions dealing with development issues in these countries. The group's work looks at the experience of each member and their partners and analyses policy at the European level to determine improvement and necessary changes.