

Europe Urged to Face Up to the Challenges of the Arab Spring

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- Assistance is urgently required – from Europe and the region – or the entire process is at risk
- The young people who created this change must be part of the new system
- It is now time for institution building and the creation of an effective civil society
- “ The Arab spring is not over, ” said President Valdis Zatlers of Latvia

Vienna, Austria – The popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa may fail without European support, said leaders from business, government and academia in a plenary session on the first day of the World Economic Forum on Europe and Central Asia.

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“ Assistance is crucial, ” said Valdis Zatlers, President of Latvia. “ The will of the people for change has been expressed in a very visible way. ” Now is the time for institution building and creation of civil society – with social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter continuing to play a key role. “ Help is required now or the whole process is put at risk, ” stressed Mustapha Kamel Nabli, Governor of the Central Bank of Tunisia. He described two paradoxes affecting post-revolution Tunisia: the first is that the gap between societal aspirations and economic reality (a key trigger of the revolution) has increased rather than decreased. The second paradox is that short-term uncertainty has increased even though long-term stability is enhanced – affecting tourism and investment. In spite of these challenges, Tunisia has not seen much external support. “ The IMF and the World Bank are not enough – Tunisia needs broad-based support, ” he said.

The region should focus on helping itself, argued Khalid Abdulla-Janahi, Honorary Chairman, Vision 3, United Arab Emirates; Regional Agenda Council on the Middle East & North Africa. “ The Arab world has over US\$ 1 trillion in assets in US securities – why not invest some of this locally. “ Despite differences we all agree that people of the Arab world want and deserve three things: no oppression, no suppression and no repression. ”

Ahmet M. Oren, Chief Executive Officer, Ihlas Holding, Turkey, agreed that Arab countries should assist their neighbours. “ We need to help young people who made this happen become part of the new system. ”

A perspective on Libya was provided by Tarik M. Yousef, Dean, Dubai School of Government, United Arab Emirates; Regional Agenda Council on the Middle East & North Africa. Libya is thankful to the leadership of Europe in supporting the people ’ s revolution – though it is also likely that Europe ’ s slow response to Tunisia and Egypt played a role. “ Libya needs to build institutions from scratch and will be looking to Europe for help. ”

“ The region is not out of the woods yet, ” stressed Raghida Dergham, Senior Diplomatic Correspondent and Columnist, Al Hayat, USA; Global Agenda Council on Conflict Prevention. While Tunisia is relatively better off,

Egypt is in a fragile transitional stage, key uncertainties surround Yemen and Syria, and Libya needs NATO to step up its efforts. “ Much is required to prevent a hopeful autumn turning into a terrible winter. ”

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