

In My Day: Arab Spring

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Opinion

There is little optimism left over from the Arab Spring, says Edward McMillan-Scott.



There is little greenery left in the Arab Spring. For those of us in EU policymaking circles who moved our attention to the Arab world from the newly-stable democracies of the ex-Soviet Bloc - whose transformation was assisted by the EU'S €160m Democracy and Human Rights Initiative (EIDHR) which I had founded in 1990 - there is little optimism today.

By 1996 we had established the MEDA Democracy Programme to flank the EIDHR. EU engagement evolved to include a joint EU and Arab parliamentary assembly.

In 2002 a major UNDP report on the Arab world found that the appetite for democratic reform was stronger there than anywhere. The EU's intention was to encourage reform alongside the US, spurred by US President Barack Obama's June 2009 Cairo speech.

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As Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak fell, I was the first outside politician to get to Egypt's revolution in early 2011 to greet my old friend Ayman Nour - the liberal leader imprisoned for standing against the dictator in 2005.

I sent a triumphant email around the European Parliament. As a relative of the architect of the first Arab uprising in 1916 - Lawrence of Arabia - I shared the world's optimism.

It has now been shattered as the agonies across North Africa, of Iraq, Palestine, Syria and the wider Arabian peninsula and beyond have overtaken reform.

Only in Tunisia, cradle of the Arab Spring, change continues.

If the EU really wants to stem the migrant crisis, it must again encourage democracy, human rights and the rule of law across the region.

About the author

Edward McMillan-Scott is a former ALDE group MEP and Parliament Vice-President

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