

THURSDAY 15 OCTOBER 2015

Members present

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top
Lord Balfe
Baroness Coussins
Lord Dubs
Lord Horam
Earl of Oxford and Asquith
Lord Risby
Baroness Suttie
Lord Triesman
Lord Tugendhat (Chairman)

Earl of Sandwich

Examination of Witnesses

Mr James Watt CVO, former British Ambassador to Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, **Professor Charles Tripp FBA**, Professor of Politics with reference to the Middle East, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and **Mr Imad Mesdoua**, Political Analyst, Africa Matters Limited

Q35 The Chairman: Good morning, gentlemen. Thank you very much indeed for agreeing to come before us. It is extremely kind of you. You all three understand that this is a public meeting as part of our inquiry into the emerging European security strategy. You have received a list of questions. If, at the end of the session, you feel that we have not covered something that we should have covered, or you want to add or subtract from something you have said, please feel free to write to us. As we have three witnesses, I hope that you will not all feel obliged to answer each question. Your expertise varies from the Middle East to north Africa and so forth. If you feel strongly, obviously you must intervene, but we do not need to have everybody answering everything. I would like, if I can, to deal with this matter in not much more than an hour and a quarter. With that in mind, I have merged some of the questions. My colleagues are free, of course, to ask supplementary questions if they wish to.

Let me kick off with the first question. Do you think that there is genuine political will among Member States to pause and undertake a strategic review of EU policies in the region? Given

the experience we have had, what lessons do you think can be learnt from the past in endeavouring to do that?

Mr James Watt CVO: I do not think there is any resistance at all to taking a strategic look at the past five years, let us say. At the same time, of course, a lot of major policy issues are emerging as part of the regional crisis, and policymakers in Brussels and in capitals are very tied up with trying to handle those and devise responses to them. We have seen some signs of that, for example, in the report by the High Representative, which I think you have before you—the recent one on the changing environment for the European Union—and a little on the Middle East and north Africa. She refers to the way in which the EU has to devise new and more tailored responses to the situations that are developing. So I think there is an awareness at the top, probably among policymakers throughout capitals as well as in Brussels. Whether they have actually had the time to sit down and turn that into a well-thought-through strategic review, I do not know; I have seen no evidence of that.

What are the conclusions? Very broadly, back in 2011 everybody was taken by surprise, including the actors on the ground, by the developments in Tunisia at the end of 2010 and then Egypt, Libya and Syria. The result was that policymakers in Brussels and many capitals reached for the file from 1989 and the end of the Soviet rule in eastern Europe and decided to bring about reform, particularly to governance and democracy in countries that were supposed to be emerging from a position of not having them. A lot of the formulae were adapted or just simply copied straight from there, which clearly did not work. It was a very different environment in the Arab world. Each Arab country had a very different political and social environment, and there was quite a lot of resistance to this Eurocentric view of how to deal with the new opportunities, which for many were far bigger risks than opportunities. So there was a general closing of ranks against the kind of formulae that were embodied in the conditionality clauses in the association agreements for example. Without going on for too long, I should say that the big lesson to learn, which I am sure has been learnt progressively over the past five years, is that you cannot do that; you have to have tailor-made responses, which is exactly what the High Representative is now writing about.

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: My impression is quite similar. Clearly, the will comes out of the shock of the Arab spring. In a sense, we did not see it coming or what contributed to it, and so as a motive for creating the political will to think about how it might not only be responded to but also prevented from disrupting EU and Member States' relations with the Middle East and north Africa, that has been part of the reason. I think that that is still very strongly there. But I also agree with James that I have not seen much evidence of a coherent strategy. There have frequently been attempts to review it, and one sees it a bit in the sense of the emphasis on economic assistance. Particularly, one of the things that comes out of some of the documents of the EU which is quite interesting is the realisation that the Arab Spring was caused not just by the desire to overthrow tyrants, but the very economic structures that had sustained them, in which the EU was partly complicit, or Member States of the EU were complicit. Many EU statements since have talked about “inclusivity” of economic reform. One of the problems was that previously, economic reform and success in Tunisia and Egypt had largely been judged in terms of macro figures, but had completely ignored the huge inequalities within those countries which had been the drivers of revolt. I think that that was a part of it.

The second point, of course, is about why there is a political will. Clearly, one can see that the events of the past six to nine months, with the unfolding and unravelling of some countries as a result of the uprisings of the Arab spring, have led to a massive refugee crisis that Europe clearly does not have a strategic plan to deal with. It has been scrabbling around both individually and in concert, and for an outsider that is one of the more depressing aspects of

the lack of strategic review. The political will is there to try to get something going, whether it be the naval force in the Mediterranean or border controls, but as we can see, the disarray has been quite significant.

The Chairman: Do you have a view on this question, Mr Mesdoua?

Mr Imad Mesdoua: I agree with the other experts on the panel. There seems to be a will towards reviewing some of the EU's policies and frameworks in the region, but there is as yet no evidence of how that is going to materialise. Certainly the intentions are there and they are good, particularly when it comes to moving towards tailored approaches and moving away from the Eurocentric paradigms which have dictated some of these association partnerships, frameworks, et cetera. But it remains to be seen how they are going to materialise into a concrete policy in the coming year. I do not want to repeat what others have said, and I mostly agree with what they have indicated.

Q36 Lord Dubs: This question is directed to Mr Watt, unless the other witnesses feel they wish to speak. There seems to be a tension at the heart of EU policy which is based upon trying to reconcile liberal democratic and humanitarian mandates with what might be called a more realistic approach, which probably means security. Do you agree with that, and do you think that this is part of the division between member states' security agendas and the more democratically inclined view of the Commission?

Mr James Watt CVO: I think there is a tension. Of course, the conditionality in the association agreements and so on is not simply on human rights and democratic governance—economic reform is also there and somehow the two blend together in some ways. This comes back to the question of equality or inclusiveness that Charles Tripp was talking about. The problem with the emphasis on liberal democracy is that many of the countries concerned did not feel that they were ready for that and that it was positively dangerous. When I was in Egypt, for example, you had the surprise overthrow of President Mubarak—that was not expected by anyone—and the army taking control and allowing democratic elections later in 2011. The strongest contenders for success in the democratic elections were the Muslim Brotherhood, which duly won and which the following year were successful in getting a candidate elected as President. This of course created a huge risk as far as many Egyptians could see, of the country being Islamised, which was in fact I believe the real agenda and the inevitable outcome of those parliamentary and presidential elections. By putting power in the hands of the Muslim Brotherhood, you would have got the transformation. As time went on under the Morsi presidency, you could see that Egypt was indeed being challenged in its very identity as a nation state. Egyptians were far more attached to Egypt as a nation state than the idea of some pan-Islamic state or whatever. They actually quite liked what was familiar to them. The western liberal agenda was seen as supporting and empowering, if you like, that Islamic takeover. So that is why the reaction against the kind of language that we have, which we take as normal and proper in our conditionality, was extremely strong. Egypt is a particularly clear example, but there are other countries where they honestly felt that going further down the track of parliamentary elections, power to the people and so on, was going to empower groups that were very well organised to carry out that kind of transformation. I hesitate to use the word “takeover” because it would be democratic, but it would actually be doing much more than apparently was being said.

I think that this is a real problem and the European Union has obviously become more cautious since then. We just have to be less trusting that liberal democracy is the solution at this moment of history for a great number of these countries. All the principles remain good—accountability, human rights, individual rights, equality before the law and so on—and they

are absolutely correct, but whether you can get there by taking a step now to majority parliamentary rule is another question.

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: Perhaps I may also say that I am not convinced that there is a tension between the EU on the one hand and Member States on the other because precisely that tension between the foreign policy of a Member State based upon human values, democracy and so on comes up against hard interests. We have seen that this week in this country in relation to Saudi Arabia. So that debate is something that is constantly at the forefront of public support in democracies for the use of foreign relations and relations with regimes that one might find deeply distasteful in other circumstances. I agree with James Watt that it has certainly been very evident in the language of the EU, but it is also there among Member States. I would not try to portray the EU as committed to large principles and Member States scurrying around doing rather dodgy deals.

Earl of Oxford and Asquith: I have a brief question in the context of what you have been saying. Given the High Commissioner's report, would you recommend that we use a slightly different language, without obviously retreating from the defence of our liberal values? Should we talk less about democracy and economic reform and more about economic prosperity and security: that is, economic freedom? That is because quite a lot of the issues in Egypt and Tunisia were more about just having the freedom to trade.

Mr James Watt CVO: There is value in keeping both, of course, but I like the clarity of the language in the latest report by the High Representative. If we look back to March of last year, the communication to the European Parliament and the Council by the Commission on policy towards the ENP, the European Neighbourhood Policy, including obviously the Near East and north Africa, was very mealy-mouthed. It never brought out clearly what the changes were, rather it described a lot of new activities in response to crises. The latest version, which is a slightly different document, is actually far clearer that we need to be more agile and to have tailor-made solutions, but it does not say that we need to abandon some of the basic principles. Coded language is always going to be part of how the EU speaks. I prefer this clearer coded language, but it should keep both.

Mr Imad Mesdoui: On the issue of democracy and the promotion of democratic values, I believe that it should remain as it is worded in the document, but there should be a greater focus on specific measures and how they can help in the promotion of democracy. There is, for example, too much focus on elections and political parties (procedural vision of democracy) and not enough on strengthening the capacities of these countries at the grass-roots level. There is not enough focus on civil society groups. A number of programmes which have worked in the past were very effective, particularly in countries like Tunisia, where there have been programmes to help civil society. I am talking about programmes such as the European Endowment for Democracy, which has done fantastic work in Morocco and Tunisia working with civil society groups. The focus should shift when it comes to proposals for supporting democratic consolidation. It should move more towards concrete measures.

Lord Balfe: Are you saying, which I would agree with, that we need to distinguish between western-style democracy and universal human rights, and concentrate on the latter?

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: I agree with that. Taking up something which Imad has just said, there is a danger that if one concentrates only on democracy, you get obsessed by procedural democracy rather than any substantive kind. Clearly the conditions under which human rights are protected and fully realised are those which create the grass-roots basis of a structural democratic possibility rather than simply political parties, elections and so on. Not that those are irrelevant, but there is a danger that if you concentrate only on those, it both annoys the country concerned and it causes despair among many civil society organisations.

Q37 Lord Risby: This is a question for Mr Watt and Professor Tripp. Mr Watt, you talked about the understanding of the need to have a strategic overview, and that is certainly reflected clearly in the High Representative's report, while Professor Tripp said that there was ultimately no coherence in this. What I want to understand is the synergy or the relationship between what essentially are the two following elements of European policy. If you look at the European Neighbourhood Policy, which is meant to be about economic and political reform, and if you take the Union for the Mediterranean, which is about regional co-operation and then in turn co-operation with the EU, where regional co-operation is certainly rather lacking, how do these two elements, which in practice are essential, elide, if at all?

Mr James Watt CVO: A lot of the countries in the region are very preoccupied with their internal struggles, some of which are existential and some of which are very violent. They really do not have much of an attention span for regional co-operation and, indeed, for soft power generally, either of the kind which is cultural and educational or for things like market access. I remember when I was in Egypt, the European Union thought that offering even more generous market access packages to European markets would somehow be an incentive to do the things we wanted them to do. Not at all—they really could not concentrate on that, and even today I do not think it adds up to very much. Soft power really does have its limits when these acute crises are going on. We should not abandon it, of course, but we should not build too much hope on it either. The Union for the Mediterranean, for example, was a revamping of the Barcelona process, which everyone said had failed, but it is quite hard to see how the Union for the Mediterranean has actually made any material improvement to what the Barcelona Process was doing. It is not because people are not trying hard, it is just that it is not sufficient, and doing more of it is not the answer. What we need are policies which, while not necessarily being hard-edged, are not soft power; they are to do with the actual power politics of countries. So, for example, the intervention in Libya in the form of the UN mediator who is a European diplomat, is doing exactly the right thing in trying to solve that crisis first before adding in other kinds of incentives.

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: It is rather tiresome that we are all echoing each other because you want us to disagree so that you can really get your teeth into something. There is a sense that something like the Union for the Mediterranean is a kind of performative platform. It does not actually have any real resources. When you look at the signatories and what they signed up to, you know that it was going to go nowhere because it was far too large and diverse in terms of the regime types within it, so I do not think that it even has much congruence with the European Neighbourhood Policy. The ENP does have the advantage of having real resources behind it and putting them into particular countries, and some of that is very well thought through. I would not have any problem with that at all. Also, we have to think about how within the region itself there are forms of co-operation. I cite the Agadir Agreement among countries. However one thinks that that has developed, at least there was an intention to create a sense of regional co-operation which has been sadly lacking in many parts of that region. One could argue that while the Union for the Mediterranean does not do anything, it does not really interfere with anything, whereas the important thing, as James Watt said, are the resources that the European Neighbourhood Policy can actually put into countries, thus doing things concretely and substantively.

Lord Horam: I was just going to say that it almost seems as though the instruments sometimes get in the way of a realistic and sensible policy. For example, one of our witnesses said that it is much more important to listen to what our people are saying on the ground rather than paying attention to the formulaic instruments that we happen to have. Would you agree?

Mr James Watt CVO: The only way to get foreign policy consensus among 28 members in terms of soft power is by saying that it has to include a lot of safeguards, as it were, against neo-colonialist thinking or whatever, because that is the prevailing spirit in the European Union and the Member States. It is therefore expressed very turgidly, which is always a problem not just for partners to understand, but for some of us who are trying to implement the policies. It is also very wishy-washy and inevitably it is soft power; it never approaches hard power. It takes a real crisis to shake people off that and to give the European Union something concrete to do, like the UNSMIL mission in Libya. So, yes, it is a handicap and it is incredibly difficult to change. When things suddenly started changing very fast in December 2010 and January 2011, it was difficult to get anyone to review these texts on the conditionality and association agreements, which had really been cast in concrete. We, the European Union, could disburse hardly any money to help, even with straightforward economic things that were sensible and helpful, leaving aside the political agenda in any of the countries, because we could not breach those conditions. For example, the conditionality includes that there should be an IMF agreement before certain major chunks of EBRD money or indeed before grant money from the European Union can be disbursed. A lot of countries just did not have or even want an IMF agreement; there was no time to do that. A lot of rigidity was built into it and I am very much hoping that the new top-level language we are getting will translate into much more flexible performance formulae for actually doing things on the ground.

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: I agree that there is evidence of perhaps a bit more flexibility, but I agree completely that the danger is if you have set up conditionality and then the recipient or the target no longer fulfils those conditions, what do you do? Do you not do anything or do you do it despite that and then get attacked for doing so? But there is the notion of what is called the “umbrella agreement”, the more for more, which is a kind of incremental process that is not as harsh and rigid as conditionality. It is a more imaginative way of saying that if people, states or governments have achieved elements of reform in these areas, there is then a decided economic incentive not to change direction, but actually to reinforce the things that are already being reinforced. I noticed that that was a new language that was being used, and perhaps that is a more encouraging sign.

Lord Risby: I should like to ask about relationships with Parliaments. I do not want to be UK-centric, but our Arab partnership agreements and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy have an interface with Parliaments. This is going on substantially in Algeria at the moment. Is there a European dimension to this: that is, of parliamentary interaction under the umbrella of what we have been talking about, and if there is, is it efficacious? You have some experience of this.

Mr James Watt CVO: Yes, as you know, there is quite an active programme of visits by parliamentarians from the region to Strasbourg. I think that it is beneficial up to a point, but again it can do only a certain amount, and doing much more of it does not make any difference. It is quite difficult because obviously there is a certain element of junketing involved because it is very nice to be invited to Strasbourg, particularly if you are coming out of some war-torn city. But as you know, parliamentary democracy is not well established because the parties themselves are not well established unless they are the party of a single-party state like the Ba’ath party in Syria and Iraq. Parliamentarians do not necessarily share the same responsibilities as their constituents or indeed have the same attitudes towards democracy that we have here. There is an interesting meeting of very different cultures when these things happen. The effect may be long term; it should be good, but it is not going to do much in the short term.

Q38 Earl of Oxford and Asquith: We turn now to what sort of policies we should be formulating, and perhaps this is something on which you might have a difference of opinion. It is widely understood that the new strategic review must focus more, that if you want to have a strategy you must set yourself more precise objectives, and given the financial resources, you must prioritise. What do you think should be our prioritisations in the objectives, and how do you think we should best engage with the other main actors in the region?

Mr Imad Mesdoui: I would probably frame it in another way. First, it is important to look at the states themselves, at each state, and consider what their specific needs are. What is the political, social and economic environment? Some states will require a focus by EU policies and EU assistance in different domains. Countries such as Libya, Tunisia and Egypt all require different sets of programmes. That said, I would tend to focus more on what I was talking about earlier, and that is—to use a terrible buzzword—capacity building. It remains an important area in which the EU can contribute to these states, particularly in north Africa. In Tunisia, for example, I would emphasise the importance of security sector reform. The country is now facing a security challenge as a result of what is going on in Libya and domestically with radicalisation. Security sector reform is therefore an important area in which the EU can assist. Another area is economic infrastructure, and this applies to many of the countries in the region. James was talking earlier about access to markets being a potential for leverage, but a lot of expertise sharing can be done as well which can assist these countries in building an economic infrastructure. Obviously the last area which might be important, thinking specifically about north Africa and countries like Libya where there will be so much to do once, hopefully, there is political agreement, is that of helping in the construction and consolidation of political institutions—a state infrastructure. Libya has been ravaged by the conflict and we have virtually no Libyan state any more. There are two rival Governments and countless militia. When they hopefully come to a political agreement and form a national unity government, there will be lots to do in helping them to rebuild state institutions.

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: I agree very much—again, so tiresomely—that one needs to think about this country by country. The notion that there can be a Middle East and north Africa policy for the EU, as for any particular member state, is really dangerous. But there are two things that one has to be quite careful of. One is the notion of what might be called technical support, which looks good and effective and looks at the kinds of things you can do, but in giving it, it may also be the thing that reinforces pre-existing forms of power and inequality. If one takes the example of security sector reform, there is an obvious logic to it in a country like Tunisia or elsewhere, but there is also a fear that it is militarising security or adding to the militarisation of security because it is trying to make it more effective on the borders and it is doing far less in terms of making the security organs trusted by the Tunisian people. There is a great fear in Tunisia at the moment that the new anti-terror legislation may be used and abused to reinforce certain kinds of political advantage for certain groups. The report from the EU was quite interesting because it said rather despairingly that it could not see any strategic vision within the Ministry of the Interior to reform itself, which is probably almost exactly true. So one of the dangers of technical assistance is that it may play into things that are already problematic from other perspectives.

The substantive assistance, however, is important, and that is where two points have come up already about economic assistance in the areas that count. It could be argued that one of the clear needs to address after the Arab Spring is glaring inequalities. That is not simply class inequalities within countries, but also regional inequalities. The notion that one should concentrate all one's investment in the capital or in the metropolitan area is problematic. Let us look at the prelude to the Syrian civil war. It came from regional inequality, it was not just

sectarian and other issues. That is the case in Tunisia and many other places, which is interesting, and Libya is a prime example. The notion of ensuring that aid is targeted not just to your old mates, as it were, and the ones you recognise as your interlocutors because they are people who have come to Europe a lot, but at groups that you might not have dealt with before. That needs some kind of imagination. I am not saying that it is not there, but the determination to do that on the part of both Member States and the EU would surely be more effective.

Mr James Watt CVO: I agree with Imad and Charles on not only the need to rebuild economic infrastructure, and there will be much to rebuild when the fighting in different places stops, but also that we must avoid reinforcing autocratic power structures, which are simply going to lead to the same problems all over again. We have an opportunity here because we already play a major humanitarian role. We have a peacemaking role in Libya, and I wish that we had more of one in Syria and Iraq. We can focus more on social investment, or social transformation if you like, in a non-ideological way by investing in education. A part of that is education without trying to use undue influence, not just in academic subjects, but in civic behaviour, inclusiveness in attitudes, and expectations of individual rights and justice. That is for the long term and requires massive resources, but we would be well placed for it, in addition to peacemaking and the physical rebuilding work.

Mr Imad Mesdoui: Perhaps I may make one last point. Underpinning everything we have mentioned is obviously the issue of ownership of policies and aid programmes. When we are tailoring these programmes and policies for each specific country and in each specific context, it is important that there is ownership through a contribution to the formulation of policies and programmes so that they are adapted to local needs. Otherwise, as with anything else, you will have rejection or ineffective policies and no follow-through from local authorities.

Q39 Baroness Suttie: In the context of this inquiry, we have regularly heard that EU action in the region would be improved by better co-ordination between Member States. What is your view of how bilateral Member State action contributes to overall EU policy and coherence? How can the European Union best utilise these bilateral relationships in the context of the overall EU policy?

Mr James Watt CVO: I must say that it is about the right mix at the moment of individual action being taken by states which have the means, confidence and motivation to do something, as long as it is not contradicting the main thrust of EU policy. It is extremely difficult to get all the member States to agree on a particular line. So particularly where speed of response is important, it is not a good thing to co-ordinate even more. Lighter co-ordination rather than more co-ordination would be my preference.

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: The EU provides, one could argue, a framework or at least a set of statements which I imagine Member States take seriously. I do not see any real and profound contradictions in, for instance, economic aid and the provision of assistance to civil society to different places. There may be different interpretations, and I suppose what one would like to think is that EU policy as a whole is informed by certain Member States' expertise in particular areas. Obviously, there are historical links between certain Member States and parts of the Middle East and north Africa. Sometimes that can have its problems. They bring prejudices on both sides and there is a baggage train, if you like, which can be difficult. Even so, I do not think that that is the case. In some places like Tunisia, from what I can see, there is a fair amount of co-ordination in terms of what they achieve. As far as I understand it, French aid to Tunisia is at least equal to that of the EU as a whole, but I do not see them treading on each other's toes. As far as France obviously supports the EU policy, it must ensure that its activities come within that framework. Of course there may be differences

about things, and I take James's point very much that the speed of response at that level is not always too brilliant, but maybe one should not be expecting that. As long as the Member States operate within a general framework that they have already bought into, it seems to be operationally more effective.

Mr Imad Mesdoui: I would add one point in the context of north Africa. On the EU's involvement in terms of foreign aid to these countries, it should be leveraging individual Member States' strengths in them. For example, a country like France will have its obvious advantages, connections, links and know-how in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, and we can see the same with the UK in Egypt and Italy in Libya. Ahead of this witness hearing, I researched the different sectors to which Member States were contributing in different countries as opposed to the areas to which the EU was contributing. You will see from the graphs that there are areas in which they are complementary, where both the EU and a Member State are actually putting in far more money and doing far more. But I am guessing that there is a lack of co-ordination and information sharing on where the money is going and how it is being spent in specific areas. When you see the graphs, it is actually quite glaring. You can see that France is spending a whole lot of money in Tunisia on social infrastructure, whereas the EU is spending far more money on the economic infrastructure. They are complementary in that respect, but they should be working hand in hand. That is the only point I wanted to add.

Q40 Baroness Coussins: I think that my question has already been largely covered by your earlier answers. I was going to ask about whether trying to formulate a regional policy when it comes to the Middle East and north Africa is actually the right place to start or the right objective. We have heard from other witnesses that it would be the wrong way and that it would be better to classify the countries in the region into three groups. Your earlier answers seemed to go further than that when you talked about a country by country approach rather than grouping the countries. The classification which has been suggested to us is that there should be one group of countries where there would be a positive welcome for EU partnerships, a second one where there might be a specific focus of support on issues like security sector reform, which has been mentioned, and the third would be where there is conflict and the priorities are humanitarian programmes and conflict resolution. Would you go along with that classification or would you stick to recommending a country-by-country approach? Whichever you go with, what would be the policy outlines involved? If it were a country-by-country approach, do we still need any kind of overarching policy to glue it together, or is country by country where we need to begin and end?

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: There are two things to be said about that. One is the danger that whatever kind of classification one uses, one gets trapped by it if one applies it too rigidly. I think that that is why we are talking about country by country. But I agree completely that when any country or the EU is looking at a region, they have to think about similarities and complementarities between regional states, and therefore how they tailor their policies to those states. It may be that there is a lot in common between this country and that country for that reason. They also have to tailor in or factor in the rivalries between countries. They may look the same on the outside, but there are deep histories of problems between them. Clearly the classification cannot simply be by region. If you compare Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, each one is utterly different in many important respects as far as EU and other policies are concerned. The classification would have to be quite a functional one. We have to think about what resources we have and what means we have to effect any change that we would describe as being for the better or to our advantage, and to the advantage of the countries themselves, and then see it functioning. Conflict-torn countries are going to be in a separate group, but as Tolstoy said about families enduring their own horrors, they are each of

them unhappy in their own ways and it would be a nonsense to try to ignore that. You cannot put Yemen in the same box as Libya, although clearly one wants to end those conflicts.

You made the important point about countries which are more receptive to technical support. I think one might bring that together, but sometimes it can be for rather sinister reasons. And then there are countries with clear historic and other forms of links with Europe. One has to remember that Tunisia, which I have been working on, has 14 Members of the Tunisian Parliament who sit for European constituencies. It is a huge integration, if you like. There are something like 1 million Tunisian citizens in Europe, half of whom are in France. It is a very different relationship from that which James had to deal with in European or British relations with Egypt, where there are different sensitivities. There are close relations, but it is a very different set-up. The notion of country by country has to be done initially and meaningfully. That is because you also have to get different Member States to buy into it. If the EU comes along with a massive policy, even if it used three categories or five categories, it would not make sense if the Member States had not fed into it in terms of their own experience. That is why one has to start from a research base at the country by country level and then see what the EU can meaningfully do.

Mr Imad Mesdoui: I would echo the point about identifying policy priorities—quick wins—in these countries. The reason I say that it should be done country by country is because, as has been mentioned, there is a danger with classifications that they become too rigid and therefore you do not have policy flexibility, and there is also the risk of alienating local constituencies and populations if the classification is public. It could create a kind of “good states/bad states” club, which obviously can backfire. The most important thing is to identify the policy priorities and the financial resources which are available and can be placed towards those priorities. We must also make sure that it is a results-oriented programme so that each country has specific targets and priorities and specific deliverables that we can point at afterwards. From there, it might be easier to group countries together based on success stories and objectives delivered.

The Chairman: The next lot of questions is made up of three questions grouped together on Tunisia and then three questions on Libya. But before passing on to Tunisia, perhaps I may ask one question of which you have not been given notice. We have dealt with a lot of interesting subjects, but one word that has not featured in our discussion thus far is Israel. I felt that I ought to ask to what extent you feel that the EU’s relationship with Israel and the nature of the debate taking place in a number of European Member State Parliaments about Israel impacts on the subjects we have been talking about.

Mr James Watt CVO: I think that the populations in the region take very seriously not only what is happening in Jerusalem today, but also what has happened over the past several decades in Palestine. That is a major factor. Governments are on the whole focusing on the power struggles within their own country, or on their economic and political struggles. It is interesting how little, in my recent experience, Israel as a subject has cropped up in these Arab Spring-type situations. But it is an underlying factor and should never be forgotten.

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: Going back to the notion of what the EU thinks it can do effectively, it must govern how it relates to Palestine and Israel. Clearly there has been a retreat from the optimism that might have once existed after Oslo that the EU had something to contribute to the peace process. As we know from the participation of the quartet and after that, the peace process has run into the ground, and the EU is never going to be able to initiate policy there. Where I suppose it can try to do things, and it does to some extent, is precisely trying to deal with aspects of Palestinian civil society by giving people an opportunity which they might not otherwise have under military occupation. But of course that has its opponents

both within Member States and within the region itself. I would say that it is a very low-key and functional set of relations because, given that we have been talking about conflict-ridden zones, which it is primarily, the EU itself has no answer to that conflict and no mechanism or means of bringing it to an end.

Mr Imad Mesdoui: I do not have much to add. I would prefer it if we move on.

Q41 Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: We see Tunisia as one of the more successful countries. Two of you have talked about Tunisia quite a bit, and I know that you have both done significant work there. We want to learn the lessons about its success, why we think that it has been successful, and what input have the EU and individual Member States made which has led to that success. Does that mean that there should be a continuing relationship and intervention, investment or whatever you like to call it? Also, as Professor Tripp was saying, Tunisia highlights the historic individual relationships of Member States. How can we help to make sure that the individual relationships between Member States are co-ordinated effectively with EU policy? I suspect that that is one of the things that we are working towards. What are the lessons we can learn, and how should we develop that success in Tunisia? I do not want to overblow success, but what can we then apply to other countries in the region?

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: That is a large set of questions. I shall simply think about three things. One is that when you look at the crisis in Tunisia—terrorism apart, although you cannot necessarily say that—it is an economic crisis. It is about youth unemployment at 33%, women's unemployment at 22%, and overall a 15% unemployment rate in the country. It is also the inequality of the distribution of those unemployment figures from north to south and from the interior to the coast. There is a real underlying economic crisis, and you could argue that without addressing it, all the hopes and aspirations of the Arab Spring, which is evidence of an extraordinary spirit of co-operation and aspiration within Tunisian society at all levels and is truly impressive, will not be realised. One of the fears is that one cannot keep that spirit alive just by civil society assistance, although that is a part of it. One has to keep it alive by persuading people that there are jobs and things are happening. Clearly the EU is trying to do that. I think that the Trade Commissioner is in Tunisia at the moment trying to make more effective the free trade agreements and to deepen them in some way. I suppose that one of the concerns in Tunisia is the flow of capital and the flow of people. One does not always match the other. Something that becomes very apparent in the €20 billion or so trade between the EU and Tunisia, which constitutes around 60% of Tunisia's foreign trade, is that the deficit or imbalance as far as Tunisia is concerned is something over €2 billion in the EU's favour. There is a sense in which there are trade imbalances that may have to be addressed structurally. I am not an economist so I do not know how to do that, but clearly it is one of the things to think about. If the trade imbalance is structural and equally there is an outflow of capital, both of which are weakening the Tunisian economy and having an effect on growth and employment, the EU would seem to be extraordinarily well equipped to deal with it. It has the instruments to do so, and I would have thought it has the will to do so. If it does not address that, all the other things it is doing will be put in jeopardy. I see that as the huge priority. I do not decry the things that Imad was talking about in terms of civil society assistance and I recognise that the EU is not coming to Tunisia saying, "Let us tell you about the virtues of civil society". The Tunisians are very well aware of them. It is a lively, disputatious, interested and committed society. Some of the aspects of its civil society we may find deeply troubling in our view: how they conduct themselves or the values that they espouse, but that is nature of the variety of the political struggle in Tunisia.

I have two things to say. One is that the economy must be the area where the EU has strength in terms of what it can do and its modalities. The other is this: be relaxed about what you see emerging in terms of political dispute there, because in a sense that is what is going to make a Tunisian democracy. It is not the institutions and the technical aspects or the purely formalistic aspects. What is going to make it are the Tunisians being able to express themselves, sometimes to the outrage of other Tunisians and maybe problematically for people outside the country. So there is the commitment of resources and finding ways of trying to encourage the Tunisian economy, and also being relaxed about some of the manifestations of Tunisian popular politics. Do not take, as it were, the establishment view of Tunisian politics within Tunisia as the only way in which politics can be conducted. That is somewhat the fear I get from Tunisian friends. It is the *Essebsis*, the established figures of Tunisian democratic change, who become recognised. The Nobel Peace Prize to the quartet has that double-edged sword. On the one hand the Tunisians are very cheered by it, but on the other they recognise that UTICA and UGTT at least, were also part of the old establishment, under different leaderships. There is a kind of slight uncertainty there too.

Mr Imad Mesdoui: The first question was about what has made Tunisia a success. I can summarise that by saying that it was because, as Charles has already mentioned, a strong civil society had existed in the country historically. Through the unions—the UGTT for example—and there was even a political alternative prior to the regime falling. There were opposition groups, some in exile and some underground, but they existed, which is not the case in other Arab spring countries where people had to create oppositions from scratch. There were also NGOs. One of the major things that has played in favour of Tunisia's success story which is often overlooked is the fact that Tunisia historically has had a depoliticised army, which other countries in the region do not; they have the strong involvement of the army in local politics, but not in Tunisia. There is a strong interior ministry and police force, but the army was not involved in politics, and that partly explains its success.

Looking at the challenges, I again agree with Charles about the issues. There are two looming crises in Tunisia, or they are already there if you wish to put it that way. There is the economic crisis which is reflected in the structural inequalities between north and south, urban versus rural, and youth unemployment is the greatest manifestation of that structural weakness. Then the security challenge is linked in many ways to the economic and political challenges the country is facing. The security issues of Tunisia are due not only to the regional climate, but also to domestic economic issues. Young people who are marginalised and without jobs, who have faced repression in the past or are radicalised, are more likely to join terrorist groups. The EU should primarily turn its attention to the two aspects that Charles mentioned earlier: helping Tunisia to address its structural and economic weaknesses, whether they are domestic or external, and in my opinion addressing political and social capacity building through NGOs and security sector reform which can take on a whole range of manifestations, particularly when it comes to accountability, respect for human rights and so on.

Q42 Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: Any lessons for how the EU should act in future in Tunisia and elsewhere?

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: Maybe one of the lessons is that it should play to its successes in the sense that for the past four years the EU has seriously sought to address in terms of economic aid and trade agreements a determination to change the relationship and to address it in some form. If one is thinking about where that can apply across the region, it comes back to the question that was raised before. Those preconditions do not necessarily all exist across the region in the same way, but clearly where they do, they need to be dealt with in some

form. The other side of learning from that is that just as in many other countries in the region, the hardest thing for the EU to address, and therefore it should go very carefully about it, is trying to address the balance of power within a country in a very direct and obvious way, because then you touch on real and raw nerves. Although those nerves may not be quite as raw in Tunisia as they are in Egypt and elsewhere, that creates alienation and entrenchment, which is a problem. I do not know whether one calls it soft power because economic power has a huge material effect on people's lives, but there is a sense in which that is playing to its success. The area of trying to redistribute and tell the Tunisians how to reallocate power within the country is problematic. One hopes that that will come about as a result of changes to the structure of the economy.

Mr Imad Mesdoui: One lesson I would also point out for Tunisia is this. During the troika and the early days of post-Arab Spring period in Tunisia, one of the strengths of the EU's policy and its involvement, whether in the form of individual Member States or as a whole, was that they favoured the long term sustainability of the political environment as it was over short term considerations over stability, which was not necessarily the case in other Arab Spring countries where a compromise or choice was made for stability over sustainability. That always comes back to haunt us. For the time being it has proved to be an effective means of looking at the political situation in Tunisia.

Lord Horam: I am interested in what Professor Tripp was saying, particularly about the importance of the economic issues in Tunisia, which he emphasised very strongly. Does that present a problem for the European Union in addressing Tunisia as a whole? In particular, does it mean that the classical external affairs policy and security policy are really less important and that we should be relaxed about our politics because what really matters is getting the economic systems properly directed? That of course is a matter for the trade side, which is a very different part of the European Union and is not particularly connected to Mrs Mogherini's area.

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: That is one of the things that I would have thought is hugely important. Sustaining that separation is a nonsense and actually quite damaging. One could argue that in the Tunisian case, EU policy should be driven by the trade side because that is going to have a material effect on the economy. It does not mean to say that one ignores whatever assistance can be given to the Tunisian Government on security and so forth on a technical level. However, the idea that trade and, with any luck, the successful outcome of trade negotiations that favour Tunisia and allow it, if you like, to restructure its economy vis-à-vis the EU in a much more favourable way—without it, there is nothing. If it is not deeply linked to European external affairs, that would be very strange indeed. If the link does not exist, I am depressed.

Lord Horam: That may be quite difficult for the European bureaucracy.

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: Yes, that is something that other people are more expert on than myself, but I would have thought as an urgent matter, if you like, that if there is a lesson to be learnt not just about a country but about EU effectiveness, one has to say that this is a case where they must be linked up because it would be a nonsense if one thing was being done in the economy while another initiative was being taken on the external affairs side that alienated people. Again, we come up against the problem that if we do not join them up, they are not going to be cumulatively effective. They might be individually effective, but that would be by chance.

Q43 Lord Triesman: Lady Armstrong asked whether there were lessons out of a relatively successful involvement, so let me turn to what seems to be an almost completely unsuccessful

one—but maybe you will tell me that I am wrong. At the beginning of the process of the decisions on intervention in Libya in 2011, there were plainly some significant differences among the nations of the European Union as to what they should and could do. Is there a legacy from that which is still impacting on the way in which the EU responds to events in Libya? That is the first of the questions.

The second is that while people have said that they can see “a pretty significant role” for the EU, can you say what you think the active role for the EU could be and whether the view of the active role for the EU is a view which is also shared by the Libyans? Would they recognise it as the role that they would like to see the EU play or is it dissonant in any respect?

Finally, are the policies that are emerging in Europe likely to be too limited in their future application to do a substantive job in Libya? These are also big questions, but I always ask big questions of ambassadors.

Mr James Watt CVO: I do not think that there are any serious lingering disagreements about the policy on Libya. Everybody is behind the policy of the EU and of the UN representative, who is of course an EU diplomat, in promoting the formation of a government of national unity, which we may be close to. I do not think that France and Britain have a particularly privileged role, it is just that we have put much more effort into trying to understand what is going on in Libya by talking to the actors and trying to influence them. To that degree, we do have a bigger role than others, although Italy is also playing a big role. Once a national unity government has been formed, while that would be tremendous, I still think that there will be an ongoing security problem. Violent jihadism is based in Sirte at the moment, but we must remember that Libya has pretty much uncontrollable borders to the south, where there are still major problems because of the Sahel jihadism. Security support would be important, as would lifting the arms embargo if the conditions are right. That needs to be taken forward quickly, if possible. Restoring economic growth, particularly by restoring the production and export of oil, will be important. Libya is relatively easy—well, it is not easy! —because what to do is very clear. It has only 6 million people compared with the huge populations of some of the other countries and the country has a source of natural wealth in the form of oil which it should be possible to restore. Otherwise, at the economic and social policy level, I think that the Libyans would like it if we did a lot on the humanitarian side in the form of hospitals, schools, the urban environment and so on. There is some trust to be rebuilt. I have the impression that many Libyans feel that the EU did not give the right backing to the elected national assembly. When the GNC decided to come back and take over in Tripoli, the European Union decided to ride both horses rather than say, “No, we do have something called legitimacy here”. I am not close enough to the action to know how justified that position was, but it has left, certainly among some sections in Libya, a sense of bitterness and mistrust of Europe which has to be overcome by patently good and helpful actions at a social level.

As for the actors prioritising relations with individual Member States, I do not particularly see that with individual Member States. Of course you have foreign sponsors of jihadism, or people prepared to support jihadist resistance to anything like the secular future that we all envisage for Libya, but they are obviously not Member States.

Professor Charles Tripp FBA: I am not sure that I have a huge amount to add, but as James has made clear, unless there is something of unity among the Libyans, it is very difficult to think of any kind of policy that has more than a very short-term effect. What is a real problem not only for the EU but also for the Member States is that in somewhere like Libya, if the gun rules, how do you deal with the rule of the gun? How do you get people either to come

together and put down their guns or deter them from using them? When you look at the widespread nature of provincial rebellion and factionalism, apart from the split between the two Governments, much of it is retained by force. So whether it is an attack on the airport or the Parliament, or the kidnapping of people, regardless of which group is doing it, they are all using them. That is a real problem for the EU and actually for the Member States. I do not think that it is a problem which is particular to the EU. However, if we get to the point where the EU might be able to play a role in bringing the different parties together, then of course you can begin to think about all kinds of technical aid. Imad made the point earlier that it is a devastated country in terms of its infrastructure, and so the capacity for assisting just on the technical level and in a non-lethal way is going to be enormous. Libya will need all the assistance it can get, but again, I cannot see that ever happening without some kind of agreement. So on the last point of your question, which was how do the Libyans view the EU activism, having talked to some Libyans, they reflected the point that James made, which is that many of them feel let down. On the other hand, if you look at the variety of views within the Libyan spectrum, even though it is only 6 million people—some of them heavily armed and some not, some very concerned about their provincial interests and so on—for some of them the EU is not actually very meaningful because it does not engage with what they are concerned about. They have a much closer enemy to hand, which is the group in the next town or the Government in Libya.

The other point to be made is about the refugee and migrant crisis, which is an outcome of the disintegration of central authority in Libya. It is clear that Europe has been left trying to deal with the symptoms of that in one form or another as humanely as possible, but with limited resources. Even there one can see differences between Member States about whether you go in and use military force to prevent the people smugglers from operating or do you simply collect the people they are smuggling. There is a problem in that the immediacy of the crisis is bound to trouble the EU in terms of how to develop a concerted policy that brings all the Member States along in terms of the symptoms of the problem. Addressing that is not going to solve the Libyan problem, but it may be thought to solve some aspect of it as it affects European interests, but even there, there is disagreement. So much hinges upon things that it cannot yet be said with any certainty will be realised, and therefore it becomes very problematic indeed.

Mr Imad Mesdoui: I do not see many policy differences in the EU regarding the position towards what needs to be done in Libya. Right now, everything hinges on the political dialogue, which is at best very fragile. That is because even if the groups come to an agreement politically as to the formation of a unity government, what the membership of the government looks like, who would head it et cetera, there is a clear disconnect—I want to make it clear to Members of the Committee—between the people who are negotiating at the political level and the armed groups on the ground. There is such a vast proliferation of armed militia, jihadist groups and criminal organisations that it is difficult to see how the political process can rein them in the short term. This is where the EU can be of assistance, and that is why I have mentioned technical support for institutional capacity building. If a unity government is put into place, it will need time to cement its authority, to grow, and really to rebuild the foundations of the Libyan state. The European Union can contribute both directly and indirectly to that, which would have a positive effect in a number of areas; it is not just assistance in the political realm. It can help to resolve security issues, whether we are talking about terrorism or the migration issue, because that is also an institutional capacity issue in Libya at the moment. It can also have a positive effect on the economy by helping the country to start exporting again. A lot of the country's capacity has been limited because of the fighting and the security issues.

On the Libyans' view of the role of the EU, I tend to agree with what the other experts have mentioned about Libyans feeling disappointed. They feel as though there have been key junctures where the European Union's involvement was not strong enough, or clear and coherent enough, that led to a number of complex situations which in turn have led to the situation we are in now. The last point I would make is that the EU should continue in the role that it is playing now alongside the UN in mediating for the Middle East because nothing is more important than the political process in Libya at the moment. All priorities should be geared towards that, making sure that the process is successful before really examining what role the EU can play in terms of programmes and assistance. That is because realpolitik suggests that now it is impossible to have a concrete and meaningful impact on the ground.

Q44 Lord Triesman: Can I ask one supplementary question, which comes out of a comment made earlier on made by Mr Watt. You talked about the porous character of the borders. I know that we are not talking about Algeria today, but one of the things which threatens capacity, with or without European help to build a solid trading basis, is to be able to operate the facilities that you have. What we saw in Algeria was in effect a number of oil producers being driven out and some of them killed, including by Algerian military forces. In understanding what we might do in Libya, how serious might attempts to strengthen those borders be? That is because almost all of the economic activities that one would want see start up again, or starting up to a greater extent again, might appear to the oil companies, for example, to be threatened.

Mr James Watt CVO: You can secure oil facilities in the mid-south, but it would take some effort, and it is the kind of assistance that the EU could give. The southern borders of Libya on to Chad and the wider Sahel of course have the potential for highly mobile jihadists to move through and strike. So that is just one element in addition to the home-grown ground elements that the other two experts have referred to. It should be possible, but it would take some investment and effort, and perhaps government assistance, perhaps by the EU.

Mr Imad Mesdoui: As an Algerian, the situation has been pretty much stabilised since the attack in Amenas, which I think is what you are referring to. Oil groups are still present in that part of the country and are operating normally. Algeria has invested a lot of money in securing its border with Libya, which it now sees as the major threat to its national security. Something like 30,000 to 40,000 Algerian troops are stationed at the border with Libya, but one could say that actually that remains insufficient because it is such a long border that even 30,000, 40,000 or 50,000 soldiers would not suffice. But the country is investing in securing that border and making sure that terrorist and criminal groups do not pass through. There are threats that continue to exist with regard to Libya's southern border, where other states do not have the same capacity. Algeria has the military and financial capacity to enable it to invest a lot of money in securing its borders, but that is not necessarily the case for Chad or Niger, which are suffering. There is a big influx of weapons which has gone all the way down to Nigeria, one could argue, through Niger and Chad to supply groups like Boko Haram. So the threat is more at the southern end of Libya. Tunisia also has problems at its border with Libya.

Lord Triesman: Perhaps I may pursue this a little more. I am familiar with the deployments and reasonably familiar with what I suspect has actually been a greater restriction in oil production because people are servicing their plants and so on rather than necessarily pumping oil. Are there things which the European Community could provide which would add significantly to the effort; not personnel on the ground, but technical things like satellites for observation of the borders, which would give the capacity for much more rapid response by people on the ground?

Mr Imad Mesdoui: I would say that the most important issue is intelligence sharing and co-ordination. The EU and the EU Member States have a capacity when it comes to gathering information and data, as well as border surveillance. I am sure they are already doing some joint work, but you often hear complaints by security officials on that side. They say that the intelligence is not shared in real time, which is when it is most valuable. So perhaps the issue of co-ordination and intelligence sharing, along with the provision of data in real time, is what is most necessary. That requires a political dialogue at a very high level. I think that it already exists between some states and individual EU Member States, but perhaps there should be a new high-level dialogue or a new framework that makes it more concrete and effective day to day.

The Chairman: You have talked about rebuilding the foundations of the Libyan state. Of course, they were never very deep. Do you take it as axiomatic that we should think in terms of a single state or ought we to be open to the idea that the area described as Libya might be better off if it was more than one state?

Mr James Watt CVO: One answer to that would be: how would you divide the oil and water resources between the three parts without setting up continual conflict between them? My view is that I am very strongly in favour of Libya remaining a unitary state.

Q45 Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: I just wanted to follow up on what the witnesses said earlier about Libya. The EU and the Member States lack the analytical capacity and interlocutors on the ground to be able to understand the many different issues that you have been talking about internally which give rise to the more regional conflicts within Libya. Do you have a view about that?

Mr Imad Mesdoui: One of the good things that has emerged out of this conflict and the difficult political crisis that Libya is facing is that the EU has now begun to rely much more on regional actors who have an involvement and a direct stake in the conflict. Countries like Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia are Libya's neighbours and they understand the political realities. They have their connections in the country and their own role to play. I think that the EU has begun to rely a bit more on their mediation and involvement. Algeria and Morocco have both hosted political talks for Libya, which is an encouraging sign of the EU working hand in hand with regional partners. They are important and I do not think they can be ignored. It is better than taking an approach that says we should go it alone and have a Eurocentric view of how things should be. That has been a very positive development.

The Chairman: Gentlemen, thank you very much. I thought that we would take an hour and a quarter, but we have been an hour and a half. You have been generous with your replies. Again, thank you very much indeed.