

Hope takes the Street.

The Europe and the Arab Springs

International conference organised by the Italian daily *il manifesto*

2011 Arab springs have been told to be the Middle East equivalent of what the Berlin Wall fall was for Europe in 1989. If this comparison holds, the new dynamics alters all the cards on the table not only for the embattled regimes and their societies, but for the whole West as well.

That's why we feel the need of a Conference where Arab and European voices (more of the first than of the last, to avoid any paternalist temptation) would meet and interact on the unsolved issues the recent events surfaced.

The goal of such a meeting is not to express a (rather unlikely) common view, but to confront alternative, or even opposite, hypothesis. So, the 15-20 speakers are invited on the ground of the widest possible geographical and political representation.

The conference will take place in Rome, Italy, on Thursday June 9th afternoon, Friday 10th (all day) and Saturday 11th (morning): it will consist of four sessions, half day each.

Each of the four sessions will be devoted to one of four pivotal issues:

1) The outstanding (and somewhat unsuspected) women's role in these uprisings. According to the conventional wisdom, religious faith (symbolized in the "veil") and political activism are incompatible. But in Tahir Square we saw women dressing jehab and women bareheaded demonstrate together for democracy. Has the time come to correct this simplistic vision of the Arab women?

2) Political Islam or politics in Islam? According to the most common image the West has of fundamentalism in the Arab Islam, the overwhelming majority of Arab populations would be radical-fundamentalist if not kept under tight rein by authoritarian dictators, whose corruption and despotism would be "the price to pay" to maintain a thin layer of secularism. Today this paradigm is in a crisis. But can we really speak of a "post-fundamentalist" phase, as many do in Egypt and Tunisia? Or rather integralism is still playing in the backstage ready to retake the hegemony in a new look? Is the "Turkish model" something real or is it just a Trojan horse?

3) The young generation. Who (and what) are these new Arab generation? How do they perceive and shape themselves vis-à-vis the global community created by the new communication technologies? How do the new communication tools and social

networks (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, google...) play in structuring the youngsters' opposition? What about the al Jazeera political influence on the youngster uprising?

4) Capitalist modernisation. These movements seem to basically claim Citizenship rights in a global world. Can the "Arab spring" be read as a way to adjust political representation and social structure to the new economic reality? How to interpret this claim of rights that seems to unite distant and heterogeneous uprisings?