

The Epidemic of Movements

The phenomenon of awakening of young Arabs, and their discovery that they in fact can win the freedom by themselves, spreads throughout Arab world causing wave of turmoil. After two months of protests in many countries, we can speak of a general movement that will definitely change the Arab world. This movement is not unique, in every country it has its own characteristics, but the roots and demands are the same in all countries. The root is poverty, hunger and deprivation, and demands are freedom, democracy and a better life.

No matter nobody can anticipate what will the regime changes bring to the Arab countries, the movements that led to their decline have gained general sympathy around the world. These movements have made Arabs closer to the world and improved their image, previously associated to Islamic fundamentalism. Internet, and above all social networks like Facebook and Twitter, global communications, mobile telephony and cable television, through which TV channels are being watched around the world, helped young Arabs to understand in what countries they live, connected them with their peers across the globe, allowed them to realize they are part of the world and helped them to organize against the repressive regimes. The young generation of average age between 20-24 years that has

made these changes is educated, mostly unemployed, it grew up with "Facebook", "iPod" and satellite television, and is interconnected. They exchange e-mails, videos; rappers sing Arabic politically involved songs. Everything that happens in one country, through the global communications is very quickly passed on everywhere. For instance, on the Internet in the Arab world was especially popular a joke in which Ben Ali, former President of Tunisia, sends a request to also ousted Mubarak to become friends on "Facebook".

Now already we can predict the four scenarios of changes in the Arab world.

Which scenario will take place in which country depends on two factors. The first is whether the regimes understand need for change and fact that autocracy has expired and accommodate, or try to maintain reign of fear by fiercely opposing demonstrators. The second factor is whether the movements in any of these countries are capable to achieve Unity, Planning and nonviolent discipline as it happened in Egypt.



Depending on these two factors, in every single case study there will be one of three possible outcomes.

The first scenario is the victory of the movement that opposes the regime. This happened in Egypt and Tunisia. These countries now face a new challenge - the transition from dictatorship to democracy.

The second scenario is accommodation of the regime and finding the middle ground with the requests of the protesters. Some of Arab leaders are trying to stop, or at least manage this "democracy wave" with less repression and more accommodation in dialogue (typically Jordan and Morocco). Certain level of dialogue can be expected and slow but steady transition as most likely outcome in these countries. Some accommodations are already happening in Algeria, Morocco and Jordan and maybe Yemen.

The third scenario is regimes desperately maintaining status quo by force, and repression as an answer to protests. Due to the increased repression, the movements are not able to maintain nonviolent discipline and these countries come to the brink of civil war. This is happening in Sudan and Libya, where the rulers are trying to maintain control over its aroused population by even more intense repression and fear. It is very difficult to predict what will happen in those countries, but unfortunate violence and misery are already occurring as regimes try to keep status quo

careless of number of their own citizens they will execute or world condemnation of this type of repression.

The fourth scenario occurs when a repressive regime tries to conquer the political space. This we seem to witness in Iran, which is a lesson learned from Chavez in Venezuela. In this scenario, the regimes push their supporters on the streets, launching threatening assault on opposition including putting leaders in house arrest, Iranian regime tends to prevent spreading of the opposition in political space. Extruding it, they are trying to avoid any turmoil, for which they use the media and lies, trying to direct the discontent of the citizens to regional unrest, such as the Shia in Bahrain.

Movements in Egypt and Tunisia have been inspired by the experiences of the Serbian student movement RESISTANCE (Ser. OTPOR), which in 2000 was one of the most important factors for democratic change in Serbia. The fact that many student movements around the world use clenched fist", a symbol of the Serbian RESISTANCE has associated Serbia in with these movements much more than there are grounds for it.

Nonviolent struggle is much older than the Serbian nonviolent revolution.



The specificity of the Serbian revolution is that it took place in Europe, eleven years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and as such has caused great attention in the world. Agile Serbian students have written their own methods of nonviolent struggle in the textbook "Non-violent Struggle: 50 Crucial Points". This book, translated into many languages, including Arabic and Farsi, has been "downloaded" more than twenty thousand times. Documentary film "Bringing down a Dictator," which tells about the Serbian nonviolent revolution, has been watched by more than 25 million people. In addition, the subject of strategies and methods of nonviolent social change is, for three years now, one of the courses on the specialized studies of the Belgrade Faculty of Political Sciences. This course is taught for five years on two prestigious colleges - the Colorado and Grinnell (Iowa, USA) while the U.S. Rutgers University in New Jersey and Fletcher in Boston organized doctoral studies.

Victories won by Arab nations, primarily Tunisians and Egyptians, are authentic. Now these people are facing a great challenge to achieve real democratic change through constitutional and legislative changes that will enable lasting democracy and the rule of law. Persuading Mubarak and Ben Ali to step down was only the first step to the vision of tomorrow defined by brave protesters: proud Egypt with freedoms of assembly and press, fair elections and accountable secular government. The challenge is greater for the people of Egypt, where military government took over the job of transition. The attempt of

the army to stop or slow down this change could cause new pressure from the streets. But enthusiasm is there, and if they use it efficiently to work with military, we may experience historical transitions with tens of millions of people travel from dictatorship to democracy, and likely see emerging of secular stable, religiously tolerant and democratic and prosperous society, for example like Turkey.

First steps for both countries, of course would be to change a non-democratic elements of their constitutions, which seems to be underway but with no clear timeline. Then to change rules of game towards free and fair elections. However, democracy doesn't end with having free elections.

The biggest challenge, but also biggest chance lies in the fact that street youth secular and democratic movement is main carrier of credibility in both Tunisia and Egypt, not the political parties.

If this youth movements help mobilization prior to referendum and elections, and help build "watchdog" organization, or even secular and liberal youth political parties, the future of durable democracy would be guaranteed, whatever the election results may be.

At this point, a wave of change is spreading across the Arab world. However, the significance of these changes is global. The



question is when these changes will initiate movements in other parts of the world - Europe and Latin America, primarily. The global economic crisis has brought many economies to the brink of bankruptcy. Particularly are affected countries in transition and development, the economies of which are not strong enough to feed its population and provide jobs without foreign investment. The governments manage differently these challenges, from country to country. More and more citizens lose trust in state institutions, as well as political parties, which are unable to provide answers to the problems that plague their society and citizens. Political parties and state institutions that haven't changed for decades, ceased to be aware that they are there for citizens. Citizens demand their problems to be solved. If political parties cannot give answers to the problems - some new organizations will, such as the movement "April 6" and "Kefaja" in Egypt, such as a Georgian movement "Kmara" or Ukrainian "Porom." In Europe, the reason for the dissatisfaction is not the lack of democracy because it is more or less all European countries, except Belarus and Moldova, reached a high democratic standard. The reasons why the citizens of many European countries are dissatisfied are the drop in living standard, unemployment, corruption, crime, lack of understanding of political elites to share the burden of the crisis with the citizens and the inability of governments to solve basic societal problems. Southeastern and Eastern Europe are especially critical. After all, Greece, a country that has been in the European Union for

decades, which only geographically, and not otherwise belongs to this region, has experienced a financial collapse. The recent events in Croatia say that the virus of self-organization of citizens has spread to Europe.

Two days ago, in Zagreb (the capital of Croatia) demonstrated at least ten thousand people who sought the resignation of the Government. It is interesting that the protest wasn't organized by any political party, or the unions, but a group that calls on citizens through social network Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/prosvjed/>)! On Friday, March 4, about ten thousand people marched to the state television in protest because the television announced that there had been only one thousand and five hundred of demonstrators. They burned flags of political parties and of the European Union and demanded the Government to resign. Croatia has been shaken for months with big corruption scandals the actors of which are politicians. Former Prime Minister Ivo Sanader is in jail in Austria, where awaiting extradition to Croatia for a number of scandals in which he participated. In addition, this country of some 4.4 million inhabitants is in a difficult economic situation, since there are over 334 thousand unemployed, 90 thousand people who work and receive no salary, 75 thousand workers who are paid pensions and health insurance, over a hundred thousands of entrepreneurs who have blocked bank accounts and liquidity of around 4.72 billion euros. This Facebook group scheduled protests in eight other towns in Croatia for the weekend. The relationship of self-organized citizens with institutions was



perhaps best highlighted by one of the protesters who is 29 years old. **"Croatia was completely robbed by its own politicians. We only want to work and live worthy of it"**, said this woman told AFP agency.

"Facebook revolution" in Croatia, if successful, could very easily become a pattern for similar movements in South Eastern Europe.

While Europe is slowly shaken by the virus of self-organization, and government fear of millions of immigrants from Arab countries that have fought for democracy, the power in China cracked down on "facebook protests". In several Chinese cities, including Beijing and Shanghai, the police prevented a demonstration, after the call over the Internet to "jasmine revolution". **"We want food, work, a place to live"** – should have been, according to the plans of the organizers, slogans of protest throughout China, and these slogans appeared on popular Internet sites - first in the United States. On Sunday Chinese authorities blocked the use of the word "jasmine" in Internet search engines. "Jasmine revolution" was, otherwise, the name of a coup in Tunisia, the first in which the Internet was massively used to mobilize protesters to streets. As similar protests flooded the Middle East, the United States called for a global respect for freedom of access to global computer network. Chinese President Hu Jintao has called for stricter control of the Internet, in order to **"solve problems that can**

harm the harmony and stability of the society."

What will be the ultimate reach of the changes initiated by young people organized in social groups, no one can say at this point. The only certainty is that the world will never be the same. In the period in which we expect increase in population and increase in food and energy prices, the world will have to find a formula for a redistribution of wealth between rich and poor, and governments and political elites will have to respond more the citizens' needs. Otherwise, we will witness more and more movements in which people organize themselves and fight for their rights.