

Towards a Meaningful Euro-Arab Partnership

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ملخص

نحو مشاركة أوروبية عربية ذات مغزى

تستهدف هذه الورقة تناول القضايا المفاهيمية الجوهرية التي تتصل اتصالاً وثيقاً بمحتوى وخصائص وقيود المشاركة لكلا الشريكين الأوروبي والعربي، بحثاً عن مشاركة فعالة. وبدائية هناك شركاء كبار وشركاء صغار في الحقوق والقدرات. وفي المشاركة الأوروبية العربية ثمة تباين في الإمكانيات الاقتصادية والتكنولوجية والعسكرية والأمنية وطبيعي أن الشريك الأوروبي هو الأقوى. وعلى الجانب الآخر يبدو أن التباين أقل حيث يملك الشريك العربي إمكانيات ذات قيمة فيما يتعلق بالحضارة والثقافة.

وتحاول الورقة من خلال عرضها للقضايا السياسية والأمنية والاقتصادية والتكنولوجية اقتراح أولويات ونقاط للعمل نحو المشاركة الهادفة والعادلة إلى حد ما، والتي تستطيع الصمود مهما كانت العقبات. وعلى كل طرف من الشريكين أن يتناول هذه القضايا بطريقة الخاصة إذا كان الطرفان يرغبان في تحقيق الهدف من المشاركة.

وانتهت الورقة لعدة آراء منها أن التنمية الاقتصادية العربية مشوهة إلى حد كبير وعاجزة حتى عند مقارنتها بدول نامية أخرى. مما عدا أفريقيا جنوب الصحراء - وذلك رغم حصول الدول العربية على الاستقلال منذ عقود طويلة، ورغم وفرة الاستثمارات التي تعمل هناك منذ ربع قرن تقريباً والتي تقدر بنحو مائة بليون دولار سنوياً. ومع ذلك يمكن للمشاركة الأوروبية العربية إذا أحسن تخطيطها وتنفيذها بواسطة كلا الطرفين أن تكون حافزاً قوياً للتنمية. إن مثل هذه المشاركة قد تخلق مناخاً من الاستقرار والسلام إذا ما تم معالجة القضايا الأمنية والسياسية القائمة بأسلوب سليم، كما أنه من المحتمل إيجاد فرص عمل جديدة متعددة، وتطوير الرفاهية الاجتماعية والتوصل للازدهار. ولكي يتسنى تحقيق كل ذلك على الدول العربية أن تتبنى منهاجاً إقليمياً لقضايا التنمية نسيجه الجمع بين الرؤى والأساليب من خلال العمل الدائم المشترك مع شركائهم الأوروبيين.

Introduction:

It is essential for us to have a common understanding of what is meant by the prospective "partnership" between the Europeans on the one hand and the Arabs on the other. With respect to the content and specifications of partnership, the constraints which have to be recognized, the qualifications which have to be addressed, and the opportunities which can rightly be expected in the pursuit of meaningful partnership with a reasonable degree of credibility and effectiveness. This is why this paper is designed to deal essentially with conceptual matters of close relevance to the pursuit in question.

To begin with, as in many if not most partnerships, there are major partners and minor partners, with the rights and capabilities and the privileges and powers of the latter distinctly fewer (and more restricted) than those of the former. The Euro-Arab partnership - whether actual or potential - especially with respect to its economic and technological, or to its military and security aspects, conforms to the differentiation and characterization just made : namely that the European partner is by far the major and much stronger partner. On the other hand, the Arab partner can rightly claim a less disparate standing in terms of culture and civilization than his major partner.

The final introductory remark to make is that the following parts of this paper will try to identify the principle issues - which seem to most politically, and socially concerned Arabs - to be addressed for a meaningful, reasonably equitable, and durable Euro-Arab partnership to be approached. And I hasten to add that both partners, each in his own way, will have to address these issues if their pursuit of partnership is to reach the goals set for it.

I. Political and Security Issues :

An economic and technological partnership cannot be developed in a political and security vacuum, that is, in disregard of the principal political and security concerns of the partners and of the issues that occupy them. This is particularly true with regard to the Arab partner. Hence the allocation in the present discussion of top priority to the principal issues within the category of politics and security.

The most intractable of these is the continued occupation by Israel of Arab land in Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon, in spite of strong and unequivocal resolutions taken at the UN's General Assembly and Security Council. While it is true that the European governments have over the last two decades taken a position supportive of Arab rights, and of the principles of self-determination, and the "exchange of land for peace". Israel continues to hold on to the territories occupied, to impose its policies and regulations on them, and to implant settlements in most of them. Admittedly, Europe does not have the clout and the influence on Israel, which the United States enjoys. However, Europe has very strong economic cards in its hand which it could play effectively in order to urge Israel to respect the will of the international community and implement its resolutions. The most notable of these cards is trade between Israel and Europe which is of such magnitude and significance that Israel would not afford to maintain its disregard of UN resolutions at the serious risk of foregoing (or at least jeopardizing) the benefits of its trade relationship with Europe.

On the other hand, the Arab countries share the blame directed at Europe. They, too, have enormous trade interests with Europe. However, they have never effectively, formulated a joint approach to their European partners with a view to articulating the expectation that these partners show concrete sympathy with Arab rightful demands. The demands go beyond the relinquishment by Israel of occupied Arab territories, if not allowing restitution and reparation as well.

I can add here that both the European and the Arab governments share in the responsibility of leaving all the political leverage in dealing with Israel in the hand of the U.S. governments, and abdicating the role which they could to a reasonable extent play. Thus Israel gets away with violating international law and ignoring UN resolutions, even when they have been voted for by all UN members except it and the United States have voted them for. Acquiescence in these situations amounts to implicit endorsement of the application of double standards.

Associated with the Arab political concerns is Israel's ever-expanding highly sophisticated military power, which goes well beyond the possession and mastery of conventional weapons to comprise the capability of producing chemical and biological weapons, and the accumulation of a huge arsenal of nuclear weapons of various forms and calibres, about the existence of which there is virtually no doubt now. This security threat is continually poised over the Arab peoples, especially in the Mashreq - a virtual "Damocles' Sword". The Arabs expect to receive tangible European support in the form of diplomatic and economic pressure targeted to make Israel agree to sign binding international treaties which could effectively ensure first the non-use, and ultimately the removal altogether of all these non-conventional weapons systems.

Two qualifications have to be made in this connection. First, that the Arabs commit themselves likewise to match Israeli commitment, and thus forego the possession of all non-conventional weapons systems, and further to commit themselves not to undertake research in and production of any forms of nuclear weapons. Such a line of argument is strengthened by the well-known and established fact that Israel's military capability in conventional weapons alone is more than a match for the Arab capabilities combined.

The second qualification relates to the potent argument that the United States provides cover for Israel against any pressure to which it may be exposed in order to make the commitments just referred to. Again here, the convergence of Arab and European solidarity and cohesiveness can be expected at least to dilute or limit the unlimited support which the United States extends to Israel, thus enabling it to persist in its intransigence in the face of Arab legitimate security concerns. However, regrettably the Arabs do not have a solid joint position in this respect, and often positions expressed openly vary from covert ones conveyed to the US government. On the other hand, though the European position is less fragmented, it shows distinct variations within the European Union.

These qualifications notwithstanding, an effort ought to be made by the Arab governments taking a joint stand on major issues, and it is

hoped that the European stand will coalesce around the main issues which the Arabs consider central to their security and unquestioned political rights. Such a development might bring about a tangible change in the virtually unquestioning support by the US government of Israel's intransigent positions and actions, vis-à-vis the Palestinians specifically and the Arabs in general.

II. economic and Technological Issues :

In my view, as I will demonstrate subsequently, it is imperative to place technological and skill issues that ought to be addressed in the pursuit of a meaningful Euro-Arab partnership ahead of such economic issues as the composition of the goods and service exchanged in trade between the two parties, or of the terms of trade and specifications of the goods and services. This is because what the Arab partners need fundamentally and urgently is help from their partners in the promotion and enhancement of Arab developmental capability.

This broad objective has several strands and involves several approaches, all of which are meant to serve the ultimate purpose of correcting the distortions in the process of development and accelerating it once it is on the right track. Arab development, broadly defined, incorporates the acquisition of appropriate advance technology, efficient administration, rational organization, and careful attention to social desiderata. The instrumentalities and prerequisites for a credible approach to this wide-ranging goal are numerous, and fall into different but communicating compartments in the society and economy. But more emphasis will be placed in the present discussion on technology and other empowering dynamics than on socio-cultural dynamics, although the latter are indispensable to economic development. However, they constitute factors which Arab society itself will have to generate and nurture, mainly from within.

Consequently, I will focus now on the factors of technology and education in the contribution of which the European partners are specially qualified and which they are distinctly capable of promoting and enhancing. This is particularly true because of the greater cultural

and social affinity between them and the Arabs: geographical proximity and centuries of Euro-Arab interaction - despite confrontational phases in the past - account for the affinity.

Doubtless, the relations, attitudes and outlooks of the partners are more harmonious or at least much less abrasive than their counterparts between the North Americans, particularly where the Arab-Israeli conflict is concerned.

The final justification for the special trust which the Arabs generally have in the Europeans arises from the conviction that the Arabs enjoy greater ability to interact with them, and that the Europeans can contribute more to Arab economic and technological empowerment. The conviction is bred from the awareness that the United States, as the world's super-power with a giant scale of operations, is less accessible and more awe-inspiring than the Europeans who remain identifiable as individual nation states though they are grouped in a "Union".

Apart from these justifications for partnership with the European union, one can identify three advantages. Especially when the "Partnership" is contrasted with the "Middle East Perspective" (MEP), which became suddenly fashionable in the early and mid 1990's. and received wide acclaim and energetic "preaching" by the US, as well as by Israel during the days of the last Labor government in which Shimon Peres was minister then prime minister.

The first advantage (or justification) is that "Partnership" is not structured in a way that places Israel in the center - at the heart of the MEP. In fact the literature that appeared along with the MEP revealed a strong bias towards the Israeli economy and betrayed some marginalization of the Arab countries.

In the second place, the "Partnership" recognizes the existence of an "Arab Region". Indeed there have been several statements by Jacques Santar and other leaders in the European Community indicating regret that the Arab countries approach Europe singly, instead of coming forth with one coordinated vision or position. Thirdly and finally, the Europeans unlike the United States, do not offer themselves as the

world's top leaders and assume a role of global supremacy which carries a way of life, a model, and a socio-political system that is claimed to have universal applicability and therefore should be copied everywhere.

III. priority Areas of Action in the Partnership :

I will be more specific in what follows, as I list certain areas in which European help to Arabs should optionally be solicited by the Arabs from their European partners. The first to identify is the promotion of, and guidance in basic and applied research, especially in natural sciences and mathematics, but also in social sciences. These are urgent needs for increasing the technological capability of Arab societies. Such help could usefully come in the form of training in Europe as well as in Arab localities. The training could optimally be through the instrumentality of academic institutions as well as on the job in factories and work places. Again, the help could take the form of financial flows as well as seconding scientists, experts, and technicians; it could also be offered via research institutions (preferably financed jointly); or it could be provided to institutions already in existence. This kind of help would widen and deepen the capabilities of Arab researchers and introduce them to advanced technologies, develop their intellectual exploratory inclinations and sharpen their questioning curiosity.

Expanding the organizational and administrative abilities of the institutions of civil society, as well as the private business sector and the public authorities will be a much-needed contribution to society, the polity, and the economy alike. Such professional services as audit, the setting of product specifications, cost-accounting and the market research will enhance the ability of business establishments to complete in external markets.

The purely economic beneficial outcomes would be further assured and widened if the Arab partners sought help from the European partners in the enrichment of education in mathematics, physics, natural sciences, medicine, and engineering - as well as economics, to name areas of pressing need. Although the educational system has

made marked progress in post-independence decades, there is still a much larger scope for improvement, in the methods as well as in the content of educational programs, and in the equipping of libraries and laboratories. Furthermore, education ought to become much more oriented toward the service of the economy and society's needs, more emphatic on problem-solving, and as indicated earlier - more concerned with society's acquisition of greater technological capabilities.

The Arabs need not feel overly sensitive (or embarrassed) about seeking external help in the endeavour to upgrade the educational systems, both private and public. The twinning of improved technology with better education can certainly enhance and widen the economic power of Arab society, which in itself can bring it closer to meaningful partnership with the Europeans. It has been theoretically proven and empirically established that trade among the members of the region develops as their capabilities and performances improve. As of now, intra-regional Arab trade is only in the range, of 6-7 percent of the region's total external trade. In contrast, Europe's intra-regional is about eight or nine times as high. Thus the enhancement of Arab productive power essentially through technology and education (coupled with wise investment), can be counted upon to enlarge and diversify the flow of goods and services within the Arab region and in external markets. Therefore it makes all the more sense for the Arabs to anchor their expectations from and their faith in European contributions to the development of the capabilities just referred to. The other aspects of the partnership would thus logically get firmer and flourish.

Before closing the present section of the paper, I must admit that I do not have enough information on the financial assistance by the Europeans to the Arab countries, whether current or planned under the partnership. Nevertheless, two prominent aspects of financial assistance ought to be singled out here. These are : first, the Arab expectation that the Europeans would make a serious effort to reduce Arab indebtedness, particularly of the poorer and less developed countries. The second, is the expectation that the flow of European

investments into the Arab economies would remain substantial and would be directed to physical and social infrastructure, as well as the private sector. Naturally this involves first, the creation of an investment-friendly climate in terms of legislation, policies, and administrative practices. Secondly it involves the targeting by the recipients of the assistance to the enhancement of socio-economic development through the empowerment of the economic agents who are engaged in the pursuit of developments.

IV. Concluding Remarks:

1. Arab economic development is seriously flawed and distorted, and largely powerless, even when compared with that in other developing regions, except that of Africa South of Sahara. The shortfall persists in spite of the passage of decades since independence, and the investment of about 100 billion dollars annually on the average for a quarter of a century now.
2. The Euro-Arab partnership, if imaginatively conceptualized, soundly planned and structured and diligently implemented by both partners can be a strong motive force for development.
3. Such partnership could create a "space (region) of stability and peace" once the intractable political and security issues discussed earlier on are satisfactorily addressed.
4. It could also create vast new labor opportunities and promote social welfare and prosperity.
5. For these rosy expectations to materialize, the Arab countries will have to develop a regional approach to development issues by weaving together country visions and approaches, and by sustained work together, and with their European counterparts.

Beirut

26 February, 1999