

POLICY BRIEFING

EU - League of Arab States relations: Prospects for closer parliamentary cooperation

Abstract

The League of Arab States, a grouping of 22 Arab states established in 1945, has the potential to become the most important regional organisation in the greater Middle East. The changes triggered by the Arab Spring have led to the reorientation of the League's traditionally conservative policies on established Arab political regimes, while the civil wars in Libya and Syria have highlighted the League's potentially constructive role in supporting transition in the southern Mediterranean. The organisation's newfound relevance has been recognised by the European Union, which has worked to enhance the once-limited bilateral relations. A milestone for the partners' cooperation was the second EU - Arab League Foreign Affairs ministerial meeting, convened in Cairo in November 2012, which resulted in a joint declaration outlining an ambitious work programme in a range of fields.

In parallel, the European Parliament has advanced inter-parliamentary cooperation with the newly-established permanent Arab Parliament composed by representatives of national parliaments. While the Arab Parliament's role is still limited, the organisation has the potential to grow in the future, as the region moves towards more democratic structures of governance. This provides impetus for the European Parliament to be proactive and enhance its cooperation with the Arab Parliament. In addition, closer relations with the Arab Parliament would allow the European Parliament to increase its visibility and interaction with national parliaments in Arab countries.

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AUTHORS:

Andreas KETTIS, with contributions from Irene FERNANDEZ MOLINA
Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union
Policy Department
WIB 06 M 043
rue Wiertz 60
B-1047 Brussels

Editorial Assistant: Agnieszka PUNZET

CONTACT:

Feedback of all kinds is welcome. Please write to:

andreas.kettis@europarl.europa.eu.

To obtain paper copies, please send a request by e-mail to:

poldep-expo@europarl.europa.eu.

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1. The League of Arab States as a regional organisation

The League of Arab States, widely known as the Arab League, is a regional inter-governmental organisation that was formed in 1945, grouping **22 Arab countries** from the Middle East and North Africa¹.

The Arab League's aim is to 'draw closer the relations between member States and co-ordinate their political activities with the aim of realising a close collaboration between them, to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to consider in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab countries'².

The organisation was officially founded in Cairo at the end of World War II (22 March 1945). Seven countries signed the Pact of the League of Arab States: **Egypt, Iraq, Jordan** (at that time Transjordan), **Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia** and **Yemen**. They were joined later, as the decolonisation of the region advanced, by **Libya** (1953), **Sudan** (1956), **Tunisia, Morocco** (1958), **Kuwait** (1961), **Algeria** (1962), **Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, United Arab Emirates** (1971), **Mauritania** (1973), **Somalia** (1974), the **Palestine Liberation Organisation** (or PLO, 1976), **Djibouti** (1977) and **Comoros** (1993). The permanent headquarters was established also in Cairo.

Established in 1945, the League of Arab States groups 22 Arab countries in order to develop intergovernmental cooperation, safeguarding their independence and sovereignty.

1.1. Ideological context of the League of Arab States

The history of the Arab League as a regional organisation has run **in parallel to the history of the nationalist ideology of Pan-Arabism**, which advocates the unification — or at least the deep cooperation and solidarity — of all the countries defining themselves as 'Arab'. In fact, the region is characterised by the complicated relationship among state sovereignty and both supra- and sub-state identities. Transnational ideologies, such as Pan-Arabism or (Pan-) Islamism, exist alongside barely recognised sub-national ethnic groups, which do not always identify themselves with the national framework (Kurds in the Middle East, Berbers in the Maghreb). This has contributed to some of the local states' irredentism, to the point of meddling in their neighbours' domestic affairs. While the region encompasses a maze of identities, 20th-century Pan-Arabism has constructed a community of fate in all these countries, extending beyond state borders, and even the region as a whole.

The ideological basis of derives from 'Pan-Arabism', emphasising the common Arab identity of its member states.

¹ Even though Syria's membership was suspended in 2011 in protest at the Assad regime's bloody crackdown on dissent, opponents of the Syrian regime headed by Moaz al-Khatib, took up Syria's seat at the Summit of the LAS in Qatar on 26 March 2013.

² Article 2 of the Pact of the League of Arab States, March 22, 1945.

Figure 1:
The 22 Member States of the League of Arab States.



© European Parliament, DG Expo Policy Dept., 2012, PH/ap

Figure 2:
The flag of the League of Arab States.



Table 1:
Basic statistical data for the Arab League's Member States, 2011

	Surface 1000sq km	Populat ion millions	GDP billions euro	GDP per capita euro	Exports to GDP ratio %	Imports to GDP ratio %	Trade to GDP ratio %	Inflatio n rate %
Algeria	2 381.7	36	137.0	3 810	38.5	24.7	63.2	4.5
Bahrain	0.8	1.1	18.8	16 618.0	127.6	48.7	176.4	1.0
Comoros	1.9	0.7	0.4	648.5	8.7	37.5	46.2	6.8
Djibouti	23.2	0.8	0.9	1 053.9	43	281.1	324.2	5.1
Egypt	1 001.5	79.4	169.3	2 133.9	12.8	25.0	37.8	11.1
Iraq*	435.2	32.96	160.6	5 015	0.7	0.4	1.2	-

Jordan	89.3	6.3	21.0	3,358.2	22.9	64.0	86.9	4.4
Kuwait	17.8	3.7	126.9	34 470.1	45.4	13.6	59.0	4.7
Lebanon	10.5	4.0	28.0	7 085.1	9.4	51.8	61.1	5.0
Libya	1 759.5	6.5	26.5	4 088.6	48.2	23.7	71.9	14.1
Mauritania	1 030.7	3.3	3.0	926.8	72.3	81.9	154.2	5.7
Morocco	446.6	32.2	71.3	2 215.0	20.9	43.8	64.8	0.9
Oman	309.5	3.1	51.6	16 749.6	61.1	35.8	96.9	4.0
Palestine**	6.0	3.9	13.6	3 465	0.2	0.6	0.7	-
Qatar	11.6	1.8	124.9	70 639.0	59.7	13.9	73.6	2.0
Saudi Arabia	2 149.7	28.2	414.9	14 730.1	55.1	21.8	76.9	5.0
Somalia*	637.7	9.6	2.0	218	0.4	1.1	1.5	-
Sudan	2 505.8	32.7	46.5	1 424.2	14.9	14.2	29.1	18.1
Syria	185.2	-	-	-	23.6	42.2	65.8	-
Tunisia	163.6	10.7	33.3	3 125.8	35.6	56.1	91.8	3.5
UAE	83.6	5.4	258.7	48 137.9	65.9	59.4	125.4	0.9
Yemen	528.0	25.1	24.2	962.7	28.4	30.6	59.0	17.6

Source: The European Commission, DG Trade, 2011, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/statistics/>

* Source: WorldBank, IMF, IHS Global Insight database;

** Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics;

1.2. Structure and decision-making procedures

The Council is the supreme authority of the League of Arab States.

Article 3 of the 1945 Arab League's Pact provides that the **Council** is the supreme authority within the organisation, entrusted with 'the function of realising the purpose of the League and of supervising the execution of the agreements concluded between the member States'. The Council is composed of representatives of all its member states, **usually the foreign ministers**, their representatives or permanent delegates. Head of State or Government Summits used to be convened irregularly, on an *ad hoc* basis, but have taken place annually since 2000.

Main functions of the Council of the League of Arab States:

- deciding on applications for membership and accepting withdrawals;
- deciding on the introduction of amendments to the founding charter/pact;

- mediating the settlement of disputes in all differences that threaten to lead to war between two member states, or a member state and a third state;
- drawing up statutes for the subsidiary and affiliate bodies of the League;
- appointing the Secretary-General.

The Council adopts its resolutions by unanimity except for administrative matters and measures against an aggressor state.

The Council convenes in ordinary session twice a year, in March and in September. Extraordinary sessions can be organised upon the request of two member states. In these meetings, regardless of the size of a member's economy or population, each member has a single vote and, as is typical in purely inter-governmental organisations, **resolutions must be adopted unanimously** to be binding upon all states. (Majority decisions are binding only upon those states that have accepted them.) Two exceptions to this consensus rule are envisaged: in the event that the Council debated hostilities between two member countries, the aggressor state is denied the right to vote; and for financial and administrative issues, universally binding resolutions can be passed with just a two-thirds majority. In any case, the League has **no mechanism to compel members' compliance with its resolutions**.

A number of specialised ministerial councils have been created.

Over the course of the League's history, as the scope of cooperation expanded, several **specialised ministerial councils** were created in the fields of:

- housing and construction,
- information,
- interior,
- justice,
- communications,
- electricity,
- environmental issues,
- health,
- social affairs,
- tourism,
- youth and sports,
- transportation.

The Secretary-General plays a key role in the institutional architecture of the League.

The League's daily administrative and executive work is the responsibility of the **permanent General Secretariat**. The secretariat is headed by a **Secretary-General**, appointed by the Council for a five-year renewable term, tasked with coordinating all duties, preparing the agenda of the meetings and following up the implementation of resolutions. With only

one exception, this position has been reserved for a diplomat from the League's biggest member state, Egypt.

Table 2:
Secretary-Generals of the League of Arab States

1945-1952	Abd al-Rahman Azzam	Egypt
1952-1972	Abd al-Khaleq Hassouna	Egypt
1972-1979	Mahmoud Riyadh	Egypt
1979-1990	Chedli Klibi	Tunisia
1991-2001	Ahmad Esmat Abd al-Meguid	Egypt
2001-2011	Amr Moussa	Egypt
2011-onwards	Nabil Elaraby	Egypt

1.3. Secretary-General Nabil Elaraby’s new, progressive approach

The new Secretary-General Nabil Elaraby, influenced by his UN background and by developments in the region, has pushed the League towards more progressive and humanitarian approaches.

Despite the shift in rhetoric, the organisation is still accused of double standards.

Nabil Elaraby (نبييل العربي), a prominent Egyptian diplomat with extensive experience at the UN, took over the League's General Secretariat on 15 May 2011, following Amr Moussa's resignation. Elaraby's UN background shaped the new Secretary-General's progressive approach, as have the regional changes triggered by the Arab Spring. The most fundamental change instituted by Elaraby was his unequivocal emphasis on the **'responsibility to protect'** — a notion that has featured high on the agenda of UN bodies over the last decade. Elaraby's stance on the issue has led to a significant shift from the League's longstanding policy of non-interference in domestic issues. The international community's duty to intervene in a country's internal affairs to protect its citizens from mass atrocities (genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing) has been used as a justification for supporting the intervention in Libya and for seeking active involvement in the Syrian crisis. Although the notion of 'responsibility to protect' is quite distinct from that of democracy promotion, it has also provoked **accusations of double standards**: while the League's new humanitarian rhetoric suggests the organisation is changing, its 'responsibility to protect' has not been applied evenly to all regimes that have violently suppressing citizens. (The Bahraini case is perhaps the most flagrant.) Obviously, the balance of interests among member states still plays a determinative role.

2. The Arab Parliament (AP)

The permanent Arab Parliament is the parliamentary arm of the Arab League. Since its first

A permanent Arab Parliament is a relatively new development in the broader, institutional configuration of the Arab League, and its role is rather embryonic. The parliament, however, has the potential to grow into a stronger institution should its members capitalise on the momentum of the Arab Spring and become more vocal about the legitimate demands of

session was convened in December 2012, the role of the Arab Parliament has been limited, although it has potential for greater influence.

the Arab world's peoples for democracy, human rights and social justice.

At present, the seat of the Arab Parliament is in Cairo. However, a previous decision of the Council of the Arab League determined that the institution would move its permanent seat to Damascus once construction of its headquarters was completed. The ongoing crisis in Syria has affected this plan, and it remains to be seen when and whether the initial plan will be implemented.

2.1. Historical developments

The idea of a body directly representing the will of the Arab people had been discussed by the Arab League since the mid 1950s. Yet League's founding pact contained no mention of direct representation. Despite numerous efforts to modify the text, the most democratic institution that could be created was the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU), founded in 1977, which fell outside of the institutional framework of the Arab League and was envisaged merely as a forum through which to coordinate policies between the various parliaments of member states.

The idea of establishing an Arab Parliament has been discussed since the mid-1950s but was only realized in 2005.

During the 1980s, both the AIPU and the General Secretariat of the Arab League worked on a new legal formulation to facilitate the establishment of an Arab Parliament within the framework of the Arab League. This served as a basis for a decision taken by the League's Council during the 17th general conference in **Algiers (March 2005)** to amend its pact to include the (interim) **Arab Parliament (AP)** as an official institution for a transitional period of seven years, which ended with the establishment of the **permanent Arab Parliament** in December 2012. The parliament's main objective is to give the citizens of the Arab world a voice that complements that of Arab governments, thereby strengthening the democratic decision-making process.

2.2. The Speaker of the Arab Parliament

The Speaker of the permanent Arab Parliament was elected on 12 December 2012 for a two-year term.

Following a transitional period that was concluded at the end of 2012, the first session of the **permanent Arab Parliament** took place in Cairo on 12 December 2012. As Speaker of the AP for a 2-year term (renewable once) was elected by vast majority Mr. **Ahmed al-Jarwan**, member of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates.



Ahmed al-Jarwan, Speaker of the Arab Parliament since December 2012

2.3. Institutional Structure of the Arab Parliament

The Arab Parliament meets in two sessions per year and counts four standing committees.

The AP holds biannual two-month sessions, beginning in March and in September. The parliament includes the following structures:

- The **presidency**, which represents the AP in the field of external relations.
- The **bureau** (composed of the Speaker, the Speaker's deputies and the heads of the standing committees), which is charged with administrative matters.
- Four **standing committees**, with a total of 22 members (no more than one member per country):
 - Committee on Foreign, Political and National Security Affairs,
 - Committee on Economic Affairs and Finance,
 - Committee on Legislative, Legal Affairs and Human Rights,
 - Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs, Women and Youth.
- The **General Secretariat**, which provides technical expertise. For the time being, the General Secretariat is staffed by a limited number of seconded employees from League members' national parliaments.

The legislative period of the AP is four years, with each legislative year beginning in October and finishing in June of the following year.

Members of the AP are not directly elected but are instead nominated by their national parliaments. Each national parliament nominates four members of the AP. Thus, the total number of Members of the AP is 88.

The mandate of AP members ends either with the dissolution of their national parliament or with their failure to win re-election at the national level.

Table 3:
National parliaments of the Member States of the League of Arab States

	Name of the chamber(s)	Number of Members	Elected / Appointed	Electoral System
Algeria	People's National Assembly	462	Elected	Universal suffrage
	Council of the Nation	144	Appointed by the President	N.A.
Bahrain	House of Representatives	40	Elected	Universal suffrage
	Shura Council	40	Appointed by the King	N.A.
Comoros	National Assembly	33	Elected	Universal suffrage

	Name of the chamber(s)	Number of Members	Elected / Appointed	Electoral System
Djibouti	National Assembly	65	Elected	Universal suffrage
Egypt	People's Assembly	454	444 Elected 10 Appointed by the President	Universal suffrage
	Shura Council	264	174 Elected 88 Appointed by the President	Universal suffrage
Iraq	Council of Representatives	325	Elected	Universal suffrage
Jordan	House of Representatives	150	Elected	Universal suffrage
	House of Senate	60	Appointed by the King	N.A.
Kuwait	National Assembly	50	Elected	Universal suffrage
Lebanon	National Assembly	128	Elected	Universal suffrage
Libya	General National Congress	200	Elected	Universal suffrage
Mauritania	National Assembly	95	Elected	Universal suffrage
	Senate	56		Elected by municipal councillors
Morocco	House of representatives	325	Elected	Universal suffrage
	House of Councillors	270		Elected by local councils , professional chambers and wage -earners
Oman	Shura Council	84	Elected	Universal suffrage
	State Council	83	Appointed by the Sultan	N.A.
Palestine	Palestinian Legislative Council	132	Elected	Universal suffrage
Qatar	Shura Council	35	Appointed by the Emir	N.A.
Saudi Arabia	Shura Council	150	Appointed by the King	N.A.
Somalia	The Lower House of the Federal Parliament	275	Elected	Elected by a technical selection committee
	The Upper House of the Federal Parliament	54	Formation Pending	

	Name of the chamber(s)	Number of Members	Elected / Appointed	Electoral System
Sudan	National Assembly	354		Universal suffrage
	Council of States	50	Elected	Elected by State Legislatures
Syria	People's Council of Syria	250	Elected	Universal suffrage
Tunisia	National Constituent Assembly	217	Elected	Universal suffrage
UAE	Federal National Council	40	20 Elected	7 Electoral Colleges appointed by the emirs
			20 Appointed	N.A.
Yemen	House of Representatives	301	Elected	Universal suffrage

Source: © European Parliament, DG Expo Policy Dep., 2013 PH/ap

Members are nominated by the national parliaments, but they represent the Arab Nation.

AP members are not considered representatives of their own national parliaments or governments; rather they represent the Arab nation as a whole, a provision intended to enable them to voice their opinions and participate in parliamentary discussions freely.

3. EU - League of Arab States relations

The first EU-Arab League Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting, which took place in Malta in 2008, was important symbolically, but yielded limited results.

The League of Arab States has long been criticised for its disunity, ineffectiveness and representation of autocratic regimes. Although a first (*ad hoc*) EU-Arab League Ministerial meeting (Foreign Affairs) was held in Malta in 2008, EU relations with the League remained limited both in scope and substance for a number of years.

However, since the Arab Spring, the Union's relations with the League have entered a new phase of constructive engagement and cooperation. Recent upheavals in the Arab world have highlighted regional challenges — political, security-related, economic and social. These issues call for regional solutions, in which prominent regional organisations such as the Arab League play a key role.

As indicated above, the League's change in leadership, under the new Secretary-General, Elaraby, instilled a progressive approach favouring change. In recent years, the Arab League has been particularly pro-active on the Libya and Syria files. The League's approval of the NATO intervention in Libya and its imposition of sanctions on the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria have helped build consensus among regional actors on the legitimacy of political actions to be taken by the international community within the framework of the United Nations.

The Arab Spring and the League's more prominent role in the region have

The EU's clear objective is to make the **'new' Arab League** the main channel for a strengthened Euro-Arab relationship. To this end, the EU

attracted the interest of the EU.

High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton has maintained close political contact with Secretary-General Elaraby, and the EU has actively supported the League's initiatives on Libya and Syria. Since 2011 a structured, regular political dialogue has developed at Senior Officials' level. Cooperation in the field of election observation has also been enhanced, with the EU offering training courses for observers from the League's Secretariat.

The year 2012 marked a turning point for enhancing relations between the EU and the Arab League.

The year 2012 marked a turning point for relations between the two partners. On the initiative of the Council's Cypriot Presidency (endorsed by High Representative Ashton), the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC) Ambassadors travelled to Cairo at the end of September 2012 to meet their Arab League counterparts and establish cooperation on ambassadorial level. Furthermore, a second, successful EU-Arab League Foreign Affairs ministerial meeting took place in Cairo in November 2012.

3.1. EU - Arab League second ministerial meeting (Cairo, 13.11.2012)

EU and Arab League Foreign Ministers chose to intensify the relationship and develop an extensive joint work programme.

The second, ministerial meeting, which was attended by more than 20 EU Foreign Ministers, was the first such meeting since the onset of the Arab Spring. The ministers then decided to meet regularly, with the next ordinary meeting scheduled to take place in the EU in 2014³. The **new, intensified relationship** is to be based on 'structured political dialogue based on regular meetings at all levels'⁴.

The Cairo ministerial meeting represented a milestone in Euro-Arab relations, since it sent a clear political signal, in the new context of changes in the Arab world, of a joint determination to work closely to meet the important regional challenges facing the common neighbourhood.

The ministers endorsed the **Cairo Declaration**, covering a variety of political subjects, and an EU-League Secretariat **joint work programme** which runs until the end of 2014. As a complement to other tools of EU cooperation in the region — mainly the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the EUROMED/ Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) — EU-Arab League cooperation will focus in the years to come on **diplomatic training, election observation, human rights, civil society, women's empowerment** and **energy efficiency**. The EU will build a network of contacts, promote common practices and improve its knowledge of relations among League members, which is indispensable for deepening the political dialogue. Cooperation also reinforces the technical capacity of the League's Secretariat to take constructive initiatives, particularly in crisis management, migration and mobility, and to express its values (human

³ Final paragraph (20) of the Cairo Declaration

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/133465.pdf

⁴ Cairo Declaration, paragraph 1.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/133465.pdf

rights, women's empowerment, inclusive growth) without simply imposing them — an important distinction, given the deeply-rooted perception in the Arab world that the Union often tries to prescribe its standards.

Challenges for the enhanced EU-Arab League relation

Despite the potential for enhanced cooperation created by the Cairo ministerial meeting, obstacles still exist. The League Secretariat remains weak, and the balance of power is shifting among Arab states. The current dominance of the Gulf States (particularly the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Qatar) will likely be challenged by Algeria and by Egypt, which had traditionally dominated the League. Any of these members could limit the Secretariat's autonomy, even under the dynamic leadership of Elaraby.

Generally, the EU's current challenge is how to fully exploit the mandate offered by the Cairo ministerial meeting and complement regular political dialogue with wide-ranging forms of cooperation. EU Member States support this approach, and important steps on technocratic level were taken in early 2013 during the 21-22 January high-level cooperation meeting between senior officials from the EU and the League in Cairo.

Concrete cooperation in the field of crisis management and early warning

Another highly symbolic development during the Cairo ministerial meeting was the joint inauguration by the EU High Representative Ashton and the Secretary General Elaraby of the **Arab League's new crisis room**, partly funded by the EU. Linked to the EU's own early warning system, the project aims to create capacity within the League Secretariat to issue effective early warnings on crises.

The EU has partly funded the new crisis room in the League Secretariat's Cairo premises.



Family photo from the Ministerial Meeting in Cairo on 13 November 2012

4. Parliamentary cooperation: the EP - the Arab Parliament

As the Arab Parliament is still in its infancy, inter-parliamentary relations

So far, there has been only limited inter-parliamentary cooperation between the European Parliament and the Arab Parliament.

The second EU-League ministerial meeting advocated closer inter-parliamentary cooperation.

The first steps were taken with high level meetings in Cairo in January 2013, and a study visit of a delegation of Arab Parliament's members (including a staffer) that took place in the European Parliament in Brussels between 22 and 25 April 2013.

between the EU and the League of Arab States have been quite limited in scope.

The 2005 creation of the Arab Parliament's predecessor, the Arab Transitional Parliament, led Arab Parliamentarians to examine what experiences from the European project might apply *mutatis mutandis* to their own project. A number of study visits and bilateral contacts took place between 2008 and 2011, though these led principally to pro-cooperation rhetoric from both sides. With no concrete follow-up, no actual progress resulted — a failure that stemmed in part from the lack of genuine interest on the part of democratic institutions (such as the European Parliament) in engaging in bilateral cooperation with the Arab League's parliamentary structure. Until recently, this structure was considered a forum that represented principally non-democratic regimes.

Following the Arab awakening and the political changes in the League Secretariat and in several countries in the Middle East / North Africa, the European Parliament indicated that it wished to strengthen bilateral cooperation with the Arab Parliament. The basis for such bilateral parliamentary cooperation is the Cairo Declaration of 13 November 2012, which provides an explicit mandate for cooperation between the two organisations, calling

on the European Parliament and the Arab Parliament to strengthen communication between them in order to realise the ambition of peoples of the two regions to establish the principles of freedom, justice and human rights, as well as to promote mutual respect and tolerance between people belonging to different cultural, religious and ethnic groups⁵.

Following the ministerial meeting, senior officials from both sides met in Cairo on 21-22 January 2013 to identify concrete follow-up actions for implementing the joint work-programme agreed the previous November. The EU delegation included high-level officials from the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Parliament who explored, among other things, the potential of parliamentary cooperation in a meeting with the Arab Parliament's Speaker and members. The meeting underscored both sides' clear interest in developing contacts and improving understanding on a series of issues of mutual concern. The EU delegation offered to organise a visit to Brussels for the Speaker of the Arab Parliament to meet the European Parliament's President⁶ and relevant committee members. The delegation also proposed arranging a multi-day, personalised study visit for Arab Parliament members and, possibly,

⁵ Paragraph 4 of the Cairo Declaration, 13 November 2012.

⁶ Scheduled for 29 May 2013

representatives of its general secretariat, during which the League's delegates would meet key counterparts in the European Parliament⁷.

The Arab Parliament has an observer status in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean, and its Speaker, Ahmed al-Jarwan, participated in the Union's first Summit of the Speakers of the Parliaments, held in Marseilles on 6-7 April 2013 under the chairmanship of European Parliament President Martin Schulz.

4.1. Policy options

The European Union has an interest in cooperating closely with the League of Arab States in a range of fields. The League's role in shaping the international community's response to the crises in Libya and Syria has contributed to its growing reputation as the most prominent regional organisations in the greater Middle East — an importance that was swiftly acknowledged by the EU. The new approach of the League's Secretariat has enhanced Euro-Arab relations, while the historic political changes in the southern Mediterranean region have added urgency to the effort.

The regional importance of the Arab League has grown since the Arab Awakening, and the momentum for enhancing European-Arab relations should not be clipped.

Moving forward, the momentum created by the second EU - Arab League Foreign Affairs Ministers' meeting should not be cut short. Cooperation and dialogue between the EU and Arab League on issues of mutual interest should be intensified and institutionalised as appropriate. Common projects on early warning, crisis response, diplomatic training and electoral observation training are advancing, while other priority areas for cooperation — including human rights, civil society, women's empowerment, energy cooperation, tourism, fisheries, migration, mobility, legal cooperation and culture — hold promise for the evolving partnership.

The **European Parliament** has an important role to play in strengthening the EU's efforts during this new era of friendship, solidarity and partnership with neighbouring Arab peoples. In close cooperation with both the Arab Parliament and national Arab parliaments, the European Parliament can express its support of democratic developments in the Arab world. The European Parliament's contacts with the national parliaments of the League's members and with civil society organisations are well established. Given the sea change taking place in European-Arab relations, precipitated by the democratic prospects opened during the Arab Spring, the European Parliament should also express its support to the multilateral parliamentary body of the Arab Parliament.

In order to increase its visibility and its role in the region, the European

⁷ The study visit took place from 22-25 April 2013 and the AP's delegation comprised of four Members of the AP and a staffer from its Secretariat was organised and coordinated by the EP's Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy. The delegation of the Arab Parliament was headed by Mr. Musallem Al Maashani (Oman), Head of the Foreign Affairs, Political and National Security Committee of the AP.

Parliament might consider engaging in **structural cooperation** with the Arab Parliament, instigating regular political dialogue on a range of issues — including sensitive ones — such as advancing the region's democratisation, socio-economic development, job creation, minority rights and women's empowerment.

The Arab Parliament's powers and competences cannot be compared with those of the European Parliament, as the Arab Parliament is a relatively new institution within the Arab League. Given the ongoing transition processes in southern Mediterranean countries, the Arab Parliament's role is likely to be strengthened in the years to come. The European Parliament should therefore be proactive and pursue closer links.

The European Parliament should also explore ways to use its new partnership as a means of expanding contacts with, and visibility within, national Arab Parliaments and to create links with civil society. The ongoing democratic reforms in Arab Spring countries must be carried out by strong and financially autonomous parliaments, endowed with adequate human resources and infrastructure. In this regard, the European Parliament can play a particularly constructive role, **enhancing its support of national Arab parliaments and offering valuable institutional expertise, including exchanges of best practices, partnerships and technical support. Study visits** by Members of the European Parliament, members of national Arab Parliaments and officials (including short- to medium-term fellowships) could be considered integral parts of a possible **joint Euro-Arab parliamentary work programme** for the years ahead.