Foreword

to 'Combining Economic and Political Development: The Experience of MENA'

Gilles Carbonnier
It is my pleasure to introduce this new thematic volume of *International Development Policy (IDP)*. The journal’s seventh annual issue focuses exclusively, and for the first time, on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), a region beset by armed conflict, social and economic turmoil and set against the backdrop of lower oil prices and political uncertainty.

The volume explores the economic implications of democratic transition efforts in the region since the start of the so-called Arab Spring in December 2010. It analyses the challenges facing governments in addressing the underlying economic problems that have led to widening national and regional inequality and contributed to the initial unrest, while questioning the complex relationships with Europe, the USA and the rest of the world. Importantly, the volume highlights the value of short-term policy measures that may offer the potential for quick and visible economic wins to help consolidate democratic processes and strengthen institutional governance at critical junctures.

The volume consists of eleven chapters including an introduction by the guest editor, prof. Giacomo Luciani. As he underscores, this collection of articles pursues specific objectives while complementing the existing literature on economic and political developments in the MENA region. While acknowledging policy priorities aimed at producing positive results in the long run, such as public sector reform and economic diversification, there is a sense of urgency when it comes to offering new opportunities to respond to the challenge of rising labour market demand, with a projected North African workforce expected to grow by more than 80 million between 2010 and 2050.¹ The authors further insist on the imperative of seeking out and implementing innovative policies ‘that will allow for rapid improvement in the living conditions of a majority of people and sustain consensus around the consolidation of democracy.’ These include measures such as the abolition of fuel subsidies combined with a targeted

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system of unconditional cash transfers, and policies that favour currency devaluation and reform of the banking sector to support small-scale enterprises.

I commend Giacomo Luciani for pulling together a timely and thought-provoking volume that brings together authors displaying a wide breadth of expertise not only with regard to the highly complex challenges and problems facing the region, but also with regard to potential economic policy measures in support of inclusive development and democratisation. The volume thus contributes to filling gaps in our understanding of how economic and political development processes may support democratic transition in spite of adverse political-economy dynamics. It also illustrates the broader intent that lies at the heart of our journal which seeks to serve as a bridge between academic research and policy making.

I extend special thanks to the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) and the Kuwait Program at Sciences Po, as the sponsors of the conference that provided financial support and material for this publication. I also underline my appreciation to Ghassan Salamé, the founding Dean of the Paris School of International Affairs at Sciences Po (PSIA), as well as to two anonymous peer reviewers for their insightful remarks and suggestions.

While I hope this collection will have particular appeal to new readers in the MENA region, I am confident that the volume will raise interest among our regular readership of scholars and practitioners elsewhere thanks to the relevance and diversity of contributions on a region whose future bears central importance to us all.

NOTES


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