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A role for Higher Education

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The Deauville Partnership has not kept its promises. Indeed, launched with great fanfare in May 2011, it soon lost its appeal. One has the impression that it was more attached to the person of the former French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, as was the case for the Union for the Mediterranean.

Even if civil society was one of the „spearheads“ or propellants dynamic change which impacted several Arab countries, it has not been involved in the Deauville Partnership which was content to appeal to government institutions.

Each of the countries of the Arab region has experienced its way of socio-political transformations. Morocco and Jordan, for example, have known almost similar evolutionary processes, while Tunisia and Egypt have suffered violent changes.

But a common feature unites all these countries. Indeed, their economic and social situation has deteriorated following the „Arab Spring“. The effects are nonetheless mixed. In Morocco, the situation is certainly less dramatic than in Egypt or Tunisia. But civil society needs legal and institutional tools and financial resources to play a more effective role in the promotion of equity and social justice values.

Internationally, NGOs have not yet been considered subjects of international law. Internally, they are still considered as a partner who has not yet reached maturity.

Therefore, it seems important to define a new status for NGOs enabling them to play a leading role in defining priorities in social, economic and cultural fields. The partner institutions of the Deauville Partnership should also work towards creating a special fund dedicated to support initiatives from NGOs and to lay the principles of good governance and social justice.

Finally, higher education should not stay out of this process. It is also expected to play a role in promoting sustainable development and social justice values. The networking of universities in the partner countries around the above-mentioned principles is likely to ensure better dissemination of good practices and help governments and donor institutions to better achieve the desired objectives.

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