

UNREST IN EGYPT

Egypt: It's now up to the Generals



Protests continue in Cairo | EPA/KHALED EL ELQI

By Andy Carling

As protests continue in Egypt, New Europe spoke with Hugh Miles, a Middle East specialist who lives in London and Cairo.

It seems to be a secular uprising, without the involvement of the Muslim Brotherhood, is that correct?

This is a popular uprising, across broad sections of the population, due to terrible social and social conditions and it looks like the people have finally had enough.

The demonstrators have come from almost all sectors, mainly from the lower and the middle class, obviously the privileged elite are all preoccupied with getting out of the country, but there's no evidence that the Muslim Brotherhood have had a leading role in this. Certainly they are agitating, like other groups, such as the communists, secularists and the opposition parties. I'm sure they've put their bit in, but this is not an Islamic revolution.

It looks like the areas where they are considered to be strongest have been quieter, have they been caught out by events?

I think partly, this might be the media. There is a shortage of international media in Egypt and a lot of people were slow off



Hugh Miles

the mark. Correspondents are still arriving. A lot of people didn't have journalists there and all the journalists are in Cairo. I don't think we have a clear picture of what is happening all around the country. The fact is that where the Islamists are strong, those areas are under a very tight security, so it might be more difficult for them to demonstrate there. Don't forget, the government has had the Muslim Brotherhood pinned down very tightly for a long time.

How is the government going to tackle this? Mubarak has been practically invisible, why is that?

I think it's probably because he doesn't know what to do. Probably because he is hoping that the protests will die down. I should think he's busy making the final preparations for the worst case scenario, a la Ben Ali.

The Egyptian government has run out of carrots and sticks to control the people. There's not a great deal he can do at this stage, his back is against

the wall. I think he will appear and I expect that he will try to make some concessions. He might offer a cabinet reshuffle, an extra day's national holiday. These are the kind of things that he could offer. Firing the Interior Minister, promising to reform the police, prosecuting abusive officers.

He can talk, but the question is, 'are people going to buy this?' By the look of it, they're not.

Will the police buy this? They do seem to be quite reluctant to take the demonstrators on as they have done in the past

The police are in a delicate situation and their morale is not high, and the Americans, who are very influential in Egypt, have spoken up for freedom of expression and demonstration in Egypt and this is giving tacit support for the demonstrators and this means that the authorities are reluctant to start shooting people. They're trying to diffuse this peacefully and they know the eyes of the world, particularly America, are on them.

I think that what happens next depends on what the army and the Generals decide to do. We don't know what's happening there, but if they decide that enough is enough, they could, just like in Tunisia, make the difference and force Mubarak to leave. There's no sign of that yet. Muba-

rak's supporters are deeply entrenched in the army and he is a former army officer. There's no sign of that happening, but the army hold the most powerful cards.

Mubarak got into power after Sadat's bodyguard turned on their leader, how safe is Mubarak?

He's pretty safe from assassination. It's not a coup d'état, it's a revolution. Assassination in Egypt doesn't always bring about revolutionary change, but this is different. This is a public and popular expression for change. There are huge numbers of jobless, which means you don't need a large percentage of them turning out on the streets to wash away the security.

We've seen the return of Baridi, is this significant?

He's just a bit player so far. He's been conspicuously absent, which doesn't help, but he's been in the media, trying to capitalise on it and he could, potentially be a player in the future. This is about the people and about the military and Mubarak himself. The rest are just subsidiary players.

Hugh Miles is an author, a presenter, producer and consultant specialising in the Middle East. Among his books is, 'Al Jazeera: How Arab TV News Challenged the World'. www.hughmiles.com

EU research and innovation funding



Máire Geoghegan-Quinn

Last week the European Commission has adopted measures to make participation in the EU's current Seventh Framework Program for Research more attractive and more accessible to the best researchers and most innovative companies, especially Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs). Based on the simplification plan unveiled by the Commission in April 2010, these measures will take effect at once. According to a Commission announcement, Research, Innovation and Science Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn said: "Today's measures will allow the many thousands of excellent people we fund to save time and effort on paperwork and concentrate on what they do best - working to boost growth and jobs and improve our quality of life in Europe through world class research and innovation. We want to attract even more and better applicants, including dynamic small businesses which can't cope with reams of red tape. This is only the start: the Commission has already proposed big changes to the overall financial rules governing all EU funding programmes, and if the Parliament and Council agree with those, we will put forward more radical simplification measures for the successor programme to FP7."

Three concrete measures

The Commission adopted three concrete measures with immediate effect on the management of EU research grants in the current EU research programme (FP7). Each of these steps responds to concerns repeatedly expressed by participants and would-be participants in FP7:

- Allowing more flexibility in how personnel costs are calculated so that EU research grant-holders can apply their usual accounting methods when requesting reimbursement for average personnel costs. They will no longer need to set up entire parallel accounting systems just for this purpose;
- SME owners whose salaries are not formally registered in their accounts can now be reimbursed, through flat-rate payments, for their contribution to work on research projects.
- A new steering group of senior officials from all the Commission departments and agencies involved will remove inconsistencies in the application of the rules on research funding.

Next steps

The Commission considers simplification as one of the basic design principles for the next EU research and innovation programme, and it will continue to push for substantive improvement. The Commission will present its legislative proposals for the next EU research and innovation programme by the end of this year, following an open consultation to be launched in the early spring.

Background

The current EU research programme, FP7, has attracted more than 40,000 proposals from the research community since 2007, and almost 8,000 projects have so far been funded. Nearly all European universities participate, and about 15% of the participants are SMEs.

Several concrete steps have already been taken towards simplifying procedures both before and after the launch of FP7.

In April 2010, the Commission adopted a Communication presenting further simplification options which apply to the existing legal framework and, in the longer term, to a possible revision of the EU Financial Regulations (see IP/10/472 and MEMO/10/156). This Communication triggered a broad debate among the EU institutions and with many other research and innovation stakeholders. In this context it is also recalled that the Commission's proposal on the revised EU financial regulation offers simplification still to be applied to FP7, such as the abolition of the interest bearing accounts, and proposes measures which will set the basis for a more radical simplification of the next framework programme. It is now under the responsibility of the Council and the European Parliament to adopt these measures.

The measures adopted in the present Commission Decision are based on a broad consensus in this debate, and are also in line with the recommendations of the Expert Group carrying out the carrying out the Interim Evaluation of FP7.