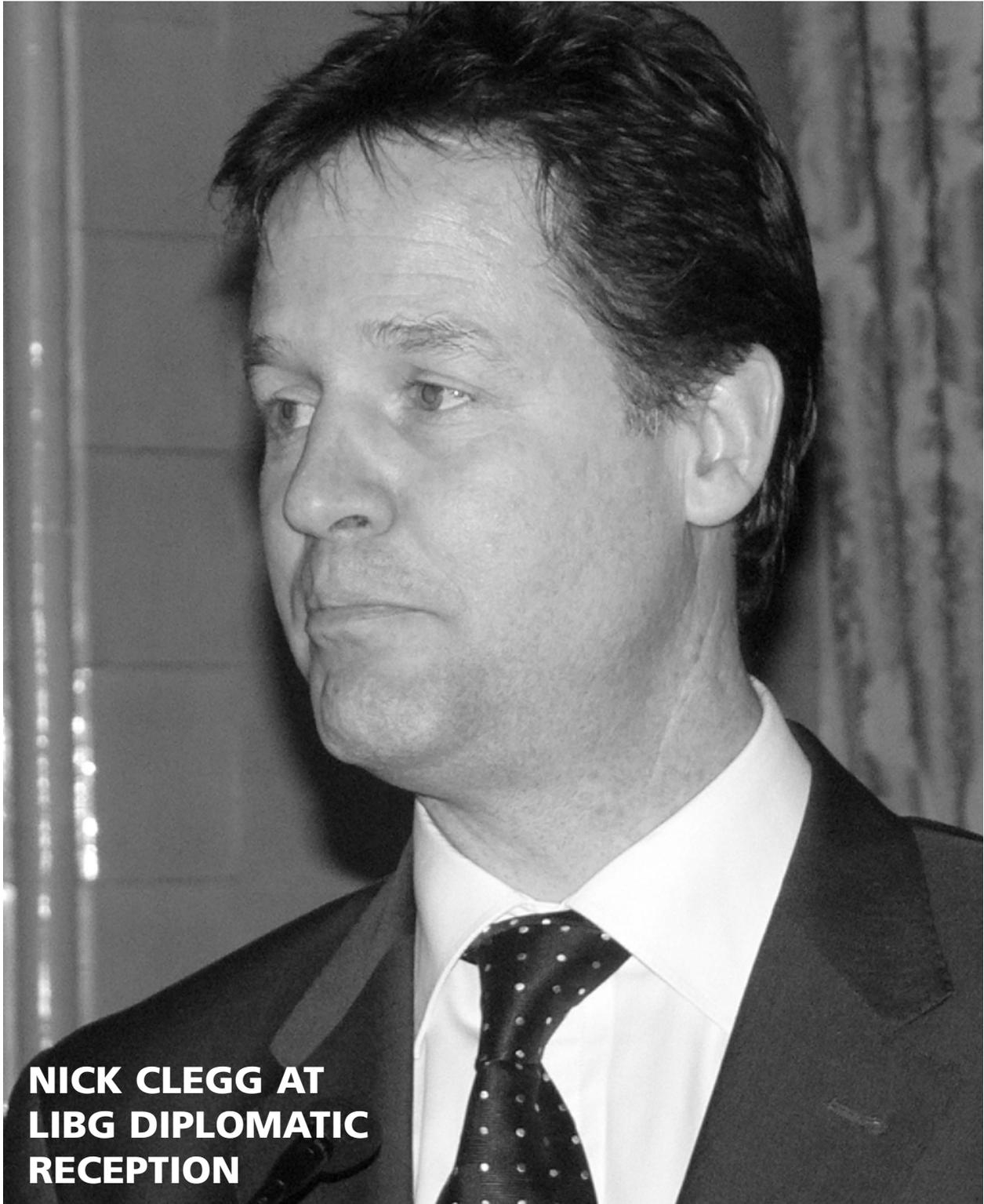




2011 no.1 £3.00 (free to members)

# INTERLIB

Journal of the Liberal International British Group



**NICK CLEGG AT  
LIBG DIPLOMATIC  
RECEPTION**

## EVENTS

4th April	LIBG Forum – North Africa (John Alderdice, Sonia Bessamra (Tunisia)) – 6.30pm NLC
18th April	Deadline for nominations, resolutions & applications to 57th LI Congress, Manila.
May	LIBG Forum - Ambitions for the Polish EU Presidency (July – December 2011) – 7.00pm NLC, date to be confirmed
5th May	Referendum on Alternative Vote, Scottish & Welsh Assemblies & local elections
23rd May	Deadline for amendments to resolutions, 57th LI Congress.
16th -19th June	57th LI Congress, Manila
23rd June	Tim Garden Memorial Lecture – Peter Hennessey. 6.00 – 8.00pm Chatham House.
17th – 21st September	Liberal Democrats Autumn Conference, Brighton
October	Liberal Party Assembly, Wolverhampton

For bookings & other information please contact the Treasurer below.

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InterLiB is published by the Liberal International (British Group). Views expressed therein are those of the authors and are not necessarily the views of LI(BG), LI or any of its constituent parties.

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# A tumultuous year – and we're only a quarter of the way through

The first three months of 2011 have seen an incredible number of international events, natural and man-made, some offering hope others offering only cause for concern and the need for international assistance. The tragic events in Japan highlight the huge impact of natural disasters even on the most developed countries with fantastic infrastructures. Compounded by the problems with Fukushima nuclear reactors, the situation is indeed grave and our thoughts are with the families of those killed or missing. Events in North Africa offer scope for rather more optimism – the departure of autocratic, repressive regimes is to be welcomed, if they are replaced by more democratic ones that respect the human rights of their citizens. At present, it is far from clear how the dramatic events in Tunisia and Egypt will turn out, while the situation in Libya, with a no-fly zone agreed by the UN Security Council and being enforced by Western

forces including British planes flying from Norfolk seems grave. At short notice LIBG has been able to put together a Forum on Transitions in the region and we will give a full report of that meeting on the website and in the next issue of InterLIB.

We were delighted that Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg was able to join us for the Annual Diplomats reception, hosted by LIBG President Simon Hughes. Nick and Simon each spoke briefly about the importance of international affairs to the Liberal Democrats, as did Armed Forces Minister Nick Harvey. Particular reference was made to Ivory Coast, which is also the topic of an article by Wendy Kyrle-Pope on page 4 of this edition of InterLIB. While parliamentary attendance was lower than we had hoped owing to the AV referendum vote in the Commons that evening Foreign Office Minister Jeremy Browne was also able to be with us, so our many diplomatic guests did have the opportunity to meet some of our

most senior MPs, including those of direct relevance. Our very warmest thanks are due to Wendy for organising the Reception so efficiently, and to the team at the National Liberal Club for their help.

Availability of speakers and other unforeseen events outwith the control of the Executive have conspired to ensure that several of our forthcoming events – notably Forums on Poland and China and the annual garden party – have not been confirmed at the time of going to press. We will put full details on the website as soon as possible. For those of you without internet access, we send a supplementary note of events along with the calling notice for the AGM.

*With best wishes,  
Julie*



Simon Hughes, Julie Smith, Robert Woodthorpe Browne & Nick Clegg.



Wendy Kyrle-Pope & First Secretary Otsuka, Japan



Shirley Williams & Paul Keetch

Nigel, Lord Jones of Cheltenham; M. Issiaka Konate (Président, Ong Univerchild, Côte d'Ivoire); Noel Kanon (Chef du Protocole, Côte d'Ivoire), Ms Phindile W Xaba (First Secretary: Political, South Africa).



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# The High Price of Chocolate

## Why the Ivory Coast is in turmoil today

Wendy Kyrle-Pope

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**E**vents in North Africa in the past month have wiped out all mention in the media of the problems facing the Ivory Coast, the Côte d'Ivoire. At the time of writing this article, Alassane Ouattara, the democratically elected President of Côte d'Ivoire (and leader of the RDR party, a member of Liberal International), sits imprisoned in a hotel guarded by UN troops, despite winning the election held in November 2010. The former President, Laurent Gbagbo refuses to leave office. Its Embassy in London has only just begun to function under a Charge d'Affaires, after the departure of Gbagbo's Ambassador who was asked to quit by the Foreign Office. The country is descending into chaos and violence as those loyal to Ouattara and those to Gbagbo fight it out in gang-like battles. Protests for democracy continue despite the carnage, despite the fact that 7 brave women who were gunned down during a peaceful demonstration in early March. Like other leaders before him, who have stayed too long, Gbagbo clings on to power without legitimacy, despite enormous international pressure to quit. Fears of another civil war are destroying one of the richest countries in West Africa. The international banks, have closed down their operations and the banking sector all but paralysed Gbagbo's signature on state accounts at the regional central bank that prints the country's money is invalid) and continuing sanctions cause incredible suffering to the ordinary people. The urging of the UN's Secretary General to make a peaceful and honourable exit, the West African bloc ECOWAS calling for the use of force to evict him, and the misery of his countrymen made no impression. President Ouattara has offered to form a government that will take into account other parties and civil society and do his utmost to take the best people in the Ivory Coast to run a disastrous situation, and arrange this honourable exit for Gbagbo.

The lack of a banking system should make it impossible for Gbagbo to pay army and public sector wages this month. He wants to nationalise the foreign banks which have closed shop, and the Cocoa industry but, as the French Foreign Ministry said, condemning the planned nationalisations, they were illegal as they came 'from authorities that have no legitimacy to make decisions in the name of the Ivorian state.' This may hold the key to Gbagbo's removal; an army does not fight on an empty stomach, nor support a leader who cannot fill it. But he still pursues a form of scorched earth policy in his own country - if it is not his, then it is ruined for anyone else.

Côte d'Ivoire produces 40% the world's cocoa. Ouattara has called for a month's ban on exports to starve Gbagbo out. The current world surplus of cocoa, plus the fact that the crop has already been shipped out or pre-approved for export, means that the ban may have a limited impact on the world cocoa prices at the moment. But if the situation continues, and cocoa beans cannot get out of the country, it will have an effect which will be felt around the chocolate eating world, because, apart from a few Africa watchers and those in high diplomatic circles, Côte d'Ivoire's sad story is little

known. For most people, Côte d'Ivoire means chocolate, Abidjan's refineries and some of the Africa's greatest footballers (think Didier Drogba of Chelsea). To understand why the country has reached this extraordinary impasse, it is important to understand its history.

Côte d'Ivoire was one of Africa's success stories in the post-colonial world. It has served for centuries as a conduit for trade for its



Maman Toure (Charge d'Affaire A.I. Côte d'Ivoire ) Wendy Kyrle-Pope & Maître Bamba Affoussy (Adviser in Law, Office of the Prime Minister, Côte d'Ivoire )

landlocked neighbours. Its French colonial rulers left a department based national structure and a unifying language for the 62 main tribes (each with its own language or dialect). Rich in agriculture (it is one of the world's main cocoa producers), oil, fish, timber, palm oil and livestock, with a highly developed infrastructure of roads, its economy grew from independence in 1960 by 82% GDP per capita during the 60s, to its peak of 360% in the 1970s. This economic growth was not sustainable and fell by 28% in the 80s and a further 22% in the 90s, and is still mainly dependent on agriculture. The population also grew exponentially, from around 3 million to today's 20 million. This prosperity attracted workers from other West African countries (Liberia, Mali, Burkino Faso, Nigeria, Guinea), who now make up 20% of the population.

33% of the population is Christian (living mainly in the south), 39% Islamic (and live mainly in the north), 12% follow indigenous religions and 16% have no affiliations. Until fairly recently, all groups coexisted peacefully, but the combination of the country's economic success with the resultant immigration and political rivalry and manipulation have created the tensions which led to the impasse we see today.

Côte d'Ivoire gained independence from France in 1960. Felix Houphouët-Boigny became its first president and ruled absolutely until 1990, when the country's first multi-party election was held.

Houphouët-Boigny won, beating Laurent Gbagbo. The president died in December 1993, and was succeeded by Henri Konan Bedie who was the President of the Parliament. However, his death was announced on television by the then Prime Minister, Alassane Ouattara, who promised to uphold the constitution and did not name Bedie. He was not forgiven. Ouattara was a US educated economist and has worked mainly overseas (with the West African Central Bank and the IMF) who had been brought in by Houphouët-Boigny to help stabilise the country's economy. He was a Muslim from the North, whose father had been born in what is now Burkina Faso, then part of French West Africa.

In 1995, Bedie, having been elected president in an election devoid of any other political parties (who had boycotted it in protest at the restrictions that had been imposed on their candidates) began the process of *îlvoriteî* (Ivority), which called into question anyone not of pure Ivorian stock, preventing them from voting in elections or standing as candidates. Whether it was because of the rivalry between him and Ouattara or in response to the growing feeling of resentment of the influx of foreign workers (from Mali, Burkino Faso and other poorer countries) who are mostly Muslims, like northern Ivorians, a form of ethnic bullying started to take place. Police would check the papers and ID cards of those entering and leaving mosques, often confiscating them. A wedge was being hammered between Ivorians.

He was overthrown in December 1999 by General Robert Guei, a former army commander sacked by BÈdiÈ. An economic downturn followed, and the military promised to return the country to



Nick Clegg, Maman Toure & Maitre Bamba Affoussy

democratic rule. An election of a sort was held in October 2000 and Laurent Gbagbo became president. However, as many candidates were barred from standing and the votes were not properly counted, Guei refused to accept his defeat, but was forced to flee after a popular uprising attacked his vote-rigging. Ouattara has not been allowed to stand because, in the words of a supreme court judge, he was *îof doubtful citizenshipî*, and he called for fresh elections. Fighting now broke out between their supporters. In the parliamentary elections held that December, the Party Democratique de Côte d'Ivoire won most seat, but some of their MPs were persuaded, once in power, to support Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front party, to give them the majority. After various attempts at conciliation, and an excellent showing in the 2002 local elections, Ouattara's Rally of Republican party (RDR) was granted 4 ministerial posts in

Gbagbo's government.

Throughout this period, there had been many reports of massacres of protesters and Northerners in the south of the country, even members of the army who came from the North were killed. This increasing violence, combined with the increasing economic downturn led, firstly, to a mutiny by soldiers in Abidjan, and then a rebellion, with the Ivory Coast Patriotic Movement ceasing control of the north of the country, and other rebel groups taking the west. The country was now divided between the president Gbagbo and the main rebel leader, Guillaume Soro. Several attempts were made to bring peace to the country, but promises made by Gbagbo were not kept.

A reconciliation process started in 2003, with French and West African troops stationed in Côte d'Ivoire to maintain peace and help implement the peace accord, but the disarmament due to take place in October 2003 failed. Tensions between Côte d'Ivoire and France increased on November 6, 2004, after Ivorian air strikes killed 9 French peacekeepers and an aid worker. In response, French forces attacked the airport at Yamoussoukro, destroying all airplanes in the Ivorian Air Force. Violent protests erupted in both Abidjan and Yamoussoukro, and were marked by violence between Ivorians and French peacekeepers. Thousands of foreigners, especially French nationals, evacuated the two cities. The disarmament which was supposed to take place on October 15, 2004, failed and the country was divided between the rebel leader Soro and President Gbagbo; the result, a state of quasi-civil war.

The country was descending into misery, especially since the overall quality of life has dropped since the Houphouët-Boigny era; the civil unrest, the personal struggles for power and the rising debt all added to the instability. And so it continued, election after election cancelled until the vital Presidential one in November 2010, which Ouattara won, much good that it has done him.

However tragic the situation in the Côte d'Ivoire, there is hope, there must be hope. A wind of change is blowing through all Africa, a democratic wind, a hunger for democracy and freedom and the end of dictatorship and corruption. What has held many African countries back for so long are the authoritarian rulers who, by patronage and corruption, stay too long. Guinea suffered 50 years of dictatorship, coups and massacres, held its first democratic elections a few weeks ago. Liberia's Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf won the second round of presidential elections, and became Africa's first woman head of state in 2006. And, just as important, the world is waking up to the realisation that Africa and its peoples are a valuable commodity as importers and consumers, not just producers. (There are more mobile phone subscribers in Africa than in the US and Canada combined.) Trade not Aid is the future for Africa. The Chinese have realised this, and over a million live and work on the continent, starting businesses, farming and trading. (Mind you, that is how the East India Company started in India two hundred years ago, and look what happened there).

The Observer claims that by 2050, 11 of Africa's largest countries will have a larger GDP than Russia or China. Its economies will grow at an astounding 7% over the next two decades, far faster than China's. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf says there are no poor nations, only badly managed ones. Let us hope she is right, that democracy can remove patronage and dictatorship and stimulate economies, and the Côte d'Ivoire regains its rightful place as one of Africa's success stories.

*Wendy Kyrle-Pope is Vice-Chair of Liberal International (British Group)*

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# Nick Clegg: Transforming Europe's partnership with North Africa

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It is clear, as I stand here today, that we are witnessing potentially the biggest geopolitical events of the last decade. It is a moment of huge significance for the people of North Africa and the people of Europe. Just a few hundreds miles to the south, in Tunisia, Egypt and now Libya, people are seeking greater rights, fairer distribution of wealth and demanding more open political systems.

I intend to talk today about Europe's response. That has been the focus of my meetings today with Council President Van Rompuy, Commission President Barroso and Commissioners Ashton and Fule. I would like to very warmly welcome President Barroso's call this morning for a "pact for democracy and shared prosperity". I especially welcome his insistence that we must have greater conditionality in our approach and much greater political and economic openness towards North Africa.

Like other European Governments, our immediate focus is on helping the remaining British nationals in Libya leave. And doing whatever we can to ensure that the Libyan people are free from Colonel Qadhafi's malign rule as soon as possible. We have seen today that Qadhafi is still waging war on his own people. His continued brutality has now created a full-blown humanitarian crisis. The UK is playing its part by flying in shelter, blankets and water, delivering aid today by ship to Benghazi and air-lifting six thousand refugees home from the Tunisian border. I also welcome the increase in EU humanitarian aid announced earlier today by President Barroso.

This is a region vital to UK and EU interests. If people in the UK ask why, I would point at the efforts in recent weeks to rescue British nationals caught up in the turbulent events, at the level of human migration from North Africa to Europe, at the level of trade and investment between Europe and North Africa, and its importance to us in terms of energy, the environment and counter-terrorism. North Africa is just 14 miles from Europe at its closest point, what happens to our near neighbours affects us deeply.

In the past, Europe has sought to build a partnership with North Africa, but failings on both sides have held us back. Now that we have witnessed the immense courage of unarmed protestors raising their voices in Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia, in Egypt's Tahrir Square and the streets of Benghazi and Tripoli, we Europeans need to respond quickly and boldly to their bravery. They have created an unexpected and game-changing turn of events in Europe's neighbourhood: we must provide a game-changing response too. Our response must be guided by the nature of the changes that we are witnessing.

Although Tunisia, Egypt and Libya are very different countries, the root causes of these uprisings and demands for change elsewhere in the region are similar: First, a lack of economic opportunity. The region as a whole underperforms economically. The benefits of globalisation are passing these people by. Economic growth per head was just 6.4% between 1980 and 2004 – that's less than 0.5% annually. Second, the presence of youthful populations without a voice or a job: 60% of the population is under 25 and youth unemployment is high. Third, an increasing sense of frustration at the closed and unjust nature of these societies. No North African country is assessed as "Free" by Freedom House's most recent survey. Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya are all judged as "Not Free". Fourth, they have been effective precisely because the protests came from directions the regimes least expected – from people whom the regimes assumed had resigned themselves to the status quo. Fifth, high food prices, the spark that lit the bonfire.

For some of us, there is a strong historical parallel here. A similar movement of change swept across central and eastern Europe in the 1990s. The European Community responded to that opportunity in magnificent fashion. By offering a path to re-joining the European family, the European community ensured the entrenchment of liberal democracy across a swathe of our continent.

When it comes to North Africa, there is no certainty about the outcome. Transitions take decades and they don't always turn out for the best. Our own example, in Europe, tells us that from the rubble of war we can

create a Union of prosperity, democracy and the rule of law. But this is not always guaranteed. Change can be for the worse, as well as the better. The hunger of those living on the other side of the Mediterranean for freedom and opportunity is clear. Our European model can help inspire them. And that is precisely why Europe must play its part.

It is unquestionably in the EU's interests to uphold its liberal values – the right to peaceful protest, freedom of speech and of assembly, and the rule of law. These values are sometimes referred to as 'Western values' – but only by people who do not know their history. While much of Europe had still to emerge from the Dark Ages, the Baghdad of Haroun al-Rashid saw a flowering of free religious debate and openness to learning from non-Muslim sources. The truth is that these liberal ideals of equality, law and self-determination cannot be claimed by any nation, or hemisphere. They are



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global values with global force.

The strategic context for Europe also compels us to be bold in our thinking. For example a free, prosperous and stable North Africa can help in reassuring Israel that it can live in peace with neighbouring open societies and give Palestinians their rights.

For those of us concerned by Iran's activities in the region, a free North Africa will help isolate rather than entrench Iran's influence.

Recent events highlight the importance of other neighbours too, especially Turkey. As a Muslim majority country, a NATO member and a country firmly committed to the path to EU membership, and a state with a vibrant multi-party democracy, it provides a valuable example for other societies. Turkey's warm relations in the region offer benefits in terms of achieving the openness and respect for human rights that we all support. Another tangible recent example of the help Turkey can offer is their readiness to represent the UK's interests in Libya when our Embassy was forced to suspend its operations, and I wish to warmly thank Turkey for that assistance. Turkey has not just been helping us. In total Turkey has evacuated over 3300 foreigners from at least fifty-two different countries, many of them European. They are now sending significant aid to relieve the growing humanitarian crisis.

What, then, is Europe's recent record in building a partnership with North Africa?

Mixed at best. We do have policies such as the European Neighbourhood Policy aimed at countries which, unlike Turkey, do not have a cast iron case for EU membership. But our hopes for our southern neighbourhood policy and our approach towards North Africa as a whole have not been fulfilled. Why? Not because of policies, processes or money, but because of a lack of will, we have allowed autocratic regimes to get away with only making a pretence of reforming. We have imposed minimal conditionality and then failed to insist even on those low standards.

We have failed because we did not express our belief in the values of open societies.

We have supported the important goals of economic opening and reform. But the EU has done nothing like enough to use its weight to support open, plural societies more broadly.

We have also got our starting point wrong: Rather than building a genuine partnership with North Africa, we have focused narrowly on certain areas of cooperation without engaging meaningfully on political reform. This has given the impression that we seek to keep North Africa stable but distant. The events of the past few weeks have demonstrated the short-sightedness of this approach.

Of course, the lack of will was reciprocated on the other side. We were working predominantly with governments that paid lip service at best to our values and ideals.

But those governments have been swept away. We now have a chance to work with partners who want our help, share our values and want a genuine partnership. As we radically re-shape our approach to North Africa, the EU has to develop a strong, enticing offer that lies between warm words and blank cheques at one extreme and full EU membership at the other. The UK will argue unashamedly for a full and engaging offer to be made.

This is not about imposing Western democratic models and prescribing outcomes, but about supporting those in the region who want a more open society. We know that reform must be a home-grown process and leadership must come from within countries. Yet the international community, especially the EU, can act as a powerful support and inspiration to those countries who want open, plural societies. As Prime Minister David Cameron has said, you cannot

impose democracy from 30,000 feet.

But you can support democracy from across borders.

Being adherents of the international rule of law does not mean being neutral about the kind of world we want to see and the kind of nations we want to deal with: open, free, democratic societies. We should never hold back from advocating our belief that freedom and the rule of law are the best guarantees of human progress and economic success. If we agree on the need for a full and engaging offer, what sorts of actions should we take?

In the UK we see three main areas for action: First, values. EU policy should be guided by clear principles linking values – the values shown in Tahrir Square – to engagement: but this must come with conditionality. We must never again accept paper thin commitments that are not pressed home. But let me be clear that this is a conditionality based on the values the protestors in Tahrir Square and elsewhere have demonstrated their passion for: values they cherish and we want to support. The EU should provide a more ambitious offer to those governments which work towards the values their people are insisting on, linked with tougher conditionality for those that ignore them. So we must raise our ambitions for the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Second, a broad and inclusive economic offer that draws on the EU's position as a global economic superpower and supports a process of economic opening to complement and reinforce greater political openness. There are many models of greater economic integration with countries that neighbour the EU – from Turkey and the Balkan states on a membership path to the east and to our northern EEA partners.

We should be looking at these models for inspiration when it comes to North Africa.

Successive UK Governments have been consistent advocates of dual economic and political liberalisations. That may have many dimensions – and it is not for me at this stage to specify them. However the UK is calling on the Commission and other Member States to look at bold alternatives to provide the people of North Africa with greater economic opportunity and prosperity. We as Europeans also need to review urgently the institutions and instruments available to us or potentially available to us for working with the region, including the EIB, Union for the Mediterranean and ENPI funds.

All of need to reconsider how best they can support North Africa. There are a number of proposals to do this. We should act fast and not allow this to become the subject of familiar political wrangling. We need real progress at the Special European Council on the eleventh of March. Europe, together with other shareholders, should consider how best the EBRD's expertise in transition and private sector development could be shared to the south. Let me be very clear here on one specific point. Citizens of these North African countries – and migrants making their way through them – are not going to stay put in North Africa if there are few economic opportunities there: they are going to make their way to Europe through one means or another. Our task is to help North Africa offer prosperity to its own people, not act as a stepping off point to Europe. The region overall does not lack capital – this is in many respects a resource-rich region. What we need is a radical change in the way we provide assistance to make it more effective and to help unlock the potential that already exists.

Third, the EU must also do more to cultivate the civil, political and democratic institutions that underpin successful open societies. The EU has an enormous amount to offer in terms of know-how

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and institution-building, not least because of its earlier experiences with central and Eastern Europe. The UK will seek to lead by example.

On top of the short term humanitarian relief that we are providing for the Libyan people and those who have fled to Tunisia and Egypt, we have already pledged an initial £5 million of UK funding to support reform projects across the region. Including in Tunisia and Egypt, to help support access to justice, freedom of expression, democratic institutions and civil society. But this is just a start. We will transform the role and capacity of organizations such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which can help to broaden political participation. And as a Government we will make further resources available to further this work. I have today written to all the leaders of the UK's main political parties urging them to encourage their parliamentarians to support this initiative. While I believe Europe must be the centrepiece of our response to North Africa, it must not act alone.

The G8 and G20 will want to play a role too. The UK Government, through its Department for International Development, is also already working closely with organizations like the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Islamic Development Bank.

Of course the process of deepening political and economic freedom cannot be delivered by Governments alone. That is why I am delighted that the Open Society Foundations, under the leadership of George Soros, are supporting major new initiatives with emerging civil society in the region. They are working with experts from previous transitions; supporting transitional justice and legal empowerment of the poor; bringing together Arab constitutional experts and lawyers; and strengthening journalists in newly open democracies to be critical 'watchdogs' in the transition.

These are exactly the sort of 'people to people' initiatives that the region needs.

The EU has always been at its best when responding to changes in the world around it. That is at the heart of its creation. So it was

in tackling German reunification. So it was in responding to the re-emergence of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

So it must be again in response to events in the North Africa. The EU cannot take for granted its effectiveness and legitimacy. It operates in a world in which power is shifting fast, in which there is greater uncertainty and unpredictability. This is a pivotal moment in shaping the EU's long term purpose and role in the world. And this is a precious moment of opportunity for the region. Precious because it is the people, especially young people, who are speaking up, and they are doing so for the most part peacefully and with dignity. They are showing that there is more to politics in the region than the choice between repression and extremism.

It is precious, but potentially fragile too. There is no certainty about the outcome. This is why Europe must play its part. Everyday on our television screens, we are witnessing the courage of ordinary people taking to the streets to demand greater freedom. The countries of the European Union need to match their bravery and get behind this movement for change. They are creating a new world. We need a new response.

So: we need genuine partnership of values with conditionality, a bold new European economic offer and a step-change in our fostering of political pluralism and open societies. What happens in North Africa impacts on every community in Europe.

This is happening in our back yard. The EU, individual member states, businesses, and civil society – all of us need to step up to the plate. 2011 is certain to be a defining moment for North Africa and the region as a whole. But it is a defining moment for Europe, too. I hope together we can rise to the challenge.

*Liberal Democrat leader and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg gave this speech in Brussels on Wednesday 2nd March, entitled Building Open Societies: Transforming Europe's Partnership with North Africa. In the speech, he explained why the EU cannot afford to adopt a neutral stance towards events in North Africa and why it is in the EU's self-interest to radically rethink its approach to the region.*

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# THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS

Robert Woodthorpe Browne

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**W**ith news bulletins filled daily with the latest events in the Arab World, it is pointless to try to be up to date. However, contrary to popular expectations, the Arab World is not a liberal desert.

Of course, the dictators who have been deposed were not leaders of member parties of Liberal International. In fact they belonged to Socialist International, as did Laurent Gbagbo, Robert Mugabe and a host of other killers. They should sing the Red Face rather than the Red Flag!

But there are liberal parties in the Arab World and on the fringes of an LI Congress in Marrakech Arab parliamentarians and representatives of civil society set up the Liberal Arab Network.

There are 3 liberal parties in Morocco, one of which is in Government, a group of liberal MPS in Algeria, historically just

one, the Parti Social Démocrate in Tunisia – although lots of others have registered in the last few weeks – and 3 in Egypt, two of which are members of LI. In Lebanon there is also a vibrant liberal party.

The Arabian peninsula does not have political parties following any established ideology, and so liberals are not involved in the uprising of Shias against Sunni domination in Bahrain or the mainly tribal uprising in Yemen.

In North Africa, we are working hard to ensure that the dictators are not replaced with something equally bad. The main dangers are from the left and from Islamic fundamentalism. But this is not what the demonstrators in Tahrir Square in Cairo or in the centre of Tunis want. These “Facebook Generation” people were largely educated youngsters and women fed up with the daily grind of oppression

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and the flagrant corruption of the elite. They are not organised in political parties and the existing parties are desperately trying to find out how to harness their vigour and become relevant to them.

In Egypt, the Democratic Front appears to be making headway, whereas El Ghad of Ayman Nour – a former presidential candidate who was jailed after he failed to beat Mubarak – does not appear to have made such an impact. Both parties are part of the reform process, however, and advising the military on the necessary political reforms. El Ghad campaigned for a “No” vote on the new Constitution on 19th March, judging it to have been prepared in too much haste. The fear is that previously restricted political parties will not be given enough time to organise.

In Tunisia, the PSL has not been included in the “Council for the Protection of the Revolution”, which contains representatives of some of the more than 35 political parties which have been registered plus people from civil society. In Tunisia the electoral period should be prolonged enough to allow for the parties to organise. However, it is essential that those many parties who claim to be liberals work together to avoid splitting the centrist and lay vote.

In Morocco young people have led peaceful protests which look

likely to result in concessions from Mohammed VI. The political parties would love to harness this new energy, but have not yet worked out how.

Liberal International is working closely with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation who have a regional office in Cairo and have now increased their representation in Tunisia and their regional Maghreb office is in Algiers. A meeting was organised in the National Liberal Club of the many foundations such as Friedrich Naumann, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the Dutch, Swedes, Danes, Bulgarians and Catalans as well as a former Moroccan minister to co-ordinate the Liberal response to the developing situation.

We must ensure that liberal and centrist voices are not drowned out by left socialists and Islamic fundamentalists. We must encourage our youth movements and women’s organisations to engage with those in the Arab world using Twitter and Facebook to exchange ideas and news, so that they can feel part of a wider democratic community.

*Robert Woodthorpe Browne  
Chairman International Relations Committee of the Liberal Democrats  
Vice President on the Bureau of Liberal International*

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## Israel: “Fascinating and Frightening”

Philip Goldenberg

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**A**fter a fortnight’s holiday in Israel last autumn, I wrote a personal note, to try to collect my own thoughts. Since then, there have been two developments of interest. Firstly, the public discourse in Israel has worsened, with nationalist Parliamentarians setting in train McCarthyite investigations of Israeli human rights organizations. Secondly, some leaders of the Anglo-Jewish community have started voicing some thoughts similar to mine. So mine may perhaps be of interest.

### **A few introductory points:**

I write as a Jew, a Zionist (more of that later) and a liberal. Of course I am a LibDem, but I do not write in that capacity.

I unconditionally support the right of the State of Israel to exist within secure and recognized boundaries, free from fear of attack. But that is very different from supporting successive Israeli governments, particularly where, as all too often is the case, their actions and policies are in my view contrary to Israel’s long-term interests.

When in Israel, I listened to family, friends and others, but have not verified everything they said. They are not representative. But they all hold liberal values and, as Israelis, share a range of emotions ranging from depression/despair to real anger at the present state of Israeli politics. One – a former Parliamentary candidate – said bluntly that he was too ashamed to discuss the topic.

I also had the salutary experience of reading Israeli newspapers for two weeks. Their priorities are (a) Israeli news (b) an amazingly detailed focus on US politics as they affect Israel and (c) occasionally, the Middle East generally. Britain and Europe hardly feature at all.

I start with a passing thought. It is apparent from one of the exhibits in the archaeological section of the Israel Museum that in

Israel homo sapiens was a contemporary, rather than a successor, of Neanderthal man. Perhaps this is a paradigm for the present Israeli government.

### **Israeli Politics**

Israel is a vibrant democracy, which has made enormous and deeply impressive progress in a whole range of fields. It is a fascinating place, and a fascinating society. But it is also very frightening, not least to Israelis – and others – with liberal values.

I deal first with the systemic structural problems of Israeli politics. Israel is the world’s worst advertisement for proportional representation. With controlled Party lists and a single national constituency (and therefore no effective threshold – 0.83% of the national vote gives one Parliamentary seat), there is an inherent fissiparous tendency, and enormous difficulty in forming a stable government. Various religious Parties, too many of whom are mired in institutional corruption, are thereby given blackmail positions which they readily exploit. To take a recent example, there was a proposal to give student grants uniquely to ultra-Orthodox Jewish males engaged in religious studies, while the general body of students effectively have to work to finance their studies. Ultra-Orthodox Jewish males are not only exempt from military service but (unlike ultra-Orthodox Jewish females) do not have to give corresponding non-military service.

So in general terms most governments lack the strength to take difficult decisions.

Of more immediate concern are the deeply illiberal values now polluting the political process and public discourse generally – a sort of race to the pit of populism, as exemplified by: the pending collapse of the Labour Party; proposed loyalty oaths for non-Jewish cit-

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izens; the recent banning by the Ministry of Education of a proposed school textbook which set out in parallel the Israeli and Palestinian narratives; powers to communities to exclude “newcomers who don’t fit in” – translate “Arabs”; and the increasing intolerance by the ultra-Orthodox of both Arabs and more secular Jews (causing eg friends who are long-term residents of Jerusalem to move to Tel-Aviv).

All this is coupled with an increasing intolerance of dissent, eg the refusal of the present Israeli Government to recognize the existence of J-Street, let alone engage with it.

### Zionist Values

It is important to recognize that the values under attack are not just liberal values in general. They are also the historic values of Zionism itself, which (as pointed out in a brilliant lecture by Shlomo Avineri, a former Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, and now Israel’s leading political scientist) were expounded by Herzl and Weizmann. If one defines liberalism as open-mindedness, tolerance and generosity of spirit (the last being the proper translation of the Latin *liberalis*), then liberalism was at the heart of Zionism, with an emphasis on learning, humanity, science, and an express recognition that the Arabs in the then Palestine had rights that would need protection.

Why are these values being trashed by so many current Israeli politicians? Partly of course it is a response to the legitimate fear of extinction which is an inevitable product of the way in which surrounding Arab régimes and groupings have put the State of Israel under threat since its foundation. Those existential pressures do not encourage liberalism. But it is also a product of changing demography, with the increasing number of ultra-Orthodox Jews whose main concern is to strengthen their own intolerant grip on the rest of society, and also the cultural change wrought by extensive immigration from Russia, whose citizens are inevitably unused to the checks and balances applicable to a democratic culture (which has never been a feature of Russian society which moved almost straight from one form of dictatorship to another). It is no surprise that the most extreme political party (at least at present) is Israel Beiteinu, which is largely Russian in composition and electoral support. Its Foreign Minister is a fascist; and several of its Parliamentarians would have fitted in well as Labour Home Secretaries!

### The Peace Process

Where does all this leave the peace process. In doing so, I recog-

nize, as all who are not involved directly in the process should, that I may well not know things which would cause me to change my views. But I doubt if this is significantly the case.

Netanyahu is a follower, not a leader. He has become Prime Minister (which he intends to remain!) by forming a coalition with extremists who are deeply opposed to a peace settlement (to put it another way, they are in favour of settlements rather than peace). If he were ever serious about peace, he would form a Grand Coalition with the former governing Party Kadimah to deliver it. The evidence is that such a Coalition advocating a reasonable and credible settlement would receive majority public support.

However, Israeli public opinion has no belief that such a settlement is on offer. Sane Israelis know that Abu Mazen and Fayyad are as good counterparts as they will get; but also know that they have no capacity to deliver a peace that extends to Gaza, nor even a peace that will necessarily outlast a change of régime on the West Bank. Public opinion will not force Netanyahu to act unless Hamas can be brought into a process in which it accepts Israel’s right to exist. In addition, a convincing and permanent resolution of the Iran nuclear issue is a necessary pre-condition of such public acceptance.

It follows from all this that I simply do not believe that any direct peace negotiations will succeed. Indeed, they serve no useful purpose when the issue is not the nature of a peace settlement (which is pretty much known and agreed) but the political will and leadership on both sides to achieve it. What the international community needs to do – and urgently – is to put together a deal which creates the conditions for precisely that political will and leadership. If and when that happens Netanyahu would blow with the wind of change and either lead, or be led, into selling a credible peace to Israeli public opinion.

Inaction on the part of the international community is not a sensible option; it will simply mean that the present peace process falters then withers. And public opinion on both sides would then harden, increasing the miasma of mutual mistrust.

*Philip Goldenberg is a long-standing Liberal Democrat who has been involved in much of the recent history of the LibDems and its predecessor Liberal Party – he was one of the two lawyers who effected their merger and co-authored the original LibDem Constitution. An adviser to Paddy Ashdown, he led the technical side of Paddy’s contingency planning for a “hung Parliament” and a possible Coalition Government. His work on the machinery of a Coalition Government was formative in the structuring of both the 1999 Scottish Executive and the 2010 Westminster Coalition Government.*

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# Palestine State Building

Guy Burton

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**F**or many visiting Ramallah for the first time, the impression is of a city under constant construction. This is a particularly apt metaphor for the current process of Palestinian state building which is going on both in Ramallah and elsewhere in the West Bank. However, it is not yet certain when – or indeed if – this process will yield results. It is now nearly two decades since the Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian president Yasser Arafat signed the Oslo accords and

shook hands; but the prospect of an independent Palestine remains a far off one.

While Oslo has formed the main framework through which the world has watched Israeli and Palestinian leaders seek to resolve their differences, the view from Ramallah is far more complicated. Rather than just one track being pursued, the Palestinians are investing time and effort into two other more unilateral approaches as well.

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## Oslo: the end of the line

Of the three tracks being pursued, the most notable is Oslo, based on the accords signed between Israel and the PLO in 1993-94. Oslo was designed to allow for a process of trust-building measures on either side, with the aim of achieving an Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and the establishment of a Palestinian state within it by 1999. The reduction of Palestinian national aspirations to the West Bank and Gaza reflected the change that had gone on within the PLO over the preceding two decades, to the point of recognising Israel within its territory in 1988.

It was assumed that as Israel withdrew its troops from the OPT, its security concerns would be taken up by the newly established Palestinian Authority (PA). However, in hindsight, the process was flawed from the start. First, although getting the two sides to meet in public was significant, it gave the impression that an agreement had been reached. This was far from the case since the accords were designed to realise a final agreement by 1999 rather than immediately. Their be open-ended and gradual nature meant that instead of building trust the process required trust in order for progress to be achieved.

Second, the lack of trust was reinforced by the imbalance of power between the two sides which enabled one side, Israel, to pursue its own objectives of achieving 'facts on the ground' ahead of any final agreement – and the Palestinians' inability to halt this. This was made explicit in the ongoing construction and expansion of Israeli settlements within the West Bank and both inside and around Jerusalem, nearly half of which have been built over the last 10 years. The settlements' status further complicate the achievement of any agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, since the settlers want and expect an Israeli security presence while the Palestinians demand that they come under a future Palestinian state's jurisdiction.

Oslo's limitations explain the current stalemate in negotiations today. The present stumbling block is over Israel's unwillingness to show good faith on the settlement issue and call a halt. Despite a US-brokered arrangement that got the two sides to speak face-to-face with each other in September 2010 after two years without direct contact, the arrangement soon floundered when the Israeli government refused to renew its 10-month moratorium on settlement construction (which was always less than it appeared, since it excluded those that had already received planning permission and those around Jerusalem).

More recently, Israel's intransigence has been exposed further in the Palestine Papers, which were released by Al Jazeera and the Guardian in January 2011. The secret documents show the number of concessions which Palestinian negotiators were prepared to make to reach an agreement with Israel under the auspices of a partial US. This included giving up territory around Jerusalem and restricting the right of return to a handful of Palestinian refugees and their descendents. Although there was initial disbelief at the extent to which the Palestinian negotiators were prepared to go, this was soon usurped by anger at Al Jazeera for publishing Palestinian weakness and undermining the Palestinian leadership – a fact that the dominant party in the PA, Fatah, quickly exploited by orchestrating demonstrations outside the media organisation's Ramallah offices.

## Unilateral measures towards statehood

Given the lack of any meaningful advance in direct negotiations, the Palestinians have embarked on two other ways to achieve independence. One is to build on aspects of the Oslo framework by developing the conditions for a virtual state within the OPT while the

other constitutes a break with Oslo, by seeking unilateral diplomatic recognition.

The Palestinian effort to create a state from within has been in progress since mid-2007 and the political and administrative split between the West Bank, controlled by Fatah, and Gaza under Hamas. The new Salam Fayyad government and its international backers in the donor community (which not only bankroll the PA and much of Palestinian civil society through its NGOs) are keen to build the West Bank up and serve as a counterpoint to Hamas's rule in Gaza.

Politically, the plans emphasise the importance of good governance. To achieve the plan the government has proposed a series of reforms within the financial, administrative, security and judicial sectors, to increase transparency and security for individuals and property rights. Economically, the plan is in line with the pro-globalisation discourse. It aims for an environment conducive to investment and a strong private sector to support it. Infrastructure development is emphasised in the plan. At the same time, the plan's authors note an absence of natural resources, therefore locating Palestinian prosperity through its human capital, connected into the global knowledge-based economy.

The other way that the Palestinians are trying to establish their state is through the diplomatic route. To this end, the Fayyad government's plans present an image of a state in waiting. Like the development programmes, the process is one that is being pursued regardless of Israel's position. This has prompted criticism from the Israeli government, which opposes this unilateral path and a return to engagement through the Oslo process.

## Continuing limitations

Despite the three tracks to Palestinian statehood, none of them looks likely to achieve its goal. Oslo not only highlights but reinforces the present cause of the Palestinians' difficulties with Israel, especially in relation to the PA. The presence of the PA has complicated things since it has fractured Palestinian society, with the PA being co-opted by the Israelis over security arrangements and failing to realise Palestinian aspirations: the establishment of a Palestinian state and an end to discrimination against Palestinians, both those resident in Israel and allowing refugees and their descendents the right to return home.

In terms of the more unilateral approaches, it is similarly unlikely that they will advance the Palestinian cause of independence further. At first glance, the Fayyad state-building plans do not look unduly problematic. However, they do not take into account the obstacles presented by Israel. As a result, the measures laid out can only ever be partially achieved since they are subject to non-interference and pressure from Israel. However, the blueprint to achieve this is deeply flawed; its neoliberal orientation is not only imposed through donors' conditionalities, but is unlikely to achieve any form of meaningful development.

Moreover, the development plans are flawed for the very reason that many of its objectives are contingent on Israel. While the PA can pursue internal administrative changes, many of the measures that would prepare it for independence are not possible. For example, infrastructure construction in parts of the OPT such as the Jordan Valley bring it into conflict with Israel's administrative and security control. Similarly, private enterprise is unlikely to take risks in an environment where Israeli-imposed movement restrictions may impede the transport of human and material capital. Indeed, Salam Fayyad put the finger on the problem himself at the Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute's annual conference

in January 2011, when he claimed that rather than West Bank and Gaza economic unity being the leverage to bring an end to the occupation, it was the occupation that was causing economic disunity.

As for the drive for diplomatic recognition, the current process is also hampered by the past. To date, more than 100 countries have already recognised Palestine, including two members of the UN Security Council: Russia and China. But diplomatic recognition has failed to change facts on the ground and the power imbalance between Israel and the Palestinians. It is relatively easy for governments to offer words of support without matching them with action. For example, there is ongoing discussion over whether the EU may soon recognise an independent Palestine. Yet it arguably already does so. The EU has an Action Plan with the PA just as it does with Israel and other countries in the region. However, it shows little inclination to press Israel on human rights conditions within its Action Plan, to enable it to achieve the objectives it set itself with the PA, including greater economic trade and development. What this shows is that the diplomatic approach does not include any 'teeth' in terms of what Palestine's peers will do to pres-

sure Israel not only to withdraw from the West Bank and dismantle the settlements, but also to stop its intervention both into and against Palestinians territories such as Gaza.

In conclusion, Oslo and the two unilateral approaches – one domestic, the other foreign – suggest that the realisation of a Palestinian state will not be achieved anytime soon. While the Palestinians have shown imagination in pursuing at least two different tracks to achieve independence, it will require far more than their current capacity and scope of action. Because of the disparity in power between Israel and the Palestinians no equitable settlement is likely – at least not without outside intervention. Moreover, it will require more than just words, but real action on the part of Palestinian interlocutors against Israel, to press the Israeli government to make concessions in terms of its military presence and settlements inside the West Bank and on the border with Gaza.

*Guy Burton is a researcher at the Centre for Development Studies at Birzeit University in the OPT and was previously a parliamentary advisor and election candidate for the Liberal Democrats and an intern at Liberal International.*



The UK Pavilion- the Seed Cathedral, showing it's ghostly Union Jack.

## World Expos- The Real Cultural Olympiad?

Allan Siao Ming Witherick

I'm not a huge sports fan. When we found out that we had secured the 2012 Olympics I was at an induction to the fire service as a newly elected County Councillor. The reaction couldn't have been more stark. The County Councillors as a whole seemed overjoyed at this success, this showing of UK's strength and credibility following on from the Chinese dragon.

The officers response was far more muted. Already the emergency services were starting to think what the implications would be, covering Hertfordshire, on the doorstep to London.

### Our Cultural Olympiad

But what was sold to us wasn't just the most prestigious international sporting event, it was also billed that it would be accompanied by a "Cultural Olympiad" (which the ever useful Wikipedia only references briefly for 2001-2004 in Athens). "The London 2012 Cultural Olympiad is the largest cultural celebration in the history of the modern Olympic and Paralympic Movements." An opportunity to show case all forms of culture, especially from young people. A counterpart to the focus on sporting excellence.

It's a phrase which sadly we don't seem to hear so much about anymore.

After an initial spurt it's faded somewhat, unaided by the recession which hit all cultures.

Shortly after the Olympics though the Chinese hosted another international event, one which sadly doesn't attract the same sort of media interest as the Olympics. This was the Expo 2010 Shanghai China, part of the series of international events also known as the World's Fair. I was privileged enough to visit as part of the British Council supported UK-China:400 delegation.

With no conceptions of what to expect, what I did find was a startling variation of cultures, countries and interpretations on show.

Queuing- something very British

Being a traveller myself, I felt strangely at home in the Expo, in stark contrast to many of the others in my delegation. Some of the UK delegates rushed off to see other parts of Shanghai while they had a chance.

Perhaps the cultural "rides" at the ends of the queues weren't interesting enough to make it worth the effort, or perhaps this sanitised introduction to the world was too artificial. However there was no hesitation from the Chinese side and their enthusiasm in places was startling. The reported queues for some pavilions was measured in hours, with some apparently queuing anything up to half a day to see some countries including the UK and China.

Others had no one waiting outside. In my case this meant I was able to visit almost 50 countries, some with their own pavilions, others within the larger continent covering buildings.

Passport to respect

For some of the Chinese I think there was a real feel that this was their only opportunity to "travel", to sample other cultures outside of their own. But then we are talking about a country which is probably better classed as a continent not just in terms of its geographic mass, but also the wide variations in everything from culture and language through to climate and diet this is perhaps not so surprising.

As a result one of the more curious marketing gimmicks, which worked incredibly well, was the sale of "Expo Passports". Each country pavilion or stall was encouraged to have a stamp which was then put in a person's "passport" to show where they had "been". At first this seemed to be a nice way to keep a record of which exhibitions people had visited, until we saw how some of the Chinese were treating it.

Almost in a "pack" form, some groups were running from country stall to country within the larger continental pavilions, just to get the stamps. They had abandoned the pretence of learning about a country and culture, or seeing the touristic information, and instead just wanted to get the stamp. Queues would sometimes form almost instantly as a group would course through like a wave. The trophy at the end?

I guess bragging rights "Look at where I've been!"

The reaction from the exhibitors was very varied. Some countries stopped stamping completely, especially after a few reported incidents of violence, fighting over the stamps, that I could very much imagine. Others limited the number of passports an individual



The African pavillion included regular displays of native dance



Not all country displays cleared through customs, despite waiting several months

ual could present or used it as a powerful carrot to push people to queue through the exhibit first, forcing them in effect to learn as they waited. In a few cases enjoying viewing the exhibit meant I actually got a stamp quicker than those who had only queued, demonstrating the extent of the problem, although it could've been my non-Chinese advantage.

And the displays?

These were extremely diverse. From the visionary and thought provoking seed cathedral provided by the British, through to the tourist advertising of some of the African nations.

There were few real themes present. It was noticeable that the European countries tended to play towards pushing thought provoking ideas. Estonia for example had a series of Piggy Banks with a question posed at each. While Monaco relied on an impressive "movie featurette" which told it's entire history and ended with sci-fi space ships.

The African pavillion included many touristic aspects including it's own mini-market for trinkets as well as shows of traditional culture on a regular basis.

The problems and politics

Not everything worked perhaps as smoothly as the Chinese would like to portray. As you went around the countries there were some noticeable "issues". Despite having been open for some time when I visited, some countries were still having huge issues with getting their exhibitions approved through customs control, with no end to the delays in sight.

This demonstrated perhaps the subtle blocks placed against those the Chinese still don't approve of. It was notable that these seemed to be invariably small countries with few resources or trading powers. Although perhaps this is the cynical side of me coming through.

So what can we learn?

Perhaps the biggest thing is that we need to be careful of empty words in international arenas. We've already heard the concerns around the Olympic sports, legacy, and the dangers around this. But what can we do to redeem our ailing attempts towards a Cultural Olympiad?

That question is far harder, but at the moment it's not too late.

*Allan Siao Ming Witherick, LI Executive Member*

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## Democracy yet to reach Russia

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“**T**he YABLOKO party has constantly been facing arbitrary rule and politically biased violation of its rights at elections of all levels for many years already”, YABLOKO leader (LI full member) Sergei Mitrokhin comments in the wake of the Russian regional elections which took place last Sunday. Local election officials banned over 45 percent of the candidates nominated by the YABLOKO party, compared with 0.8 percent for the ruling United Russia, which on average won about 50 percent of votes.

“The most wide spread techniques are those targeted at ousting the party from elections already at the stage of registration at election campaigns... YABLOKO insists that all the political parties should have equal rights to participate in the elections without any preliminary requirements”, Mitrokhin further said. According to YABLOKO, the election day, again revealed much fraud, such as compulsion of public servants to vote for the ruling party, bribing of voters and mass-scale ballot-stuffing. YABLOKO will apply to courts arguing the elections results and the violations.

Mitrokhin earlier expressed outrage at the treatment of its activists in the North Caucasus, who were unlawfully detained on 28th February while protesting against the deforestation of a public area of protected trees, where recreational cottages have been built for the Governor of Krasnodar Krai.

Three of the jailed activists went on a hunger strike to protest the unjust verdict of imprisonment and the dire conditions of detention. Sergei Mitrokhin said that the cells in which the detainees were held were unlit and had poor sanitary facilities. He further commented: 'The police broke not only Russian law, but also inner normative acts of the interior, protecting unlawfully constructed cottages. Moreover the police actions against peaceful citizens were tough and violent.'

YABLOKO has conducted numerous actions of support and forwarded letters to the Public Prosecutor and the Interior Minister demanding them to investigate the actions of the police and the regional authorities, but has yet to receive a response. The activists have now been released, but Russia has a long way to go before it gets its 'revolution'.

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## JAPAN

### Seismic waves reach the West

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**W**atching the events of 11th March unfold tells us that we truly are a global village and no one can fail to be moved by the photos of people hit by the earthquake and tsunami struggling to come to terms with their loss. Even without the knock-on problems with nuclear reactors the parallels with the devastation that ended World War II are too great. Our sympathy goes out to all, not forgetting the other peoples around the Pacific rim, who were also hit by the tsunami, as far away from the epicentre as Canada, Chile, Papua New Guinea and Peru.

LI President Hans van Baalen MEP called Japan's Prime Minister Naoto Kan and the Japanese Co-Chairman of the European

Parliament - Japan Delegation Yukio Hatoyama, both members of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) which maintains close links with Liberal International to express his condolences to the victims and families affected by the Japanese tsunami, earthquake and unfolding nuclear disaster. Van Baalen has asked Liberal leaders around the world to offer Japan the help needed to overcome the problems it is now facing. Van Baalen, who is also European Co-Chairman of the EP - Japan Delegation, will visit Japan coming May and, if the situation permits, will visit the areas hit.

Set aside the dislocation of trade, the disaster will impact on us too. Chris Huhne has called for report on implications of nuclear situation in Japan.

Chris said "We take this incident extremely seriously even though there is no reason to expect a similar scale of seismic activity in the UK. I have called on the Chief Nuclear Inspector, Dr. Mike Weightman for a thorough report on the implications of the situation in Japan and the lessons to be learned. This will be prepared in close cooperation internationally with other nuclear regulators. It is essential that we understand the full facts and their implications, both for existing nuclear reactors and any new programme, as safety is always our number one concern."

Anyone who watched the Internet news on Saturday night/Sunday morning (13th/14th) will have noticed how the information gradually became sparse as the situation at the third Japanese nuclear power station deteriorated. The word 'plutonium' mysteriously vanished. Chris could have an uphill struggle for transparency.

The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, under the Chairmanship of Cross-bench peer Lord Krebs, launched a short inquiry to investigate whether the UK's nuclear research and development (R&D) capabilities are sufficient to meet its future nuclear energy requirements to 2050. Evidence is due in by the 28th April should anyone wish to make a written submission by email, to <mailto:hls@parliament.uk>

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## The Scottish Group at Perth

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**R**eform of the European Union's common agricultural policy (CAP) has to be undertaken bearing in mind implications for pressures on food in the developing world. That was the message by George Lyon MEP to Liberal International members at a fringe meeting during the Scottish Liberal Democrat conference in Perth on March 5.

He has written an official report on the CAP which will form part of the discussions by the European Parliament and Commission that should lead to proposals in the autumn. George, a farmer on the isle of Bute, said that decisions on reforming support for the European agricultural industry will affect farmers and consumers in Third World countries. He also pointed out that rising standards of living among millions in China, India and Brazil will mean that their carbon footprint will increase towards western levels.

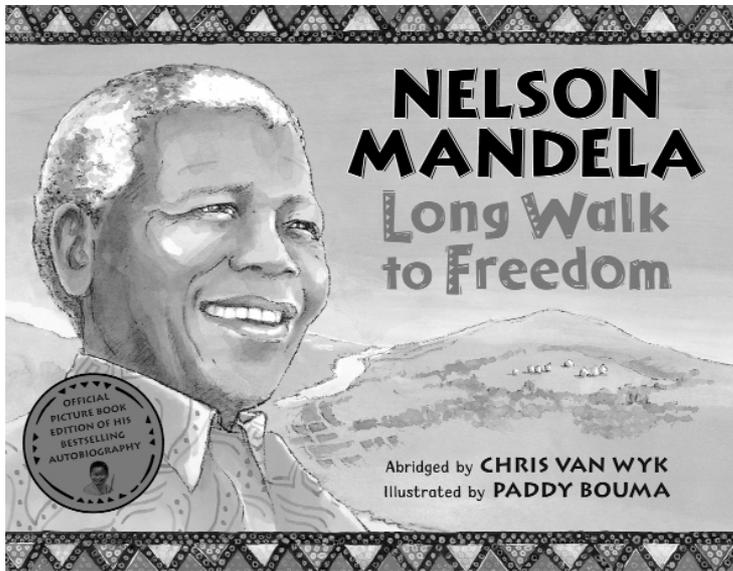
It was appropriate that George Lyon gave his address as the LI's memorial to Ronnie Fraser, a longstanding Scottish Liberal activist who founded the Scottish branch of LIBG. Ronnie was a writer on farm and land issues and lived his final years near Dunoon in the Argyll and Bute constituency that George Lyon represented in the Scottish Parliament before becoming an MEP. *Willis Pickard*

## Nelson Mandela Long Walk to Freedom, abridged by Chris Van Wyk & illustrated by Paddy Bouma

MacMillan 2010 £6.99

InterLib has solved a nagging problem for you... an abridgement of Nelson Mandela's Long Walk to Freedom, suitable for all neoliterates and those who didn't quite manage the long read to the end of the original book back in 1994.

Chris Van Wyk is a fitting person to attempt such a task – a poet, one of the Soweto generation, who has honed his skills on other members



of the ANC pantheon, Oliver Tambo and Solomon Plaatje. Paddy Bouma was a runner up for the Kate Greenaway Award in 1986; one can sense the emotion of the people in her images of the Apartheid and post-apartheid eras. Her work should be better known here.

Whilst Apartheid should be confined to the dustbin of human memory, the dignity of the struggle for freedom and of Nelson Mandela should live for ever. Many young people now have no personal memory of those events, what better aide mémoire than this?

*Stewart Rayment*

## Van Baalen raises concern over situation in Burundi

LI President Hans van Baalen MEP welcomed Alice Nzomukunda, Leader of Alliance Democratique Pour le Renouveau — ADR, LI member from Burundi, to the European Parliament. She was accompanied by Mathias Basabose, ADR Secretary General. During the meeting, the opposition leaders informed the LI President about the deteriorating conditions in the country.

Both ADR leaders live in exile after the elections in 2010, which were described as fraudulent and were marred by violence. “Liberal International's support is very important for us. The international community, which fills 50% of the Burundi budget, should help the torture of the population to stop”, said ADR leader Ms. Nzomukunda.

The LI President will ask the EU Foreign Affairs High Representative Catherine Ashton questions concerning “the fact the regime in Burundi continues to violate human rights and forces the opposition to leave the country and live in exile”. Mr. Van Baalen wants Europe to temporarily suspend aid to Burundi until democracy and respect for Human Rights is restored.

## Women's Refuge in Afghanistan Under Threat?

With the announcement of the Afghan government's plans in February, which aim to take control of women's shelters, much of the progress that has been made regarding women's rights and protection in the country is severely threatened.

Everyone is aware of the treatment of women and erosion of women's rights under the Taliban. Although rights are now technically protected by law, in many parts of the country this is often completely ignored. Women aren't even seen by some as complete human beings. They are subject to oppressive, outdated practices and abuse.

There is a practice known as *ibaadi* where young girls are given away to make up for a perceived crime on the part of a male member of their family. These girls are then seen as little more than a slave. Sometimes, as a result of chronic abuse in unwanted marriages, women and girls have been driven to make attempts on their own lives out of desperation. This is often by setting fire to themselves. If their attempt fails, they're left with irreversible, excruciatingly painful damage. They will need somewhere they can be protected: a women's shelter gives them somewhere to stay.

If caught, women who attempt to flee abuse are subject to horrific practices. Last summer TIME magazine showed Aisha on the cover, an 18 year old who was sentenced to having her nose and ears cut off by a Taliban Commander. This was punishment for a bid to escape her abusive in-laws, under whose control she thought she would have died. She 'had to be made an example of'. These events happened in 2009.

Aisha was eventually able to find protection in a women's shelter in Kabul.

Run independently of government, and funded mostly by foreign aid organisations these shelters provide protection for women, who so very desperately need it. Now these few shelters for abused women in Afghanistan may be taken under government control because they are seen as 'corrupt' by officials in the administration.

It appears the shelters are readily criticised. Officials have accused them of facilitating prostitution, breaking down family links, and encouraging women to stand against their husband, or Father. They have even been accused of 'tricking' women into leaving home.

These criticisms, to me, certainly do not seem justified. Nor are they considered so by the women in the shelters, and the allegations are denied by the Afghan Women's Network. The shelters do keep women safe.

The plans have come without any consultation from the organisations that manage the shelters, and without the involvement of any women's rights professionals. These are the people who understand the issues surrounding the treatment of women in Afghanistan, and therefore also understand the huge need for women's shelters to be kept safe. They need to be protected from outside control. They need to remain independent, under the control of individuals and organisations who understand the suffering of those who need them. Women still don't have particularly easy access to legal help or any kind of legal protection in most parts of Afghanistan. So who are they to turn to?

The current shelter system does help women. But if the government controlled shelters fail to protect them, where exactly are they supposed to go? Women's shelters need to remain completely independent, free from influence, and able to continue providing safety for vulnerable Afghan women.

*Harriet Ainscough  
International Committee, Liberal Youth*

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## R E V I E W

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### The Peace Process from a breakthrough to breakdown, by Afif Safieh

Saqi 2010 £16.99

**A**fif Safieh was Palestinian General Delegate to the UK, or as I would rather put it, ambassador, 1990 to 2005, during which time he was a regular and welcomed guest to Liberal gatherings and an occasional contributor to interLib. During this time he was a prolific writer and some of his works, from 1981 to 2005, are gathered here.

Political writing is very much of its time, which is invariably fleeting, although its general principals may be universal. Safieh's brief

comments on the situation post 2005 can be summarized – the Arab Peace Initiative has been on the table since 2002, but has not been accepted by Israel, and the Quartet behaves with self-inflicted



**Menzies Campbell, Paddy Ashdown, Yasser Arafat, Afif**

impotence in dealing with Israel, which holds no immediate hopes for the future. Al Jazeera's publication of selective documents from the Palestinian side has shown considerable pragmatism on the behalf of Palestinian negotiators, which has no doubt heaped opprobrium on them, yet the reality is that it is the Israelis who constantly hamper the peace process, brought 9/11 upon the West and unless the West stands up to them may well bring worse.

Opening with a 1981 paper on the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to a UN Symposium, one wonders to what extent this still reflects reality of Palestinian intent. He says 'Pacific and

harmonious cohabitation in Palestine has been the objective of the Palestinian revolution since its inception.' Nearly 30 years on can such optimism prevail? Does HAMAS sign up to that? Has too much bad water flowed under the bridge since? Aside from times when the West showed too much interest in the area, Christian, Jewish and Moslem settlements coexisted alongside each other for centuries.

One point I would take up from that essay. Safieh says that 'Zionism has transformed the oppressed of one continent into the oppressors of another.' Part of the problem with Israel is that whilst a mainly European Zionist vanguard seized the Palestinian state, the response of Arab governments was to expel centuries old Jewish communities, usually violently. The descendants of these victims now make up the majority of the Israeli population (Israel could be said to be another Arab country whose religion happens to be Judaism) and their fears drive much of Israeli policy.

The interview with Gene Sharp on non-violent struggle, something the author puts much stress on, not only sets out a personal view, but seeks to influence the strategic agenda. I'm sorry to learn of the death of Faisal Oweida, another very capable Palestinian representative.

It was honest to include the mauling from the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee in the wake of the liberation of Kuwait. The PLO was painted, unfairly, as a backer of Iraq in the western press. In general it must be said that there is a failure in the West to understand the sensitivity of the involvement of non-Arab military forces in the region, in the post-imperial era. Although our motives might have been altruistic – the liberation of Kuwait, so many other actions have been misguided or simply wrong – one thinks of interventions in Lebanon, or Suez for example, not to mention the lack of even-handedness with regards to Israel.

*Stewart Rayment*

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### Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Relief Charity Concert

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I am pleased to advise you that, together with the Japan Society, NLC Member Mr Hiro Toda, is arranging a charity concert at the National Liberal Club in aid of the Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Relief Fund. This is to be held in the David Lloyd George Room on Thursday, 7th April at 7.30pm with a drinks reception from 7.00pm.

The concert by renowned pianist Mr Motoki Hirai will feature music by J.S.Bach (French Suite No.2), Mozart (Adagio), Schubert (Litany - arr. Liszt), and Chopin (Polonaise No.1, Maiden's Wish (arr. Liszt), Nocturne & Scherzo No.3), as well as Motoki Hirai's own 'Scenes from a Native Land' ('Fantasie-Japonaise'). Please note that the programme is subject to change without prior notice.

Admission is £30.00 all of which will be sent to the devastated areas in Japan by the Japan Society. Additional donations for the Japan relief fund at the desk of the concert room (the David Lloyd George room) would be gratefully appreciated.

Motoki Hirai (pianist & composer) is acclaimed worldwide for his imagination and sensitivity. He has appeared in the music capitals of the Far East, America and Europe, performing regularly in London venues including the Wigmore Hall, St. John's, Smith Square and the South Bank Centre. (<http://www.motoki-hirai.com>)

I hope that this event will be of interest and if you would like to attend please contact the Club on 020 7930 9871 or [secretary@nlc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@nlc.org.uk)

*Simon Roberts, Secretary NLC*