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Succession to Mubarak's Throne

### Is Egypt Becoming a "Family Republic"?

**Egypt's president Hosni Mubarak's is almost thirty years in office, the country is suffering from democratic deficits. Therefore, in order to initiate change, Europe must demand a relaxation of the restrictive election regulations, writes Stephan Roll**

Egypt has scheduled parliamentary elections for 2010 and a presidential election for 2011. With this in mind, there have been increasing speculations on who will govern the country in future, should the now 81-year-old President Hosni Mubarak be unable to do so for health reasons. The most likely successor is Gamal Mubarak, the president's 47-year-old son, who has been placed in key positions in the governing National Democratic Party (NDP) over the past few years by his father.

It is more than doubtful, meanwhile, that such a "dynastic solution" would gain majority support from the electorate. The leadership circle around the president has therefore chosen a dual strategy to secure the Mubarak regime. Firstly, it has restricted the actions of the opposition through repression and changes to the constitution. And secondly, it has attempted to reinforce the loyalty of the military and the business elite towards the presidential family.

#### Constitutional modifications

The opposition boycotted the 2007 constitutional referendum in protest at the government's despotic approach. The voting papers had been rushed through parliament with the votes of the NDP, for example, and the date of the referendum was brought forward at short notice. Official calculations put participation in the referendum at a low 27 percent, with observers considering even this figure too high.

The constitution was modified in three decisive points in relation to parliamentary elections: Firstly, any political activity related to a religious frame of reference was banned, secondly a foundation was laid for the introduction of a list system, and thirdly monitoring was transferred to an election commission, away from the partly independent judiciary.

Particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, officially banned but generally tolerated and Egypt's most important opposition group, was put at a disadvantage by these changes. The Muslim Brothers have renounced violence and are working towards political participation within the existing system. The constitution now makes it impossible for them to found their own political party, and if a list system were introduced for the next elections Muslim Brothers would no longer be able to gain seats as "independent" candidates as in the past.

In relation to the presidential elections, the complicated form of article 76 of the constitution sets extremely difficult conditions for candidates. As Hosni Mubarak has signalled his willingness to run for office again in 2011, by which time he will be 83, we can assume that Gamal Mubarak will only apply for the presidency when his father's health no longer allows him to carry out his duties. In this case, the constitution states that elections must take place within 60 days – leaving the opposition no time to nominate a candidate of their own with a chance of success.

#### Support from the military and business elite

A handover of the presidency from father to son is inconceivable without the support of the military leadership. Even though there appear to be reservations within the officers' corps, open resistance is highly unlikely. Secret Service chief Omar Suleiman is evidently expected to secure the support of the military leadership for Gamal Mubarak. Suleiman is highly respected within the military and in parts of the general public, and is regarded as loyal towards the presidential family.

The officers' corps will presumably follow Suleiman's lead, particularly as it is unclear whether it sees any attractive alternative to the father-son power transfer. The military has a vested interest in maintaining its many material privileges, due above all to years of US military aid. This position would not appear to be threatened by Gamal Mubarak's possible presidency, as he has maintained good contacts to the US administration for several years.

Nor will the emerging Egyptian business elite have significant difficulties with the planned handover at the top. Gamal Mubarak's express support within the NDP for the economic reforms of the past

years meant this elite has profited abundantly, supporting Gamal Mubarak's climb up the political ladder in return.

A handful of families now dominate key areas of the private sector, influencing the political sphere for the most part in favour of the president: directly by taking on offices in the government or the NDP; indirectly through relations to political decision-makers or by running print media and TV stations.

### **Toothless opposition**

The opposition has little up its sleeve to counter the regime's strategy. Not only is it under constant threat of repression, particularly in the form of random arrests; it is also fractured and lamed by quarrels within the various parties and movements. An anti-succession alliance of mainly secular opposition members has tried – so far in vain – to pick up the thread of public attention achieved by the opposition movement "Kefaya!" (Enough!) between 2004 and 2006.

Opposition circles have also recently been calling for an independent presidential candidate, naming two prominent names: Mohammed al-Baradei, the former Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and Amr Moussa, the Secretary General of the Arab League and former Egyptian foreign minister. Yet the restrictive rulings of article 76 mean neither of the two have a chance of being accepted as candidates.

The Muslim Brotherhood, meanwhile, has been going through internal debates on its political direction, with the conservative, more apolitical wing gaining the upper hand. The organisation's newly elected leader (*murshid*), Mohamed Badie, belongs to this group. The mainly younger representatives of the more liberal urban wing, who are demanding a stronger political emphasis and more collaboration with other opposition groups and parties, will now have an even harder time being heard within the Brotherhood.

### **Stagnation, not change**

The continuation of the Mubarak regime would not only lengthen an authoritarian system. Egypt's socio-economic development, less than satisfactory over Hosni Mubarak's almost thirty years in office, would presumably continue to stagnate. The 1991 economic reforms systematically ignored the major obstacles to development such as corruption and inadequate competition regulations.

Worse still: broad swathes of the population were excluded from the already slow-moving economic progress, intensifying the country's social tensions. These tensions will continue to intensify, particularly in the face of strong population growth and progressive environmental damage.

Germany and the EU have an interest in political stability in Egypt, the southern Mediterranean country with the largest population. Long-term stability, however, requires sustainable economic development and distributive justice. Neither are conceivable in Egypt without separation and monitoring of political powers. The international community should therefore press for an opening of the political system. For the elections, this means calling for maximum transparency and election observers – and not only directly before the respective vote itself.

Above all, however, Europe must demand a relaxation of the restrictive election regulations. This includes expressly calling for a possibility for the Muslim Brotherhood to take part in the political process. Without it, political participation will never be extended in Egypt.

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Hosni Mubarak's Reign in Egypt  
[The Pharaoh's Legacy](#)

Hosni Mubarak has enjoyed unlimited power in Egypt for the past 28 years. Today, however, there is increasing resistance against his autocratic reign. Many Egyptians are wondering what the future of the Nile republic might look like after Mubarak's death. Amira El Ahl reports from Cairo

Hereditary Succession in Egypt

[Keeping Up Democratic Appearances](#)

Jordan has a hereditary monarchy, in Syria dictatorial power has been passed on from father to son. In Egypt, too, though formally a democracy, the handover of power is looking more than likely to be a family affair. Jürgen Stryjak reports

Interview with Ayman Nour

["I Won't Wait for the Regime to Give Me Its Blessings!"](#)

Ayman Nour, the chairman of Egypt's liberal El-Ghad party, talked to Arian Fariborz and Mahmoud Tawfik about his party's perspectives for the future and his plan to run for office again in the next presidential elections

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