



ESCWA

ESCWA calls for Arab Integration as a Development Imperative in the 21st Century

Despite obstacles, there are still good reasons to believe that the dream of Arab unity can be realized

Tunis, 25 February 2014

Arab Integration

A 21st Century Development Imperative



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As widespread strife and myriad conflicts continue to ravage the Arab world, calls for regional integration could at first seem outdated, if not the product of hopelessly wishful thinking. Yet in the face of such daunting challenges, Arab countries — whether rich or poor — will remain powerless in the global arena if they fail to unite. This becomes obvious when the Arab States are compared to the emerging powers, giant conglomerates and powerful regional blocs that dominate the twenty-first century world.

This is the case made by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in a report entitled *Arab Integration: A 21st Century Development Imperative*, launched today by Dr. Rima Khalaf, Executive Secretary of the Commission. The report is the result of a collaborative ESCWA initiative that involved a group of distinguished Arab thinkers from various disciplines, occupations, and backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the Arab region — a diversity which, the report argues, should form the basis of integration.

The report points to the common language, culture, history and geographical proximity of the Arab countries in making the case for integration as a prerequisite for human development and Arab renaissance. It refers to contemporary examples of regional integration in other parts of the world which have resulted in achievements that would have remained beyond the reach of individual States. The report notes that the Arab region, with its history of fragmentation and flawed policy choices, has been left vulnerable to oppression, foreign intervention and stifled development; it is a legacy that the authors insist can only be overcome through regional integration.

The report comes at a time when the Arab region is in the throes of bitter internal conflicts that have in some cases erupted into all-out war, possibly the result of long decades of exclusion, marginalization and regional fragmentation. These conflicts have caused many to lose hope of ever achieving Arab integration, given that many countries in the region struggle to preserve even a minimal level of peaceful coexistence among their populations. Arab integration has also been impeded by regional and foreign actors with conflicting interests, and by the absence of conditions conducive to the development of an effective project for Arab liberation and renaissance.

Yet despite these obstacles, there are still good reasons to believe that the dream of Arab integration can be realized. As the second decade of the twenty-first century began, a popular awakening spread throughout the Arab world demanding freedom, justice, equality and development. The Arab uprisings effectively refuted misplaced assertions that the Arabs were somehow unfit for democracy. They heralded a historic realignment of the region towards democratic governance and social, economic and cultural renaissance. The report acknowledges that some Arab countries in transition have descended into violence and

argues that, although democracy in Arab countries will encounter obstacles — as has been the case in every other part of the world — there is little doubt that the will of the people will ultimately prevail. The Arabs, and in particular the youth, have broken once and for all the shackles of tyranny and fear. They are determined to build their future with their own hands, restore justice and prosperity, and regain their rightful place in the world.

Seizing on this momentum, the new ESCWA report lays out a strategic vision for achieving Arab integration across the spectrum of political, economic, social, public and cultural life. While accepting that consensus is not possible on every detail, the authors assert that this strategy is an integration road map with a record of delivering security, stability and prosperity to other countries with less in common than those of the Arab region.

The comprehensive integration called for in the report does not seek to detract from existing Arab economic integration projects, but rather to complement and broaden them to include all aspects of political, educational and cultural life. Its goal is not to isolate the Arab world from its natural surroundings or from the rest of the world, but rather to strengthen economic ties with other regional blocs and groups, especially in Africa and Asia, and broaden the opportunities for mutual enrichment.

The report views the divisions within the Arab region as the result of inadequate policies and outside interference which, it charges, have damaged the unity created by the common Arabic language and culture. The Arab uprisings, however, proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the heritage, language and history of the Arab people are and will continue to be irrepressible forces in the twenty-first century.

Despite the shortcomings and failures that have blighted past attempts at Arab integration, it continues to feature among the most cherished aspirations of the Arab people; it is they who have kept the dream of integration alive. Arabs from different countries have rallied together on a range of political and social issues. Time and again, they have defied national boundaries and the divisions that have so often characterized dealings among their rulers. Today they use social media to collaborate as closely as neighbours. Perhaps the strongest example of this dynamic is the unwavering popular solidarity with the plight of the Palestinian people — a cause that unites Arab people from all walks of life and from every country of the region.

Like a great ship on rough seas, the Arab world today is in desperate need of safe harbour. This new ESCWA report makes a bold case for Arab integration as the beacon that could guide the region out of harm's way, and towards a renaissance befitting of its heritage and the aspirations of its people.



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Integration Presents Arab World with Unique Opportunities for Human Development, says New ESCWA Report

Economic integration is “a requirement for survival”

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Many countries around the world are uniting in regional blocs in an effort to better manage the challenges of globalization. Until now, Arab countries have remained divided, despite the enormous external pressures, domestic challenges and emerging risks they face, in a world more interconnected and complex than ever before.

Endowed with many characteristics that allow close cooperation, including a common language, culture and history, as well as geographical proximity, the Arab countries have the potential for development, prosperity and national security if they achieve integration.

This is the message conveyed by a new report entitled *Arab Integration: A 21st Century Development Imperative*, launched today by Dr. Rima Khalaf, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The report is a result of an ESCWA initiative conducted with a group of distinguished Arab thinkers from various schools of thought, occupations and regional backgrounds, reflecting the diversity that characterizes the region and that, the report argues, should form the basis of Arab integration.

Integration as called for in the report refers to a cooperative process that would bolster human development and national security while promoting a vision of the region based on guarantees of freedom, social justice and dignity for all. It means the progressive establishment of political, cultural and economic unity as part of a comprehensive Arab renaissance.

The report examines the philosophical foundations of such an endeavour, drawing on the definition of ‘human civilization’ developed by fourteenth century Arab luminary Ibn Khaldun. Taking his theories as a premise, the report contends that comprehensive Arab integration goes beyond economic liberalization to encompass all dimensions of human civilization and social organization.

Continuing from this premise, the report examines the concept of integration in Arab cultural heritage, with reference to the triad of civilization, culture and modernity. It contends that in order to instigate a true renaissance in the twenty-first century, the Arab world must reconcile tradition and modernization; freedom and responsibility; individual and collective well-being; unity and diversity.

The report indicates that since the 1950s, the Arab countries have sought to achieve economic integration, but their efforts have failed to produce real economic gains. It emphasizes the need for economic integration as a central pillar of a broader Arab integration encompassing political, social and cultural unity. It calls on the Arab countries to take swift action towards comprehensive integration in order to overcome development challenges, achieve human well-being and compete with other regional economic blocs. Towards these

ends, it advocates the swift completion of existing integration projects such as the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) and the Arab customs union; the liberalization of trade in services and the movement of capital and labour between the Arab countries; and the development of a regional production value chains.

One of the principal benefits of integration, according to the report, would be the access it would create to knowledge production and acquisition, taking into account that 'Big Science' projects remain beyond the capacity of any single Arab country. In the modern world, the knowledge economy has come to be viewed as the pinnacle of development, and knowledge and human capital have become the main criteria for assessing progress and development. In this context, the importance of the boost to Arab research and technology that would result from regional integration is difficult to exaggerate.

The report reviews several successful regional integration experiences in Europe, Latin America and Asia. Most of these models of integration were originally intended as vehicles of conventional economic integration; however, they have also yielded important social and cultural benefits. In all cases, success has been the product of sustained political will on the part of member States. Learning from the experiences of these unions in other parts of the world, the countries of the Arab region stand to reap similar benefits.

Economic integration is no longer seen as just another pillar of development; in a world dominated by powerful regional blocs, it has become a requirement for survival. The report is unequivocal in its assertion that comprehensive integration is not only a vital necessity for the Arab world; it can also launch it towards a comprehensive renaissance. If the countries of the region embrace integration, the Arabs may once again be able to produce, enjoy and share with the world the fruits of an advanced civilization.



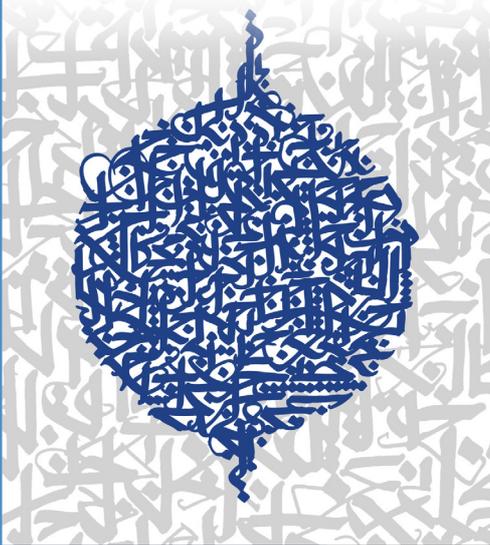
ESCWA calls for Arab Economic Integration to Revive Development

Integration would increase regional GDP by 3 per cent, create 6 million new jobs by 2020

Tunis, 25 February 2014

Arab Integration

A 21st Century Development Imperative



The Arab region abounds with opportunities for development, if only it could confront the challenges before it as a united bloc.

That is the argument made by a report launched today by Dr. Rima Khalaf, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission of Western Asia (ESCWA). The report, entitled *Arab Integration: A 21st Century Development Imperative*, argues that the model of the European Union and other economic blocs around the world holds enormous potential for the Arab countries.

Drawing on the knowledge and expertise of a group of Arab intellectuals from various disciplines, professional backgrounds and countries, the report analyses the reasons why past attempts at Arab integration have fallen short. It proceeds to set out the potential benefits of a broad economic integration that would liberalize the movement of goods, labour and services.

The report makes use of several studies and sophisticated economic models to present estimates of the effects of deepening Arab economic integration, compared to the maintenance of the status quo. It also sets out potential scenarios related to the completion of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) and the establishment of an Arab customs union.

According to the report, establishing the customs union by 2015 would represent an important step towards broader integration but would not benefit all Arab countries, necessitating mechanisms to distribute revenue from tariffs among Arab countries and compensate those countries that benefit less from the union, as well as assisting particular sectors of the economy.

Further underscoring the importance of broadening economic integration, the report presents another scenario that would gradually reduce transport costs for Arab trade and replace a section of the future migrant labour force with Arab workers. Implementing those two procedures alongside the establishment of the customs union would guarantee an increase of 3 per cent in Arab gross domestic product by 2020 and would reduce unemployment by over 4 per cent. This additional growth would generate an extra US\$760 billion in Arab revenue, equivalent to more than the total revenue of Arab countries in North Africa in 2013. Unemployment rates would drop as a result of 6 million new job opportunities, contributing to higher levels of wealth for all Arabs and combating poverty and unemployment across the region, thus responding directly to two of the central causes of the Arab uprisings that erupted in 2011.

This broader form of economic integration, the report asserts, would offer significant benefits to all Arab countries, whether rich or poor, refuting the popular belief that less-developed countries would benefit at the expense of their wealthier neighbours.

It goes on to identify a number of potential strategies for promoting free trade in services, free movement of capital and workers and the development of regional production chains.

These conditions, the report's authors contend, are among the prerequisites for a comprehensive road map that would deepen Arab economic integration in the medium and long terms.

The report calls on the Arab countries to cultivate a dynamic economic environment by taking concerted action towards inclusive economic integration. This would guarantee economic and social gains and ensure their place among the regional blocs that govern the global economy and contribute to shaping international structures and institutions. The report argues that these goals are within reach, so long as the political will exists to pursue economic integration as a path towards genuine sustainable development.

Will Arab States be able to manifest this will and move forward with integration? This and other pressing questions raised by the new report deserve a well-considered response.



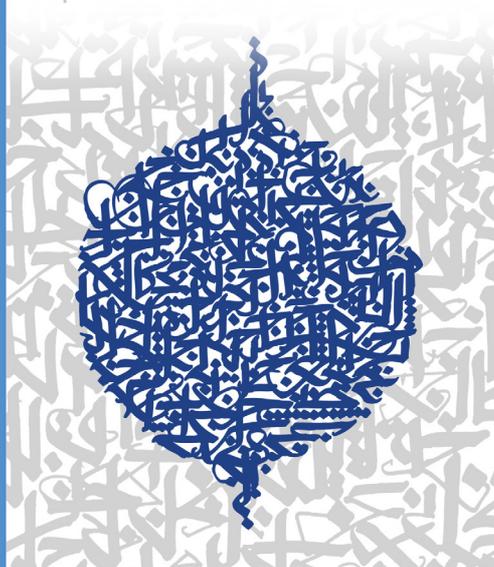
New ESCWA Report Advocates Integration through Culture and the Arts

Art, literature, music and film hold the key to Arab unity and renaissance

Tunis, 25 February 2014

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Culture is the tie that binds a community and the spark that ignites the spirit. Peoples from all Arab countries have been united by works of art and creativity that expressed their dreams and ambitions, their tragedies and defeats. Arab cultural integration should therefore be used to unite the Arab region for the sake of development, social justice and freedom.

This vision inspires the call for Arab integration made by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in a new report entitled *Arab Integration: A 21st Century Development Imperative*, launched today by Dr. Rima Khalaf, Executive Secretary of the Commission. It is the result of a collaborative ESCWA initiative that involved a group of distinguished Arab thinkers from various disciplines, occupations, and backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the Arab region — a diversity which, the report argues, should form the basis of Arab integration.

While integration has often been viewed as an exclusively political and economic issue, the report argues that cultural integration is fundamental to the success of its proposal. It explores Arab identity and common Arab causes as they have been expressed in great works of art, literature, music and cinema from across the region.

The report contends that state cultural and educational policies have smothered freedom of thought and contributed to the division of the Arab region. Attempts to legitimize post-independence nation-States have almost wiped out the Arab memory, with each country focused on its own recent past to the exclusion of the common history that preceded the delineation of its borders. Despite this fact, Arab communities have maintained cultural links and resisted the isolation imposed by state policies. The report indicates that the Arabic language and the cultural and historical unity of the Arab world have withstood official policies that sought to undermine them.

The report also criticizes state censorship of information and culture, which have principally targeted intellectuals and artists, leaving ideologues to fill the vacuum. The danger posed by these ideologues has only increased as they have presented themselves to the masses as the sole custodians of Arab heritage.

Nevertheless, the new ESCWA report gives numerous examples of the ways in which creative expression has withstood these attacks. It recounts how literature, music, art and films have revived the Arab dream of liberation from suffering, oppression and authoritarianism, acting as the voice of the people with regards to various issues of politics, society, identity and destiny. It notes how Arab writers and intellectuals have returned time and again to the sources of their Arab identity, searching for answers to questions raised by the harsh realities of the day, and for glimpses of light in the darkness. These works were read, seen, shared and appreciated by people throughout the Arab region.

Films about Arab identity and other social issues have also played a role in courageously depicting social injustice and suffering, grievances which ultimately incited the civil uprisings which shook the Arab world in 2011. The spread of satellite television channels have boosted social interaction, providing the Arab people with a shared cultural space. Another key achievement of satellite television has been to bring customs and traditions, as well as dialects, closer together. The literary Arabic language has similarly been strengthened by thoughtful religious and historical programmes.

The report also honours the primordial role of music in Arab popular culture and artistic expression. Over centuries, music has demonstrated its ability to transcend time and space, censorship and classification. Through music, notes the report, Jerusalem, Beirut, Baghdad and Damascus have come to exist in the hearts of all Arabs, a bond that has resisted decades of political divisions and strife.

The report concludes that every form of cultural and creative expression conveys a powerful message that resonates across political and geographic boundaries. Art and culture are the record of the Arabs' past, the mirror of their present, and the lamp that can illuminate their future. Together with the Arabic language, art, literature, music and film hold the key to integration and a twenty-first century Arab renaissance.

Strictly confidential before 25 February 2014 at 10 a.m. Beirut time



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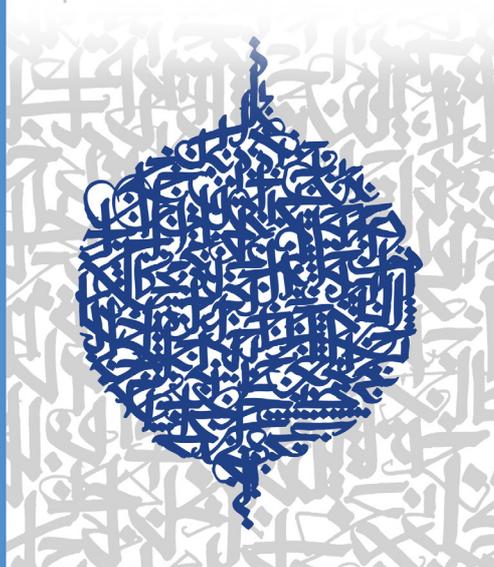
ESCWA Proposes a Strategic Vision for Arab Integration and Renaissance

A new report makes a powerful case for how integration can be realized and sustained

Tunis, 25 February 2014

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Together, with a political will and the participation of the people, the Arab countries can reap the enormous benefits of social, political and economic union. Integration would lead to the establishment of a free Arab citizenship area characterized by prosperity, social justice and human dignity, heralding a twenty-first century Arab renaissance.

This is the main message conveyed by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in a new report entitled *Arab Integration: A 21st Century Development Imperative*, launched today by Dr. Rima Khalaf, Executive Secretary of the Commission. The report is the result of a collaborative ESCWA initiative that involved a group of distinguished Arab thinkers from various disciplines, occupations, and backgrounds.

Pointing to the chronic and emerging challenges that face the Arab region, the report calls on the Arab countries to revive efforts towards integration, which it argues is no longer an option for the region so much as an urgent necessity. It notes that, while other regions have successfully integrated into powerful blocs, the Arab countries have so far failed to establish the united front they need to withstand shocks, create opportunities and meet the challenges of the new century.

The report provides a strategic vision and plan of action for comprehensive Arab integration, which would enable the Arab world to embark on a path to renaissance and achieve three fundamental goals: ensuring the freedom and dignity of all people in the region; establishing a strong and diversified Arab production structure; and reviving the Arab culture.

The report notes that the Arab countries have made several ambitious attempts at unity at different times in history. But these efforts were not sustained and rarely capitalized on the unique characteristics of the region or its abundant resources. It argues that the failure of Arab countries to adopt unified positions left them acutely vulnerable to foreign interference and opened the way for foreign powers to propose or impose alternative models of integration that sought less to promote Arab cooperation or the priorities of the Arab countries than to orient the region towards outside interests. .

The strategy proposed by the report is centred on ending unemployment and poverty; promoting knowledge acquisition and production; reforming the educational systems to enhance analytical skills and innovation capabilities; supporting scientific research and technological development; developing alternative renewable energy sources; and enhancing the capacity to develop Arab software and expand the presence of digital Arabic content on the Internet.

The strategy includes a series of measures to facilitate the movement of people and goods between Arab countries; build the infrastructure for Arab integration — including road and rail networks, bridges, gas and electrical networks, maritime routes, communication networks,

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and streamlined customs clearance procedures — and establish mechanisms for disaster relief and assisting refugees and displaced persons. It also proposes the establishment of a number of institutions, including an Arab integration fund to which all Arab countries would contribute, according to their means. The fund would finance Arab integration and research projects to strengthen national security throughout the region.

The report goes on to argue that the Arab region cannot become free without the liberation of those Arab territories currently under Israeli occupation. It calls on the Arabs to pursue what has already been done by several non-governmental organizations to deter settlement building in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It recommends the prohibition of trade in goods produced in Israeli settlements and coordination with international civil society to designate institutions located within Israeli settlements as ineligible for grants, scholarships, awards or other forms of financial assistance.

The report notes that one of the advantages of Arab political integration would be Arab unity in international forums, particularly the United Nations. It argues that Arab coordination should not be limited to the issue of Palestine or ending foreign hegemony; rather, it must include the whole range of issues addressed by the international community, such as the environment, the status of women, development and trade, thereby ensuring that international decisions are in line with the goal of development in the Arab world.

The report maintains that there will be no renaissance in the Arab world without intellectual renewal, which would help the Arabs to overcome the state of dependence that has stifled innovation and creative thinking in the past. Stressing that Islam would lose its revolutionary spirit if it ceased to promote critical reflection and innovation, it recommends restoring independent reason to the interpretation of scripture. Through constructive criticism, Muslims can change confessional and institutional traditions that have corrupted religious thought in the past and resulted in stagnation.

Following the outbreak of popular uprisings throughout the Arab world in 2011, a long era of authoritarian control is drawing to a close. As calls for good governance, economic security and greater sociopolitical freedoms echo across the region, it is clear that the challenges facing Arab Governments and civil society are on a scale too great for any country to confront on its own. This historic moment has provided an unprecedented impetus for Arab integration, which has the potential to energize the entire region. This new report from ESCWA makes a powerful case for why, this time, the dream of integration can be realized and sustained.