

# Five minutes with Timothy Reno of the International Policy and Leadership Institute: “Transformation and consolidation of changes in the Arab Spring countries takes time.”

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*The International Policy and Leadership Institute (IPLI) is a platform for policy-makers and students to interact and learn from each other. [Timothy Reno](#) founded the institute in 2010. Since its launch, IPLI has been particularly involved in building capacity in the Arab Spring countries. In an interview with EUOPP editors Chris Gilson and Julian Kirchherr, Reno argues that the international community must be patient – progressive democratic reform throughout the Middle East will not happen overnight and the international community must have patience and craft policies that support a long term development effort in the region.*



## **What does the International Policy and Leadership Institute (IPLI) do?**

IPLI's main objective is to promote good governance in the Euro-Mediterranean region by creating forums in which graduate students of public affairs and international relations can communicate and network with each other and with international policy makers, with the purpose of frankly debating challenging policy issues in view of articulating potential solutions.

Such forums, which take the form of conferences, round-tables, and symposium events, are designed to provide intensive learning experiences and a mutually beneficial exchange between students and policy makers. Tangibly, students gain invaluable knowledge at these forums by interacting closely with policy makers who have extensive applied experience in their respective fields. IPLI forums allow them to move out of the academic, “theoretical” arena to catch a glimpse of policy making in action. Policy-makers have the opportunity to converse directly with students and can provide examples that may provoke students to reflect on the applicability of accepted theories in real world contexts. These conversations can be more instructive than even the best classroom lecture. On the other hand, students can bring a fresh perspective to policy-makers. During IPLI events, I have witnessed many occasions where a policy-maker has acknowledged how a student provided him or her with a new angle on viewing an issue.

## **What inspired you to found the IPLI two years ago, and what are the issues you are trying to address?**

The inspiration for IPLI came to me when I was studying at the Master of Public Affairs program at Sciences Po Paris. I wanted to foster more direct student dialogue with policy makers, so I founded IPLI as a mechanism to democratize and expand the sphere of those actively engaged in policy debates within the academic community. At the time, I was tired of seeing so many institutes, even those within schools, launching restricted attendance roundtables where a few fortunate academics would get to interact with a policy-maker and debate policy challenges and prospects for future governance. The standard refrain of “students don't understand enough about issues to meaningfully participate” was unacceptable to me. IPLI aims to prove that students can indeed understand sophisticated policy issues very well, and that if you give them a chance to engage and be a part of the

debate, they will surprise you.

## **How is the IPLI supporting the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region?**

Through a variety of initiatives: When it was established, IPLI focused on raising awareness of the evolving issues in the MENA region. For instance, IPLI was among the first policy institutes in the world to launch a conference to discuss the Arab Spring revolutions with thinkers and activists from the countries in question. Our first conference on these issues happened in Malta on March 10 – 11, 2011, just days after two Libyan fighter pilots defected to Malta. Additionally, IPLI was also the first policy institute to organize a direct meeting, in Tunis, between students from European policy schools and Tunisian students who participated in the protests that led to the ousting of Ben Ali, the purpose being to gain the perspectives of young Tunisians on their aspirations for their country's future. IPLI incorporated these perspectives into a policy brief that was circulated throughout universities in Tunisia and in the European Parliament. It was among the only publications of its kind to take into account the thoughts of the future leaders of Tunisia. Most recently, IPLI, in cooperation with partner academic institutions, has begun developing a project to create customized public policy training programs for civil servants who will be working in the MENA region.

## **What do you think is the most pressing policy challenge facing the Arab Spring countries?**

The challenge is really for the international community to have a long term outlook and to craft policies that will take into account the fact that transformation and consolidation of changes in the Arab Spring countries is not going to happen overnight. The situations in these countries are going to be volatile for a long time to come, and there will not be a steady movement forward. Progress will come in fits and starts and, yes, there will surely be major setbacks along the way. Other parts of the world, including Europe, took time to forge their own post-revolutionary identities; the international community must not give the Arab Spring countries a deadline for reform.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPPE – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

### **About the author**

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#### **Timothy Reno – International Policy and Leadership Institute**

Timothy Reno is a graduate of the Master of Public Affairs program at Sciences Po Paris. His main policy research focus includes the study of security and development issues in the Euro-Mediterranean region. His specialization in these issues stems from his academic and professional experience in the region.



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