A second Arab Spring
The protest movement against the Algerian president and government has amplified the voices of those who evoke similarities to the dawn of the Arab Spring of 2011 and warn against renewed destabilisation of the region. This comparison comes to mind but has little justification. Unlike in 2011, the protests have been peaceful and President Bouteflika, after much hesitation, has now finally resigned. Another reason the protests have been without conflict is that there has hardly been any third party intervention. Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia had attempted to influence developments during the uprising in 2011. Rather, current events appear to be nudging Algeria closer to developments in neighbouring countries. Reform-minded Tunisia and Morocco have welcomed this process.

Stability – at a cost
Unlike in Egypt and Tunisia, the government in 2011 succeeded in quickly defusing the tense social and economic situation. Thanks to the rapid rise in commodity prices (2011–2014), the country had sufficient financial resources to increase subsidies, e.g. for fuel, expand social housing construction and lift public sector wages. When the oil price fell after 2014, the status quo was secured with the aid of the Oil Stabilisation Fund. The option of financing further expenditure from the Fund has been depleted since 2017. Since then, economic stability has been financed by higher sovereign debt.

Limits of the economic model
The limitations to Algeria’s economic development – and to its political model – are now becoming apparent. The main problem of the country – and the entire region – is labour market participation (especially of young people). It is North Africa’s lowest. This situation is fuelling dissatisfaction with the government but the desire for political change continues to be the main focus of current protests.