

**TRAVELS AMONG EUROPE'S  
MUSLIM NEIGHBOURS  
THE QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY**

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# FOREWORD

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CEPS is very happy to publish this book, since it fits perfectly with our new series on Islam and the European Union. In 2007 CEPS published its first two edited volumes on Islamic issues, one on the internal challenges for European society represented by the new Muslim minorities,<sup>1</sup> and the second on political Islam in the Mediterranean Arab states and Turkey.<sup>2</sup>

The second of these books is close in subject matter but quite complementary to the present work, which was originally published in Dutch by two Members of the European Parliament, Joost Lagendijk and Jan Marinus Wiersma. Both books look at democratic political parties of the Mediterranean region with Islamist foundations or origins. They are both investigating the ideologies, ambitions and views of Islamist parties that aspire to political power through the ballot box, and who reject violent political action, radical Islamic ideology and authoritarianism. The earlier CEPS book was based on structured interviews with Muslim democrat leaders of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Turkey. The present book delves into the same subject matter in four countries - Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, Egypt and Morocco. However the method of the present book is quite different. The authors travelled extensively in the four countries and conducted interviews with a wide range of key individuals. The accounts they give are more free-flowing with ideas, and often quite vivid in describing the context, from the coffee shop in Bosnia to the Islamist leader's apartment in Rabat.

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<sup>1</sup> *European Islam – Challenges for Society and Public Policy*, Michael Emerson and Richard Youngs (eds), CEPS, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> *Political Islam and European Foreign Policy – Perspectives from Muslim Democrats of the Mediterranean*, Samir Amghar, Amel Boubekeur and Michael Emerson (eds), CEPS, 2007.

The authors have an underlying theme, that of the quest for democracy on the part of these Muslim democrat parties. The special place of Turkey is well analysed, both for its centuries of Ottoman influence in the Balkans through to the careful interest in the role model of the AKP party as perceived by the Muslim democrats of Egypt and Morocco.

In conclusion the authors do not hesitate to affirm their bottom line positions on two matters of strategic importance to the European Union. They advocate Turkey's accession to the EU in due course, conditioned on the usual criteria for EU membership. They also urge the EU institutions and member states to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Muslim democrat parties of the Mediterranean states. This presents no problem in Turkey or Bosnia. But it is still the norm for the EU to ignore the parties in the Arab Mediterranean states in deference to the preferences of the authoritarian kings or presidents of the region. Interestingly, these two positions on Turkish accession and on engaging with Arab Muslim democrats enjoy majority support in the European Parliament; but the majority of public opinion in the EU is against Turkish accession, and the majority of EU member states still appear to ignore the Muslim democrat parties. This in itself makes the book a significant political statement in the midst of the cross-currents among the EU institutions and in European public opinion, as well as a highly readable and informative analysis of this topical and complex issue.

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April 2008

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# INTRODUCTION

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## Ring

“A ring of friends surrounding the Union [...], from Morocco to Russia”.<sup>3</sup> This is how, in late 2002, the then President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, described the key challenge facing Europe following the planned enlargement of 2004. The accession process had built up momentum, and the former communist countries of Central Europe had been stabilised and were transforming themselves into democracies. EU membership was not directly on the agenda for countries beyond the enlargement horizon, however. How could Europe prevent new dividing lines forming at its borders? How could the European Union guarantee stability, security and peace along its perimeter?

Those questions were perhaps most pertinent to the EU’s southern neighbours. Since 11 September 2001, in particular, our relations with the Islamic world have been imbued with a sense of urgency. Political developments in our Islamic neighbour countries bordering the Mediterranean could have a tremendous impact on European security. Although the area is nearby, the political distance is great. Amid threatening language about a ‘clash of civilisations’, the EU quickly drew the conclusion that conciliation and cooperation, rather than confrontation, constituted the best strategy for dealing with its southern neighbours.

The idea was a kind of ‘enlargement lite’: a long-term strategy to strengthen cooperation, with the focus on economic cooperation and trade, dialogue and gradual political reform. In the long run, Europe’s neighbours

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<sup>3</sup> Romano Prodi (2002) “A Wider Europe - A Proximity Policy as the key to stability”, speech given at the Sixth ECSA-World Conference, Brussels, 5-6 December.

would be able to participate in everything, as it were, except the European institutions themselves. This ever closer cooperation would be based on shared values: democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. This line of thought came to form the basis of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

## **Barcelona**

Did this not sound familiar? In the mid-1990s the EU and its Mediterranean neighbours laid down very ambitious plans, which they called the “Barcelona Process”. This was a time of optimism. The 1993 Oslo Accords had not yet collapsed. A solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seemed to be in sight. The Cold War was over, and democracy and the free market system were gaining ground. Europe would be able to help North Africa and the Middle East, too, take a great stride towards freedom, prosperity and democracy.

The Barcelona Declaration was signed in November 1995 by the EU and 12 Mediterranean countries, including Morocco, Turkey, Israel and the Palestinian territories. This declaration held out the prospect of a ‘Euro-Mediterranean Partnership’, with three pillars: a political and security component, an economic and financial aspect, and social and cultural rapprochement. One of the objectives was a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area by 2010. It was the first pillar, however – a kind of ‘security pact’ – that was the most eye-catching: not only because all countries made a commitment to working towards peaceful relations, but also because democracy and human rights were recognised by all parties as necessary preconditions for lasting security and stability.

These were noble objectives and honourable ideas, but did they work in practice? What is the situation as regards democracy among the EU’s Mediterranean neighbours? Elections are indeed held, but there is definitely room for improvement in circumstances such as freedom of the press and freedom of expression. Electoral fraud and intimidation are the rule rather than the exception; not that this makes a great deal of difference as, in many cases, parliaments have little say. At each regional summit with the EU, ministers reaffirm the vital importance of democracy, but the dialogue has largely reached a stalemate. In practice, hardly any far-reaching political reforms have been carried out. The fact that the Barcelona Process is so little known – at least in our region – is partly attributable to its poor results. Critics have even called the process an out-and-out failure:

Europe is an important neighbour, but not a strategic player. Turkey is the exception; but then that country withdrew from the Barcelona Process when it was accepted as an EU candidate country.

### **Friends?**

Why is it so difficult for democracy to take root in the EU's Mediterranean countries? Does Islam have anything to do with it, or are there other causes? What can and should Europe do to promote democracy among its Islamic neighbours? Can Europe call its 'friends' to account for their repressive practices and spur them on to change?

We visited four countries and investigated the social, and often political, role played by Islam. In all these countries, the political and social situation does stand in the way of democratic reform. We will begin our quest in the Western Balkans, where divisions along religious lines were a factor in the ethnic wars of the 1990s, and work our way up to the present day. The problem here is not so much formal democracy as the construction of functioning states. Until politicians in these countries can overcome their differences by democratic means, the EU will be unable to redeem its pledge of accession.

It is also logical to examine Turkey and Morocco: their political and cultural distance from Europe is relatively small. This, combined with the large Turkish and Moroccan communities in the EU, makes developments in these countries all the more relevant. Morocco is officially a secular state, but the King is the head of the religious community. In Turkey the confrontation between the secular establishment and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has its roots in political Islam, is itself a source of tension.

Relations between Turkey, Morocco and the EU are completely different. In Turkey's case, as in the Balkans, the EU can impose stringent requirements – not least concerning democracy – as part of the accession process. The EU does not enjoy that degree of influence in Morocco. Nevertheless, the relative openness of Morocco, which is conducting a policy of cautious liberalisation under the reform-minded King, Mohammed VI, contrasts with developments in Egypt, the most important country in the Arab world. Under President Mubarak, a secular autocrat in a country with Islam written into its constitution, the situation is more one of democratic regression than liberalisation. In both countries, however,

Islamic political movements are in a strong position: in Morocco's case chiefly the Justice and Development Party (PJD) and in Egypt's case the Muslim Brotherhood.

The lack of democracy has its origins first and foremost in the authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes that for decades have held sway chiefly in North Africa and the Middle East. Here, pluralism and elections tend to be democratic window-dressing to take the wind out of the opposition's sails or to satisfy Western donors. Power is in the hands of a political elite that has no direct interest in change. This 'shadow power', or 'deep state', obstructs rapid progress. The status quo is monitored by means of patronage, clientelism and, where necessary, repression. The situation in Turkey is substantially different, but there, too, there is resistance to change from within. The army is the self-appointed guardian of the secular order and opposes political reform.

On the other hand, autocrats provide a degree of stability. The United States is often accused of keeping dictators in power while it is in American interests to do so, but Europe's position with regard to the powers that be is just as ambivalent. We cooperate with them on combating the threat of terrorism and on controlling our borders, and lay down this cooperation in action plans and association agreements. The EU openly condemns its partners' undemocratic practices and human rights breaches on a regular basis, but is ultimately prepared to put up with them. In this, Europe's aspirations to promote the democratic rule of law conflict with other interests and the harsh political reality.

## **Political Islam**

But what is the alternative? Is there not a risk of these countries falling into the hands of fundamentalists if democracy breaks out? In this area, we inevitably run into political Islam. Indeed, it is Islamic movements that are challenging the establishment. They even show some degree of interest in participating in the political process. Are these Islamists interested in democracy only as a means to win power and establish a theocracy, or are they really prepared to accept the democratic rule of law and work within a constitutional framework? What kind of policies would they pursue if they came to power? What are their objectives? What is their attitude to the advance of modernisation, as represented by satellite TV, the internet and tourism?

In Turkey the formerly Islamist AKP is responsible for the most fundamental political reform since Atatürk. It takes an entirely moderate position on religion. In other countries, however, Islamist parties have thus far remained excluded from power, and so there is little or no basis for comparison. Could we trust the PJD and the Muslim Brotherhood if they were to assume governmental responsibilities?

## **Distinction**

We cannot possibly disregard political Islam if we wish to promote democracy in countries with a majority Muslim population. As is the case with many broad, abstract terms, 'political Islam' has many rival definitions.

Following US researcher Graham Fuller, we can define political Islam as: the belief that Islam serves as a source of inspiration for how political and social life should be constituted and the desire to work towards implementing this. Thus, political Islam - or, to put it another way, Islamism - encompasses the full spectrum, ranging from pragmatic politicians who use Islam as an underlying basis for their convictions and activities, through to fundamentalists who reject any deviation from or addition to the original Islamic ideas on government and society. This book refers to all of these variations as 'Islamist'.

The parties and political movements we visited and investigated all have their own place in this spectrum. The Turkish AKP places itself outside the Islamist spectrum, avoids any designation associated with Islam, and now describes itself as a 'conservative democratic' party. Since many AKP politicians have their roots in political Islam, the best way of characterising the AKP is as 'formerly Islamist'.

At the opposite end of the scale are hardcore Islamist movements such as the Palestinian Hamas movement (one we only touch upon). They believe that Islam should still be an essential guiding principle in the organisation of state and society. More importantly still, they are prepared to use violence to move closer to that goal. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has distanced itself from such violence and is now more flexible regarding the precise role of Islam. They can best be described as 'pure' Islamists taking the first steps towards modernisation and moderation. The Moroccan PJD is already some way further down that route, and is thus best described as 'moderate Islamist'.

## Salafis

Another classification important for the purposes of this book is provided by the International Crisis Group (ICG). In one of its reports, the ICG uses the term 'Islamic activism' to categorise the multitude of political and social movements based on the Islamic faith. Its classification helps to clarify the term 'Islamism' used in this book. It should be added, however, that this book focuses exclusively on countries in which the vast majority of Muslims belong to the Sunni, or main, branch of Islam. The other branch, the Shia, is almost absent in the Balkans, Turkey and the North African countries.

The ICG writes that Sunni activism can be divided into three main categories. The first is the political Islamism described above.

The second category is missionary Islamism, which focuses on intensifying faith, on preserving the unity of the Muslim community (*umma*) and upholding the Islamic moral order, and on introducing Islamic law (*sharia*). The main movement within this category is '*Salafism*'. This is a fundamentalist movement based on the practices of the early Muslim community, which has gained a great deal of influence in the Islamic world. This has developed partly thanks to Saudi financing of Salafi mosques and Islamic schools abroad, as can be seen clearly in the Balkans. The radical Saudi branch of Salafism is known as *Wahhabism*. Wahhabis rarely refer to themselves as such; most prefer the broader term '*Salafi*'.

In principle, Salafis do not seek political power, and reject Islamic political movements. Nevertheless, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is Salafi in origin. Even though this movement no longer focuses exclusively on missionary work, many still refer to it as Salafi. The Brotherhood is an example of Salafis moving over to one of the other categories, as sometimes happens. Another example is the PJD in Morocco. Usually, moderate Salafis become politically active as Islamists, whilst radicalised Salafis sometimes move over to more violent forms of Islamic activism.

This brings us to al Qaeda and related groups in the third category, which can be referred to as jihadi activists. This category contains the terrorist groups that are waging an all-out war against the West. Other jihadi organisations are waging a 'war of liberation' against non-Islamic troops, as is happening in Afghanistan and the Palestinian territories. In addition, there are jihadis whose objective is to topple a regime they consider godless. Examples can be found in Algeria and Iraq. This whole

category plays a major role in the perception of Sunni activism, but has no place in a book that advocates a strategy for the promotion of democracy.

### **Sufis**

Adherents of Islamic mystical brotherhoods, or 'Sufis' as they are often called, fall outside this Islamic activism. There were many Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire: in the Balkans, in Anatolia, and also in the Arabic world. They strive to perceive divine truth intuitively, and thus by definition do not focus directly on society or politics. In present-day Turkey Sufi brotherhoods still play an important social role. Since their ideas vary from very fundamentalist to modernist, however, they do not play a decisive role as such in the current political debate between secularists and former Islamists. They are represented in both camps. In Morocco Sufism is the dominant religious system. Sufis lay no claim to political power and exert a moderating influence on the Moroccan state apparatus.

### **Democratic intervention**

The theoretical question as to whether Islam and democracy are even reconcilable is the subject of heated debate in the West, among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Like the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), we consider such a discussion somewhat unproductive. The answer is determined largely by the way in which Muslims interpret their faith and the attitude they display on the basis of this. These interpretations and behaviours vary widely in the Islamic world and are often very much a product of time and place. The majority of Turkish Muslims have a fundamentally different understanding of the role of Islam in society from the average Saudi believer.

As we see it, the basic principle is that EU policy should give greater priority to democratisation. Indeed, it remains to be seen to what extent the stability of the current authoritarian regimes bordering the Mediterranean is real. All countries in the region are contending with both internal tensions and external pressure. They have not escaped economic globalisation, political criticism from both within and without, or discontent among the population over poverty and social inequality, corruption and lack of freedom. Democracy is no panacea, but it is a far better guarantee of progress and stability in the longer term.

We cannot dissociate the desirability of democratisation aid from the possible implications, or from the issue of whether there are genuine possibilities for democratisation. Democracy can hope to succeed only if there is fertile ground for it to take root and grow. In the words of Amsterdam University researcher André Gerrits, democratisation is “an exercise in pragmatic idealism.”<sup>4</sup> What counts is not the intention, but the results and consequences. The US lost sight of this in Iraq. In spite of the good intentions of some of the supporters of the war, Iraq is proof that regime change is deficient as a democratisation strategy. It is top-down policy at its most extreme, ignoring the risks and implications.

It is a hard lesson that has been learnt – for one thing, because it has tarnished the whole idea of democratisation. Democratisation aid is being equated with US interventionism. This does not help win hearts and minds, particularly in Islamic countries, where the US is already accused of selective vision: Saudi Arabia an ally, Iraq an adversary. This gives ruling regimes a pretext for obstructing change. Iraq has not made it any easier for outsiders to help with democratisation. The EU is not immune to this, and the accusation of double standards is levelled just as much at us. The EU’s refusal to enter into dialogue with Hamas, even though that party won just about the only free elections ever held in the Middle East, has not done Europe’s credibility in the region any good.

In light of this, what is the best way of promoting democracy? Is it primarily a matter of supporting all manner of non-governmental organisations in order to spread the idea of democracy? Or is it more important that Europe take a tougher line on regimes that ignore democratic principles? Whom should we choose as partners when we set to work on a country? In short, what course can we take with regard to our Muslim neighbours? These questions were reason enough to set off along Europe’s periphery in search of the role of Islam, of obstacles to progress and in hope of encouraging developments. We started our journey in Bosnia where we met an old friend. We discussed with him the fallout of the war in his country between 1992 and 1995 on the Bosnian Muslims and their feelings on Islam and Europe. We met the moderate and inspiring Grand Mufti of Sarajevo and listened as he described, with passion, his Islamic and European identity and his aversion to the efforts of

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<sup>4</sup> André Gerrits (2006), *Democratie door interventie*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

fundamentalists to make headway on the Balkans. We were surprised to hear from Bosnians and Albanians that for them the way the EU deals with Turkey's accession is a litmus test. If Europe shows that it is sincere and keeps its promises to Turkey, Balkan Muslims will believe that also their future really does lie in Europe.

During many visits to Turkey over the last couple of years it became clear how deep the divide is between the governing AKP party with its roots in political Islam and a large part of Turkish society. As defenders of Turkish accession to the EU we found ourselves, during many debates and conversations, in the odd position of being closer to the former Islamists than to our natural secular allies. Since 2002 Turkey has come closer to meeting Europe's demands because a conservative party is changing the way the country is run. Despite the strong opposition of the forces that defend the status quo and do not trust the motives of prime minister Erdogan and his party of modernising Islamists.

The efforts in Turkey to combine a liberal economic policy and a pro-Western outlook with traditional Islamic values is being observed with some excitement in countries like Morocco and Egypt. Two leading countries in the Arab world; Europe's neighbours on the other shore of the Mediterranean. In Morocco we met Islamists that want to copy AKP's success story in Turkey. But we also discussed the pros and cons of the heavily controlled democratic system in Morocco with radical Islamists that have not decided yet whether to participate in the process or remain outside it.

In Egypt the Muslim Brothers face another dilemma. Despite all the repression by the authoritarian regime they want to take part in the democratic process. But talking to them made it clear that the shift from a fundamentalist Islamic movement to a political party respecting the rules of the democratic game is not that easy. There are still many 'grey areas', key issues for many Europeans on which the Egyptian Islamists do not yet have a clear position.

And the end of our travels we tried to draw some conclusions about Europe's role in trying to democratise these countries - our neighbours with their majority Muslim populations that lie so close to our borders but that sometimes seem so far away.

# 1. MUSLIMS IN THE BALKANS: A SPECIAL REPORT

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It is him all right. Unmistakably Mustafa, no longer the student of forty years ago, more grown-up now, but otherwise hardly changed. A tall, distinguished-looking man who clearly feels at ease in the arrivals hall. Sarajevo airport is his home ground.

He admits to being Mr Eminefendić, an old friend. He shrugs off the blatant flattery that time has not left its mark on him. The whole of Bosnia has suffered in recent years and has the scars to prove it. He does too, he says, emphasising his softly spoken words with elegant but unmistakeable gestures. He used to work for the national airline of Yugoslavia and had contacts all over the world, as far afield as Libya, but now, following the break-up of the old homeland, he is head of the small and not yet very sound *Air Bosna* and his travels take him little further than Stuttgart and Istanbul.

“Everything here is different now, only the names have stayed the same and that gives the impression that things haven’t changed. But it’s a false impression. Go to Jajce – it’s a real disappointment” regrets Mustafa. Jajce is the town where he was born, on the road from Sarajevo to Banja Luka, and where he once managed a no-frills campsite to earn a bit more money, but also to gain the practical experience needed for his studies in tourism.

## Jajce

It turns out to be worse than disappointing. What was once a colourful oriental little town in the 1960s, overlooked by a royal fortress, and with a Franciscan Catholic abbey in one of its outlying districts, a proud Serbian Orthodox church in the centre and one or two mosques with soaring minarets, is now a ghost town. The spectacular waterfall is still there, but the tourists no longer come to admire it.

Before the war Jajce was home to about fifty thousand people, but now, after the return of the Muslim community, there are no more than about twenty thousand. And they scratch a meagre living amongst the ruins, picking fruit from trees that poke up through derelict roofs, tending vegetable plots on grounds where houses belonging to neighbours of a different religion once stood. They throw rubbish into the gaping, water-filled remains of cellars, into which other properties have collapsed, and they are despondent, above all they are despondent.

In the early 1990s the town endured two lengthy periods of almost medieval siege warfare. First by the Serbs, then by the Croats. For months the populace was starved. Out of spite, and that is something not easily forgotten.

Bosnia-Herzegovina had three years of war, from 1992 to 1995. Following a referendum the country, previously a republic of Yugoslavia, declared independence in March 1992, like Slovenia and Croatia before it. But Bosnia-Herzegovina had a problem. Its population, unlike that of Slovenia or Croatia, was made up of minorities: Serbs, Croats and a group who were identified by the name of their religion – because ethnically they were indistinguishable from the rest – Muslims.

The Bosnian Serbs had not voted in the referendum, seeing no advantage in independence. Backed by the Milošević regime in Belgrade they subsequently sought to gain control of significant parts of the region. And they did not shrink from violence. All in all the war took the lives of roughly one hundred thousand people, 65% of them Muslims, a quarter Serbs and the rest Croats and Roma. Of the original 4.4 million inhabitants, a good half fled or was driven out. Only some of them have been able to return.

## **Café**

Forty years ago the first tourists came to Jajce and the rest of Bosnia. The little streets of Jajce, at that time still a walled town, were busy, almost always in shade from the projecting upper floors of buildings, typical of the old Turkish style. Shopkeepers sold their wares on the street, mothers in harem trousers sauntered round doing their errands and here and there a peasant in a fez would try to prod a heavily laden donkey into moving a bit faster.

None of that remains. The mosques have been blown up; up in the town there is one operating again, as best it can, and in the centre a new one, prefab-style, is being built. Of the Serbian Orthodox church an unsteady tower still stands and the Franciscan church is a ruin, through which the wind blows. The town gates are gone, and so are the small streets close by; a few new cafés have sprung up, five for Muslims and six for Croats – there are no Serbs left. They live in a separate area in their own part of the country, by the beautiful Pliva Lake, where international canoeing championships used to be held and where the small municipal campsite that Mustafa once managed was situated.

With aid from elsewhere a modern shopping centre has been built, on a historic site. Right next door to it the concrete mixers are churning, to rebuild the mosque. Gone are the sleepy terraces and beer gardens where musicians struck up the Drina March and where Mustafa and his friends would scrounge cigarettes for a whole evening over one cup of Turkish coffee.

Early in the morning it seems as if the past has not disappeared altogether. At first light, even before the minarets have sung everybody awake, a white shadow shoots past. A bearded young man in a long white robe. No one greets him.

## **Dissident**

He's a *mujahideen*, they say. Since the war just a few hundred of them are left in the whole of Bosnia, of the five thousand who up to 1995 had rushed to the aid of their co-believers. From Pakistan they came, from Saudi-Arabia, Malaysia, Afghanistan and wherever Muslim brothers heard the call to help their threatened coreligionists. After all, the West, with its arms embargo, had left the Bosnian Muslims in the lurch.

Some in the West, and the Americans especially, did not really mind this too much, it is said. They saw the embargo as the foolish brainchild of naive European politicians. After all *someone* had to help Alija Izetbegović and his Muslims. Had not Izetbegović been a dissident, put in prison during Tito's time? This opponent of dictatorship had to be a democrat and his emancipation movement, which dated back to a first Bosnian Muslim party founded in 1906, deserved support. It was no great problem that that support came from the somewhat problematic quarter of the mujahideen. The Americans also initially backed the strict Taliban in Afghanistan

because the Taliban were resisting the Russian occupying forces. Unfortunately, in choosing coalition partners one can't always be too picky.

All these years later it is obvious to everyone that the contribution of these Islamist allies, which included the formation of a separate *El Mujahid* battalion, was almost guaranteed to produce a backlash. At the time there was some surprise that people like Milošević invoked this support in their own defence. After all this regiment of Islamist immigrants proved the necessity of waging war in Bosnia and later Kosovo. How could a defence be mounted against the growing Islamist threat otherwise? Islam, they claimed, was not yet quite at the gates of Vienna, but in the absence of stout resistance by the Serbs, it soon would be. And with so many Muslims living in the big cities of Western Europe, the regime in Belgrade expected to capitalise on national sensitivities elsewhere too. An Islamist state, whether in Bosnia or an Islamist-Albanian Kosovo, could not be permitted.

This rhetoric did not cease on the death of Milošević. Milorad Dodik, the social-democratic leader of the Serbs in Republika Srpska, the Serb entity of Bosnia centred on Banja Luka, cites this threat as justification for his new nationalistic policies.

### **Forced marriages**

Following the Dayton Accords imposed by the international community, which ended three years of war and violence in Bosnia in December 1995, the mujahedeen had to leave, except for the few who had made homes there and the small group of heroes granted Bosnian nationality as a reward for their outstanding services. Pressure for them to leave intensified after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, when the world suddenly began to take a very different view of Islamic fundamentalism. In early 2007, tough measures were taken. 367 mujahedeen who had acquired Bosnian nationality were stripped of it and they must now leave the country, unless the courts rule otherwise. Most of these people are of Turkish origin, whilst others are from Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, Syria and even 20 or so from Russia. They had, allegedly, exaggerated the services they had rendered or had pressured the authorities into unjustifiably granting them a Bosnian passport.

Some of these mujahedeen are even accused of having forced women into marriage. A name regularly quoted in this context is that of Šemsudin Mehmedović, now party leader in the Sarajevo parliament of the SDA, the

big and chiefly conservative nationalist party of the Muslims. Opponents say he is the al-Qaeda leader in Bosnia. During the mid-1990s he was chief of police in Zenica, the area where the mujahedeen were most strongly concentrated.

Zenica, a fairly large industrial town located in an open valley, survived the war unscathed thanks to the presence of foreign Muslim fighters and as a result it is one of the few remaining examples in Bosnia of the dreary Tito concrete that was typical in the 1960s and 1970s of Yugoslavia's transition from the previous century to the modern age.

Police chief Mehmedović allegedly not only stood up for the foreign guests; he took active measures to help them, for example in the case of the failed attempt to force 15-year-old Eldina Mašinović into marriage. According to human rights activists the plan, condoned by Mehmedović, was to marry her off to one of the foreign Muslim militants so that he would qualify for citizenship. Only the vigilance and cool-headedness of Eldina's sister saved her from this forced marriage, so the story goes.

Intelligence services of the Nordic-Polish SFOR Brigade, now supervising Bosnia according to the Dayton Accords, reported the existence of a terrorist training centre in Bocina Donja, a formerly Serb village near Maglaj in December 2007. A group of mujahedeen seems to have settled there. Special services have received an order to monitor the activities of these unusual settlers to prevent the village from being transformed into a base for launching terrorist operations.

## Music

The mujahedeen are not popular with the locals, because true Islam in Bosnia and elsewhere in the Balkans is not of the nit-picking kind. There is alcohol, if you feel like it. As the social-democratic leader in the Bosnian-Croatian Federation, former Prime Minister Lagumdžija, puts it: "where in the world will you find Muslims getting drunk on the last day of Ramadan?"

Mustafa Eminefendić confirms the story smilingly as he takes the rediscovered friends of his youth to a restaurant attached to a brewery in Sarajevo. Offering round filter-tipped cigarettes he asks if the company would like a little aperitif before they get started on the beer and wine. He reassures the Jewish guest who keeps kosher: the atmosphere may be reminiscent of Bavaria or the Habsburgs, but in obedience to Islamic law there isn't a shred of pork in the sausage. And the ham isn't really ham

either; it's lamb. But doesn't Islam also have rules on alcohol, his guests ask. "Of course, so we only sin in moderation".

And it is much the same with headscarves. Ex-premier Lagumdžija explains that they used to be worn by traditionalist peasant women or as part of folkloric costume, but never because it was decreed by the Prophet. You now see fewer of them than you would in parts of London or Brussels.

Nevertheless, there have been rows over this recently. In Kalesija in north-eastern Bosnia, older Muslims complain that they are no longer allowed to listen to music. A group headed by the young radical Jusuf Barčić is seeking to impose its will on the older, more moderate generation, forcing women to wear the headscarf and calling their parents apostates, because they follow the teaching of Islam less rigorously than the new, younger spiritual leader who was educated with a scholarship in the Gulf States.

Even Grand Mufti Dr Mustafa Cerić, the very moderate leader of Islam in Bosnia, a kind of archbishop as he himself puts it, has had a run-in with this young man. Together with a few of his henchmen Barčić tried to take over the main mosque in Sarajevo, the home base of American-trained Cerić. They regarded the Grand Mufti as a creep who set a poor example and was far too tolerant and liberal. Cerić's supporters were warned in time, closed the mosque and so averted the confrontation.

This is not the only such incident. A year ago, as all the newspapers recalled in their reporting on Kalesija, a young Wahhabi murdered his mother. By his Saudi standards she was not strict enough.

## **Busy**

The influence of young spiritual leaders trained under foreign scholarships causes greater concern than the presence of at most five hundred or so foreign veterans. These students are trained primarily in Saudi Arabia, because the Wahhabis are generous with their funding. In Kosovo a measure of concern is expressed in rather hesitant English by Kemal Morina, vice-dean of the local faculty of Islamic studies in Priština:

Everyone has the right to serve God as he sees fit. Including the younger people here who call themselves Salafists or Wahhabis, but we shall resist if they try to force their rigorous interpretation on others, on us. They have to remember that our circumstances are different, we are a European country.

By no means is everyone convinced of this. Al Hussein Imad, also known as Abu Hamza, leader of a small organisation of Bosnian citizens of Afro-Asian descent and a former mujahedeen, publicly proclaims in radio interviews that Islam in Bosnia is not genuine, is a pale imitation.

How can it be otherwise? In order to survive here Islam had to reach an accommodation with Tito's secret service. That kind of faith can no longer be pure. We, who came here to fight and lay down our lives for the freedom of the Bosnians, now have a duty to restore the true faith.

Figures like Abu Hamza are not having much direct success, because they are opposed by the power of the official clerics. Too passively, according to Jasmin Merdan, a former Wahhabi radical who now, along with a few others, stands against his former friends. "Not every Wahhabi is a terrorist," he says, "but every terrorist is a Wahhabi".

Consequently, he says loud and clear, we must curtail the spread of this Arab faith of the black veil, which is alien to the European Muslim culture; we may even have to ban it. "And the Grand Mufti might be rather more energetic and quicker to react. Once, in 1997, he dismissed a mufti in Zenica, for being too cosy with the mujahedeen. He's now trying above all to keep the peace". When foreign journalists approached Dr Cerić's office on this matter, the answer was invariably that only the *Reis-ul-Ulema* (Bosnian Islam Community) Mustafa Cerić or his chief deputy could deal with these questions, but unfortunately "the *Reis* is busy". So no comment.

### **Aid workers**

But the problem hasn't quite gone away. Walking around Sarajevo and travelling through the rest of the country you see shiny new mosques, girls in headscarves and here and there the odd fluffy beard in baggy pants, but they don't like being called Wahhabis. Dika Mustafić, a young university-educated woman who heads a faith-based orphanage attached to a primary school in Sarajevo, gets very cross if people call her a Wahhabi. Clearly the name is such a dirty word that she wants nothing to do with it. But we can call her a Salafist. Her establishment is largely funded by Saudi Arabia, it is true, but she rejects any association with Wahhabism. She is a true Muslim, but wants nothing to do with quibbling fundamentalism. She has no problem sharing a table with people of her own age who drink alcohol, call themselves unbelievers or even admit to being atheists. She isn't overjoyed, of course, but she accepts as a matter of course that this is how the world is.

The battle over doctrinal orthodoxy continues outside Bosnia too. In Sandžak, the small Islamist area of Serbia, it is waged very vigorously. Here Wahhabis are systematically trying to persuade the local mosques that they are too lax. With some success, because the Wahhabis are naturally keen to support a population cold-shouldered by Belgrade. In Novi Pazar the internal debate even led to people being injured. In December 2006 three of the faithful were hurt during an argument in the mosque. 17 fundamentalists were arrested, but only after shots were fired.

In Kosovo the debate is rather more moderate. But there too there are concerns. In Kosovo, as in Albania, all kinds of small Sufi sects with their own dervishes and sheiks had traditionally been very influential, especially in rural areas. But the modern aid industry has made quite a few dents in the old religious infrastructure.

After the fighting, the war zones in both Bosnia and Kosovo were flooded with well-intentioned aid workers. But these often had a hidden agenda. American evangelical organisations and Saudi NGOs battled for virtually every needy case and every single soul. In Kosovo this meant that the role of the local Sufi sheiks was effectively superseded. Every little Muslim village or area previously had its own tolerant variant of Islam. There is little trace of this now. Partly due to the violence of war and partly due to the well-paid, insistent aid workers.

## Galileo

Unsurprisingly Arben Xhaferi, the grandfatherly and impressive leader of the Albanian nationalist party DPA in Macedonia, takes a somewhat more flexible approach to this problem. He started out as a philosopher:

Serbs, Macedonians, Bosniaks, White Russians, all these nationalities or ethnic groups have to define their identity in terms of religion, because that's the only way they can do it. We Albanians don't need to. We have our shared language. So an Albanian can be a Muslim, Catholic or Orthodox without this leading to bad blood or problems.

His attitude is entirely consistent with the anecdotes about traditional tolerance one hears everywhere in Kosovo and Macedonia. In order to survive, a father would baptise his eldest son as a Catholic, the next was brought up as a Muslim, and so on. In some families the children actually

had several names, one for each faith. "To us this whole business of religious belief is less important," Xhaferi continues,

It's the Albanian cause that matters most. But there's more to it than that. Anyone with views on this should read Spengler. He demonstrates convincingly that people living at the same time are sometimes centuries apart in their thinking.

That is the case with Christianity and Islam. Christianity had the Inquisition. Galileo was persecuted, true, but the Dominicans couldn't snuff out the right to question. That became the basis of Western Christian thinking. The Bible does not have to be taken literally.

Islam has not reached that point yet. Islam in the Balkans has been greatly influenced by its environment. So we must take care that this new bunch of Saudi-trained literalists do not hijack our Koran. However tolerant we are, we have to defend the Koran against these Muslims

It is immediately apparent to anyone visiting Skopje that this obvious tolerance is perhaps more a wish than a reality. High on the mountains, since the year 2000, stands an enormous 60-metre cross. In the evening and at night it is lit up with triumphalist brilliance. Symbolising two thousand years of Christ and Christianity, according to the powers that be.

## **Mother Theresa**

Edi Rama, the social-democratic mayor of Tirana and a giant in physique and personality, roars with laughter when asked if there is any danger from foreign religious influences. He can't dismiss the following story of Mother Theresa's statue, of course, but apparently that is just one silly incident.

With echoes of his former art as a sculptor he explains, passionately and with expansive gestures, that Mother Theresa - very much Albanian though not actually from Albania (she was born near Skopje) - is naturally much revered by Albanian Catholics. These live in the north of Albania and were keen to have a symbol of the saintly miracle-worker in their region. So a statue of the Nobel laureate was erected in Shkodër. The young local mufti didn't like this and began a campaign against it. With a lot of noise and media coverage. But he hadn't reckoned on a lot of noise and media coverage from the other side too.

We even suggested having her statue put up officially here in the capital. So the mufti suffered an ignominious defeat, losing the battle and losing face. Mother Theresa belongs to all Albanians. In Skopje, in Shkodër and in Tirana.

As if his story and his theatrical gestures were not yet convincing enough, Rama embellishes further with what sounds like a real old chestnut.

Back in the early 1990s, our borders had just opened, but even so we hadn't a pot to piss in, and one fine day two British relief aid consignments arrived in the village of Backë. Two bus-loads of old clothing. The whole of the Muslim community flocked to the scene, the mufti as well. The mosque got a splendid new coat of whitewash and the buses set off for their next port of call. A few months later they were back. Shock, horror: in the meantime the whole community had converted to Catholicism. Why? Simple, replied the erstwhile mufti, God made it clear, and I have to be honest. The Catholics came with *three* bus-loads of stuff. Case proven, eh?

When the laughter – mostly his own – subsides, Edi Rama concludes that religion is not an issue in Albania and that the influence of foreign missionaries is marginal. The issues in his country are poverty, unemployment and the lack of prospects.

## Europe

Maks Velo, architect, writer, publicist and former political prisoner agrees, but his fear is that this same poverty, lack of prospects and the crime associated with them will provide a breeding ground for fundamentalism. He campaigns openly and, like the only world-famous Albanian writer Ismail Kadare, warns against the creeping but pernicious influence of foreign organisations, generous study scholarships from Saudi Arabia, the 21 Koranic schools set up with foreign funding and the 11 madrassas, which provide Islamist secondary education and send out 800 of their trainees a year into society.

Velo's warnings have not gone unheeded. The reaction of his fundamentalist opponents has been violent and, despite his air of elderly intellectual, he was actually beaten up on one occasion.

Velo urges Europe to take initiatives: to invite students to EU countries, award scholarships, offer targeted assistance, launch academic cooperation projects, and so on. But it is not just Europe that needs to do something. Velo demands the same of his own government. New statistics, for example. No one knows what the true situation on religion in Albania is, because the most recent population census that asked about religious affiliation dates from the late 1930s. At that time some 70% were Muslims, about 20% were Orthodox and the remaining 10% were Catholic. Those figures can no longer be trusted, not least because of the atheist propaganda preached by the Stalinist Hoxha regime, but primarily because of the many 'inter-faith' marriages contracted during that period. Velo opines:

In the absence of any exact figures, President Berisha was able to take Albania into the Islamic World Conference. Not that membership of that body means much, it has never been ratified and no one bothers about it much. That's the way it is here. Albania is also still a member of the international Organisation of French-speaking Countries. Dictator Hoxha was originally a French teacher and educated in France.

## **Turkey**

Maks Velo's arguments are similar to those of Anton Berishaj – no relation to the Albanian President – in Priština, Kosovo. Berishaj is from Montenegro and he is a Catholic, though an ethnic Albanian. He is a sociology lecturer at the local university, where he does research into religious belief and practice. He echoes the view of all experts outside Bosnia that religion plays little or no part in Balkan politics.

It's different in Bosnia. There the hostility between Serbs and Croats made the Muslims into a group apart. What bound them together was their faith and that is why Islam is such a big deal there. Because of the conflicts in Bosnia, nationality or ethnicity has come to be associated with a particular religion. Serbs are Orthodox, Croats are Catholic and so the third group – the Muslims – had to be defined in ethnic terms too.

But in the conflict between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo religion was not at all the main issue, though religious symbols were of course easily the most natural targets. Both sides did all they could to destroy monasteries, mosques, Sufi lodges, churches,

seminaries, etc. The more precious, the better. In hurting, damaging the other side, nothing was sacred.

So religious differences can be used to rekindle the flames of conflict. Certainly if you add into the mix foreigners with no feeling for traditional attitudes who are convinced, moreover, that their interpretation of the sacred texts is fundamentally the right one.

So whilst religion may not be central to the conflict outside Bosnia, it behoves us to be careful, for example about allowing the activities of imams trained and brainwashed in Saudi Arabia.

Europe should allow Turkey to join the EU, and in that way the West will at a stroke remove all the doubts felt by the Muslim populations in these countries. People will believe that the West is not anti-Muslim.

## **Turk**

A subsequent meeting comprehensively vindicates everything our friend Mustafa Eminefendić has said. There have indeed been huge changes. Where forty years ago under Tito religion and ethnicity were not really seen as an issue, being portrayed by communist ideology as something obsolete and backward, nowadays the whole of Bosnia is defined in ethnic and religious terms. Even in its neighbouring countries where religion is less controversial than in Bosnia, there are signs that ultra-orthodox and fundamentalist tendencies are working, with foreign backing, to overturn the religious tolerance that traditionally reigned in the Balkans.

Mustafa is not happy at being right. "When I was young there was hardly any religion. There were churches, synagogues and mosques, but faith or ethnicity weren't important". In the evening, over cigarettes, drinks and sausage he passes round photos of the old days and of his old Dutch friends. How young and in the prime of life they were then. Then come photos of a later trip to Amsterdam with a few pals and fellow students. One friend studied in Zagreb and now counts as a Croat, the other had relatives in Belgrade, so he's a Serb, and he himself moved from Jajce to Sarajevo and is now a Bosnian Muslim. An elder brother who studied in Zagreb and married a woman from Croatia had to settle and make a life for himself there, two sisters and their families who lived on the outskirts of Banja Luka have vanished from the face of the earth, one brother lives in

America, another in Sweden, and his own daughter lives in the Dutch city of Almere.

“My daughter and her husband call themselves Bosnians, not Bosniaks. They try to uphold the peaceable mentality and tolerance of pre-war times. In Almere that’s maybe easier than here”. She and a lot of her intellectual friends in Sarajevo dislike the ‘ethnic’ name ‘Bosniak’. They fight, albeit usually quietly and with little success, against conflict and division. In artistic and academic circles you occasionally bump into people who want nothing at all to do with any form of ethnic nationalism. They use the proud nickname ‘Bosnian’, the old name for inhabitants of the country. They see themselves as humanists who want to bring the parties together.

‘Bosniak’, Mustafa explains, is the term invented for the Muslim group by their leader Alija Izetbegović and his companion and fellow-dissident from the old days Dr Adil Zulfikarpašić, theoretician of the Muslim identity. The traditional and derogatory name ‘Turk’ would not do, because there was still a whiff of treason about it. During the time of the Ottoman Empire the Bosnian Muslims had, after all, converted to the faith of the Turkish occupier. By no means because they were collaborators, but often for the simple and practical reason that it was advantageous to do so. Muslims in the Ottoman period paid far fewer taxes than people of other religions.

The name ‘Muslim’ was not satisfactory either because it designates allegiance to a religious faith. Hence the choice of ‘Bosniak’, synonymous to others with ‘Muslim’, but for the Islamic majority a name that implies that they are the true heirs of the old national Bosnian tradition. A tradition which, as the Bosniak leaders and especially Grand Mufti Dr Cerić unceasingly stress, was one of tolerance, looking in matters of religion towards Turkey, but also, in matters of science and trade, towards the Habsburg West.

After all, and Dr Cerić makes the point in numerous publications, it was not a Bosnian who assassinated Archduke Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo in 1914, triggering the start of the First World War. It was the Serbian student Prinčip, who came from Belgrade to spread terror.

## **Civil war**

Not that every Bosniak is now suddenly a regular worshipper at the mosque. As a result of the fighting, faith has become more a means of

distinguishing ethnicity than a philosophy or a political agenda. And so it is for Mustafa. It is nothing strange. His family were never devout. His mother, who in the 60s of the last century was already an old lady who fuelled her impoverished existence with endless cups of coffee and cigarettes, was once a regular party member. She played an important role in the resistance. Her name and signature feature on the Jajce Declaration, in which Tito and his followers declared independence, long before the Germans had all been kicked out. Forty years ago the Declaration was proudly on display in the local museum. The museum was destroyed, and is still not rebuilt, and Mustafa is surprised, when he hears the story later, to learn that a huge statue of the Marshal waits in a back room for better times. "It was never like that before, there was a bust of President Tito out on the square".

That high party-rank proved useful to the family, because when the brother who now lives with his children and grandchildren in Croatia lost his faith in the scientific rightness of Marxism and began to express criticism, particularly after a drink or two, his mother's influence saved him from total disgrace. His only punishment was to be banished to the farthest-flung province.

But the family were never Muslims. The name Mustafa and the other names have their roots in Islam, of course, but that was as far as it went. "The West converted me", he replies, when his old friends ask him over a drink what he means by that. A surprise, as it is well known that after a period as representative of the Yugoslav national airline in Ghaddafi's Libya, where he wanted nothing to do with the local religious and cultural customs, he spent time in Germany. On two occasions actually, once whilst still working for Yugoslavia, and the second time as representative in the West of the new *Air Bosna*.

But how can a spell in Stuttgart have helped to convert him? It quickly becomes apparent that it wasn't like that. He reacts with a fury that is astonishing and at odds with his gentle demeanour to the words 'civil war', which one of his guests uses in a question. "Civil war, no. The West forced a war on us". The surprise on the faces of his old friends surprises him in turn.

But the West has always been islamophobic, that's nothing new. For hundreds of years. Since the Crusaders, but later too. Don't forget, in 1529 the Turks were at the gates of Vienna. The whole of the West was in uproar. All of Christian civilisation,

Catholic and Protestant alike, rushed to help save the old world. That mentality lives on in the European subconscious.

He goes on:

In that same period, from 1530 to 1640, more than a million Western Christians were captured by Muslim pirates from North Africa and were sold at slave markets or ransomed for a high price. Don't forget the effect that had on your collective memory. Not every potentate was as benevolent as the Turk Bassa Selim in Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* who freed his captives, telling them to proclaim the wisdom and tolerance of Islam in the West. And then it was already almost 1800, two centuries ago. Do people in the West really think there is no connection between those historical events and politicians' warnings, even in your enlightened country, of a tidal wave of Muslim immigrants? When Alija Izetbegović began to organise the Muslims as a group here in Bosnia, the West was terrified. Rely on the traditional Western alliances and you're done for.

## Axis

Counter-arguments leave him unmoved. Little trace now of this otherwise very affable gentleman. Or of his customary give and take, his erstwhile and otherwise self-evident sympathy for the West. This is not the Mustafa of 40 years ago. This outburst, this rage, this hate for a faceless West, that is what the 1992-1995 war has done to him.

Naturally he concedes that in the meantime opinions have changed, in the West too, about Germany's swift recognition of Croatia, led by Foreign Minister Genscher, but it is overly suspicious of him to see this as a revival of the German-Croatian axis of the Nazi era. Even the unexpected and heroic visit to Sarajevo by French President Mitterrand, who allowed himself to be escorted into the city along the highly dangerous 'Snipers' Alley', is not accepted as a valid counter-argument.

That came too late, we were already at war. The French have always been pro-Serb. Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Only when the war got to be a humanitarian problem and he had to be accountable at home did Mitterrand turn up here to lend moral support. Just a bit of spin, really, to jack up his own popularity a little. And the British? They believe in 'divide and rule'. Don't give the Muslims their own state in Europe, keep them divided and out of power. John Major's government was on the side of the Serbs.

This story resurfaces in a conversation the next day with political scientist Miraščija, whose thesis was on the role of Islam in the development of a European identity, and who is currently overseeing an EU-funded university research programme. "The British are traditionally pro-Serb. In both the First and Second World Wars they supported the Chetniks". He backs up his claim with anecdotes and facts, from Sir Winston Churchill to John Major's Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, who later worked for the consultants NatWest Markets, advisors to Milošević on his privatisation policy.

### **Humiliation**

Miraščija offers a wealth of irrefutable facts and literature references. Not only about the British. He is equally happy to tell the story of his own Bosniak group. Are his visitors aware that the whole tale about Bosnian Muslims having been collaborators, creatures of the Turks, is nothing more than an attempt by the other ethnic groups to badmouth the Bosniaks?

Because they had a good relationship with the Turks the Bosniaks naturally formed an upper class in society, an elite, and that led to resentment, but it had nothing to do with unpatriotic behaviour.

Academic research has shown that Bosnia in the Middle Ages was home to the Bogomils, seen both by the Pope in Rome and the Orthodox church in Constantinople as a dangerous and heretical sect. Their ideas were similar to those of the Cathars. Crusades were even undertaken against them. When the Turks consolidated their power here these Bogomils later converted to Islam. Not for convenience, but because this new religion sat happily with a number of their own beliefs.

That the research quoted by Miraščija was chiefly the work of Dr Adil Zulfikarpašić, who coined the term 'Bosniak' and was a leading advocate of a separate Muslim identity for Bosnia's Muslims, which consequently can be seen more as a part of the nationalist-ethnic mythology of the Bosniaks than established academic fact, is something that Miraščija's visitors from Western Europe were to discover for themselves later. It goes without saying that the Muslim community is rather anxious to distinguish itself from the other two ethnic groups by something other than a presumption of treason.

Mustafa is not as strong on academic research and irrefutable facts, but the essence of his message is the same:

The West felt threatened by the growing self-awareness of the Muslims. Hence, for example, the arms embargo which hit us the hardest. But the fact remains: does anyone in the West really believe that the international forces couldn't have picked up Mladić and Karadžić? There are international troops all over the place. The French deliberately let these criminals escape. It's an indication of how the West helped the Serbs.

We, like all those fine young Muslims in Western Europe, have felt European for generations. We acknowledged and lived under the law of the Habsburgs, under Tito we turned away from Moscow and opened up to the West. We welcomed millions of German tourists and did our best to please them. And what is our reward? – Humiliation. We are cold-shouldered by our Croatian and Serbian neighbours, but worse still: we feel let down by Europe. Abandoned by you Western Europeans, our old friends. It feels as if we are second-class citizens. Orhan Pamuk wrote about this in the *New York Review of Books*. A writer and a publication respected in the West, so perhaps you will believe it from him. Pamuk says that the Western world has hardly any idea of the degree to which most people in the world feel humiliated by the West.

## Lite

Mustafa goes on:

By this attitude you managed to alienate old friends in European Bosnia. Europe is a whore. First she made use of us and then she sold us off to the highest bidder. I, we, feel hurt. Is it so strange that we should then look to the past for our identity, to the religion which no longer exists, it is true, but which, given the West's reaction, must still have some life left in it. So now I go to the mosque from time to time. Just after the siege I was even secretary to the Grand Mufti for a while. Not his theological assistant, but I dealt with protocol and suchlike. My background in the tourism industry and international aviation paid off there. His entourage seemed to have no one with any knowledge of these things, and that's why I got the job. At that time there were no planes to fly and no tourism to promote. From time to time a theological or moral question would end up on my desk. If there

was no one around to answer it, I did so myself as best I could, turning to the Koran for guidance. So at that time I began to read it. And in the process I became a Muslim again, the only one of my brothers to do so. Muslim in the Bosnian style, of course. 'Islam-lite', as we sometimes jokingly call it.

It is a term that crops up throughout the Balkans. Edi Rama, the social-democratic giant and mayor of the Albanian capital Tirana, uses exactly the same word. So, later, does Vlora Çitaku, spokeswoman for the social-democrats in Kosovo. Even Professor Enes Karić, dean of the faculty of Islamic studies in Sarajevo, seems to mean the same thing when he talks about 'Islam *à la carte*' in the Balkans.

### **Kiss on the hand**

Grand Mufti Dr Cerić, who studied in Chicago and spent a few years there as a mufti before becoming spiritual head of the Islamic community in Bosnia, returns the greetings from his namesake Mustafa later in the week. They do not altogether agree. Mustafa Cerić is less disillusioned with Europe. He still has expectations of the West. And not because he was trained and worked in America. He also studied in Cairo and after his time in Chicago he was in charge of the mosque in Zagreb, acting as an important intermediary during the Bosnian war.

Dr. Cerić is a likeable, but also an inspiring man. His visitors wait rather nervously in the east-facing reception room. Three of them, sitting on one of three richly carved wooden benches placed at right-angles to each other. The Bosnian Croat interpreter, a Catholic, sits in the middle between the two men. She hadn't really wanted to go in with them. She isn't wearing a headscarf and worries that the Grand Mufti might not want to shake her hand. And he speaks English? So why do they need her anyway?

But we're in this together, as they say. In the ten minutes they have to wait, the tension rises and nerves jangle. A photo on the wall of SDA leader Izetbegović wearing his *haji* (pilgrim's) clothes does nothing to put the Westerners at their ease. But the entry of the Grand Mufti does just that. Like a gentleman with good Austrian manners he moves first to the lady and kisses her hand elegantly, not only breaking the ice but also unwittingly putting the mistrustful Dutchmen to shame. He wears an official robe, a cassock similar to those of Catholic priests, and under it

smart black neatly pressed trousers, just like the ones that teachers in Episcopal colleges in the Catholic parts of the Netherlands used to wear.

## Imports

Questions are hardly needed. In an engaging lecturer's voice he starts to talk, and what he says differs little from what he says a few months later to the assembled European politicians in Strasbourg. Or from his address to a group of theologians in Leiden in spring 2007.

The three big monotheistic religions are all imports to Europe and all three of them come from the Middle East. So why the hostility towards one of these three? Or is it better, notwithstanding the emphasis now given to its Judaeo-Christian roots, to say that one of the three has always been inimical to the other two - Christianity versus Judaism and Islam?

We should focus not on our differences, but on the point on which the three faiths, which go back to Abraham, agree. God's messengers Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Mohammad, peace be upon him, preach in essence the same values. And the presence of Islam in Europe is just as natural as that of the other two faiths. In Western Europe Islam is seen as a recent arrival on European soil. That is a big misconception. In the Balkans there has been a European Islam for five centuries. But that is when Islam began in Europe. In Western Europe people tend to forget that from 711 to 1492 there was an Islamic empire in Andalusia, until Ferdinand and Isabella of Aragon and their Inquisition expelled the Muslims and Jews from Spain and wiped out the memory of the great artistic and scientific achievements of Muslim culture.

## Light

Dr. Cerić is not alone in pointing out that the history of the Moors in Spain proves how highly developed and tolerant an Islamic culture can be. It is a powerful part of the defence against those who define Islam as a backward culture.

Leopold Weiss, a Galician Jew who converted to Islam in the 1920s on discovering in Jerusalem that there were more Palestinians than Jews in the Holy Land, did extensive research under the name of Muhammad Asad on the modernity of Moorish culture in Spain.

Cordoba, he wrote, was a world city, a metropolis, which already had 300 hammams in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and hundreds more just a few centuries later. And that was at a time when princes, bishops, abbots and their underlings in Europe had not yet heard of hygiene and thought it was over-fussy to wash. Whilst in Western Europe epidemics were still seen as a scourge sent by God, the people of Andalusia already knew that in such cases it was necessary to isolate the sick and sometimes even whole communities and villages. Granada, Seville and the rest of Moorish Spain already had a system of health care and hospitals, whilst the rest of Western Europe still languished in starvation, poverty and feudal darkness.

The wisdom of Ancient Greece, of philosophers like Aristotle and to some extent Plato, of the great grammarians and the philosopher and healer Galen were brought to Paris and Bologna via Toledo. Arabic numerals reached Europe via the Moors. Mathematics, astronomy, medicine, pharmacology, technology, alchemy and even distillation all came to Western Europe via Arab-Islamic culture, in some cases returning to contribute to the Renaissance. Toledo was a centre where hundreds, maybe thousands of books were translated into Latin to bring light to Europe's darkness.

## Enemy

Mustafa Cerić is less triumphalist. He doesn't want to weary his guests with impressive examples, but he does want to make the point that Islam is not by definition obscurantist or an obstructor of scientific progress. More important to him is the message that Islam has a place in Europe, not because it originated there – neither did the other two faiths descended from Abraham – but by virtue of a history that is almost as old as that of Christianity.

Only the sheer chance of the intolerant Ferdinand and Isabella drove Islam from Western Europe. But immediately afterwards the faith gained a firm footing in the Balkans.

Here too a Catholic prince played a pivotal role, but this time to good effect. This was the Austrian Kaiser Franz-Joseph who, with his tolerant views at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ensured that Islam was accepted under the dual monarchy, but also made it possible for Muslims to have an academic education.

He is the godfather of the university tradition in Sarajevo, and enabled Bosnia's Muslims to retain their religious identity and at the same time develop their potential further, taking the road of progress and following a European course.

An academic tradition is essential for the future of Islam in Europe. Look at what is happening now in Western Europe, where religious education all too often is given at home and via the internet. That is dangerous, because spiritual guidance is something that has to be monitored. A licence to teach, the right to instruct, can and should only be given to people with a proper and balanced training.

Western Europe is now in the pre-madrassa era, the period when Islam did not yet have its own approved middle schools. But Europe needs to develop initiatives fast, to reach a post-madrassa time. The period where imams, muftis or ayatollahs are university-educated. University education for Muslims is not only important for the training of religious leaders, but also for the advancement of the Islamic world. Islam is not in conflict with science and research, despite the emergence now of tendencies which want to reject the secular world. I try to defend my Islam against such false prophets. They are just as much my enemy as they are the enemy of the West.

## Phobia

"There are two dangerous developments at the present time," says Dr Cerić. He elaborates:

There are voices in the West that see Islam as the problem and think civilisation has to be defended against obscurantist Muslims and Islamic terrorists. And in general it is true that the West shows less willingness than we would like to understand us and accept us for what we are. It sometimes seems to us that the only good Muslim in European eyes is one who renounces Islam. Or perhaps one who is prepared to take all the sins of his fellow-Muslims upon himself and expiate them. The attitude of the West towards us at present is so xenophobic that it seems it cannot bear the idea that Islam is a neighbour who is not going to go away.

On the other hand the East thinks that Islam is the answer and that we must turn away from the West on grounds that it is simply decadent. There is a kind of hatred of the West in the Islamic world, just as there is islamophobia in some parts of

Western Europe. There currently seems to be a reluctance on both sides to understand one another.

I think we have to do something about that. I have drawn up a Declaration of European Muslims and have laid it before the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the President of the European Commission and of the European Council, etc., etc.

The Grand Mufti opens a box in the arm of the bench he is sitting on. The text is right there, ready. He hands over several copies and urges his visitors to distribute them in Brussels and Strasbourg.

It is no coincidence that this declaration comes from Sarajevo, from the Balkans, because we have been demonstrating for the last five hundred years that Europe and Islam do not by definition have to be at odds with one another.

In this declaration I naturally start by explaining what our essential values are: respect for life, religious belief, freedom, property and the dignity of others. With those few parameters I am in fact describing not only my Islamic identity but also my European one. Freedom demands a great awareness of responsibility. From everyone in Western Europe. From young Muslims who feel insufficiently recognised and valued. But also from the Europeans who have to see that Muslims are not immature children who are not yet ready for the responsibility of freedom, the challenge of democracy and the justice of human rights.

As the spiritual leader of the Muslims in Bosnia I am for democracy, for the separation of church and state. I am unequivocally in favour of a secular state, but I am just as unequivocally opposed to a secular society.

It is not the first time that Europe has accepted a religion from the East. Why not do so again and then see, after Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, the contribution which Mohammad – peace be upon him – can now make towards tolerance, justice and prosperity.

But at the same time the East, tribal and stagnant, will have to accept that the road leads from might to right, from mythology to science, from slavery to freedom and from its own autocratic view of the state to a state that must constantly prove its

legitimacy. And we shall have to concede that all those ideas come from the West.

These debates are the new dialectic between East and West. We all follow different paths through life, but each of us takes a little bit of the other with us. We would do well to learn that.

## Sultanate

A few days later we are received by Professor Enes Karić, dean of the faculty of Islamic studies. In the election for Grand Mufti of Sarajevo he stood against Dr Cerić, who is also a professor at the faculty.

“It’s easy for the Grand Mufti to say”, Karić observes about his colleague, but he fears that a lot more water will have to flow under the bridge before the tribal Islam of the Arabian peninsula and North Africa is as tolerant and liberal as that of the Balkans.

Confusion still remains as to what constitutes the customs and traditions of our faith and what is its actual substance. Views on this differ. In the Gulf States people are uncompromising in this respect. Literal observance of tradition is often seen there as the essence of faith. That interpretation gained ground here too in certain circles during and after the war. This was due to the mujahedeen who came to help us, to Arab money and the bodies associated with it, which subsequently helped us to get back on our feet to some degree. But above all it was due to young students who studied in Mecca or elsewhere on scholarships from Saudi Wahhabi institutions and then, when they came back, tried to dismiss our type of Islam as theologically unsound. They stand little chance in the official mosques, because a preacher has to have a licence and he won’t get one if he behaves in such an un-Bosnian manner, but through underground channels he may perhaps have support and influence.

Almost all Wahhabis have gone or are watched carefully, it is said. Just one mosque remains as a focus for the fundamentalism of that period. You’d think there were more, because a lot of new mosques have been built using Wahhabi money, for example a gigantic architectural aberration in an outer suburb of Sarajevo. Bigger and better maintained than any traditional mosque, it stands prominently by the roadside amid a rural landscape, blinding every passer-by with the reflection from its unauthentic gilded minarets and hammering home the message that this is Muslim territory.

But Professor Karić is not too worried by this.

There is no one here who dreams of a new caliphate or yet another sultanate. Our students are good orthodox Muslims, but they don't have to espouse the old-fashioned Moroccan interpretation of the Koran – that's no good in this day and age. In Europe you're more likely to see groups of Muslims opposed to each other rather than Muslims opposing Christians. Enlightened ones, like us here, opposing fundamentalists.

If I ask my students here what they would choose, Egypt or Germany, no one chooses Egypt. Students here have the West, democracy, the modern age in their blood.

The interpreter confirms this later: "Everyone can receive fifty TV channels here, but no one watches al Jazeera". The head of the protocol department for the municipality of Zenica, supposedly the heartland of present-day mujahedeen influence, also thinks that the influence of fundamentalists is limited: "Ask the man in the street who his favourite Arab author is and he'll just gape at you".

## Rug

Mustafa Eminefendić waits somewhat nervously in the airport departures hall. Not just because it's time to say goodbye, apparently. He is also rather dejected. He wonders if his friends are not annoyed at his outbursts?

Not at all. It was he who held forth the most forcefully on the issue of Western islamophobia, true, but he was by no means the only one. Even his friend the Grand Mufti talked about it, though he also thought that the East should not turn its back on the West. 'Westophobia', he called that.

It seems as if a burden has been lifted from Mustafa's shoulders. 'Shall we have a quick coffee? There's time'. Mustafa apologises for his vehemence. With a hand on his old friend's arm he tries to recreate the old feeling of solidarity. He has not been a good host, he says softly. He shouldn't have sounded off like that. Should have allowed his guests to give their side of it, left room for discussion and comparison. Can his friends forgive him? He is so disappointed. So, to make amends, and in this last-minute opportunity for a debate, he asks what we will be reporting back home and in Brussels.

There isn't much time, and the answer isn't easy. It is really no more than a disjointed stammered response. Recognition and respect for Islam

rather than rejection and hostility, for one thing. Plus, of course, the fact that there has for centuries already been a European Islam in an outpost of Europe, a religion and a population that feel European and tolerant and want to be part of Europe, in cultural, religious and political terms.

For these reasons Western Europe must forge links with people like the Grand Mufti Dr Cerić and his colleagues in political circles that also favour cooperation and are just as opposed to fundamentalism as the West is. And concrete assistance, of course: grants for students and teachers and funds to help counter the undesirable influence of rigidly orthodox protestant NGOs.

“And Turkey?” asks Mustafa hopefully. It’s as if he had been there when we talked to Professor Berishaj in Priština. That is the litmus test, he says.

If Europe wants to show that we have been wrong about each other and that Western islamophobia is a thing of the past, make a gesture in Turkey’s direction. That way the EU will pull the rug out from under the mujahedeen’s feet. Then everyone here will believe that our future really does lie in Europe. We are Europeans and we want nothing more than to be treated as such. It’s just that we feel let down, we have turned our faces eastwards out of disappointment and anger at being rebuffed.

Mustafa’s face expresses an eloquent weariness when he is not given a direct and unequivocal answer to his question about Turkey’s EU membership, but before he can say more, he catches sight of familiar uniforms in the distance. He waves them over. They turn out to be the pilots and crew of the flight which is to take our little Brussels delegation to Cologne. Suddenly he is once again the elegant host, introducing everyone to everyone else and concluding with the comment that it makes little sense to speculate about the future. “Perhaps we should all place our fate in the expert hands of a higher captain”.

## 2. TURKEY FUNDAMENTALLY DIVIDED: BELEAGUERED SECULARISTS AND MODERNISING ISLAMISTS

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“Will sharia law be introduced now or will there be an army coup?” It was the most frequently asked question by journalists in early May 2007. Before a long bank of microphones and cameras, we had to explain over and over again what exactly was going on in Turkey. The question sprang directly from two sensational events. At the end of April, the army had let it be known via a message on its website that it would not accept any attack on the secular character of the country by the election of a President who was not trusted by the armed forces. Partly in response to this, millions of people then took to the streets of Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir and many other cities in protests that went on for weeks. They really were an impressive sight: a sea of Turkish flags, millions of people stepping into the breach for the secular character of the Turkish republic; alarmed at the possibility that Abdullah Gül, then Foreign Minister but formerly leader of an Islamist party, would be elected President; fiercely opposed to the prospect that the wife of the future President would be wearing a headscarf. For many of the demonstrators this was a nightmare that threatened to become a reality: a former Islamist and his covered wife as figureheads of the Turkish republic; the beginning of the end of modern Turkey.

### Sympathy

In Turkey the demonstrations sparked off a new round of heated debates about whether Gül was a wolf in sheep’s clothing who, under the guise of modernising Turkey, was ultimately bent on the far-reaching Islamisation of society. Outside Turkey, the footage of so many agitated Turks raised many questions. Were the many women demonstrators right to fear the imminent introduction of sharia law? What should people make of the

large numbers of banners against Turkey joining the EU? Was this a demonstration to retain the status quo in Turkey and against changes, which were the very changes that were being welcomed by many in Europe?

It was pretty difficult to answer the journalists' main question in the space of a couple of minutes. No, sharia law was not on the point of being introduced and no, despite threats we did not think that the army would intervene. It became even more difficult when we were asked about the reasons behind both of these denials. Most Europeans and so most journalists almost automatically assumed that those who were demonstrating for the secular republic and against the Islamists deserved our sympathy. How do you then explain that those damned Islamists had done more to reform and modernise Turkey in recent years than all the secular parties put together? How do you explain that many demonstrators had major objections specifically to those reforms and actually wanted nothing better than the maintenance of the status quo, if need be through a military coup? Does that then leave you with enough time to explain to European viewers and listeners that among the demonstrators many women went onto the streets with the banner "No sharia, no coup"? Without doubt, after all these broadcasts, many people have been left with the feeling that they still do not completely understand what is going on in Turkey. That is hardly surprising, since the same can be said of many Turks.

### **Secret agenda**

Alarming reports about the increasing role of Islam in daily life in Turkey have been appearing with increasing frequency in the Turkish media in recent years. From a new edition of traditional fairy stories for school children with an Islamic flavour and attempts by local authorities to push back alcohol consumption locally by banning its sale to the efforts of the AKP government to lift the ban on wearing headscarves at university in the early months of 2008. According to many journalists and commentators in Istanbul and Ankara, these are all examples of the creeping Islamisation of Turkish society. Under the leadership of the AKP, the party that gained an absolute majority in the Turkish Parliament in 2002 and 2007, the foundations of the Turkish republic, as laid down 80 years ago by Atatürk, the father of modern Turkey, are allegedly being undermined bit by bit. One of these basic principles is secularism: a strict separation of religion and politics, the elimination of religion from the public domain and, in the

Turkish version, complete state control over religious institutions. This means, for instance, that wearing a headscarf in government buildings is forbidden, as it was until recently in universities as well. For years, secularists, defenders of the original republican principles, have looked on in alarm as more and more young women have taken to wearing a fashionable variant of the traditional headscarf and as the pressure to allow female university students to wear it has increased year on year. There is great fear that the AKP government, after having given in to that pressure, will come up with proposals to allow the wearing of headscarves in other places as well. AKP leader and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, whose wife also wears the headscarf, stands firm that he will not tamper with the secular character of the Turkish republic, but he and his party are widely mistrusted. Many believe that Erdoğan has a secret agenda and that extreme vigilance is called for.

## Women

The scaremongers' camp is made up in part of the 'usual suspects': the army, the judiciary, parts of the state bureaucracy, a large section of the media and the largest opposition party, the originally social-democratic CHP. All of these groups have both material and ideological interests in maintaining relations as they are now and share a dislike of what they see as a backward rural culture that, through the present government, threatens to encroach upon the modern urban culture that has dominated the country for decades. In the first months of 2007, increasingly harsh words were being used by, for instance, the then President Sezer and the Commander-in-Chief of the army, Büyükanıt. In statements that dominated the news for days on end, they warned about a fundamentalist threat and set themselves up as the defenders of the principles of Atatürk, the Kemalist legacy. The so-called e-coup of late April 2007, the placing of a threatening letter on the army's website, was the most striking example of this.

To be fair, it has to be said that it is not only the obvious defenders of the status quo who are worried about creeping Islamisation. In liberal, pro-European circles in the big cities in the west of the country, and especially among women, there are fears that the victories of the AKP are the sign of a development that has been going on for much longer. They see an advance of the traditional, conservative value system from central and eastern

Anatolia that, partly due to migration to the big cities, is putting a stronger and stronger stamp on daily life throughout Turkey. The expectation is that this cultural and political rise from the countryside will inevitably lead to serious pressure on republican values, such as the equality of men and women.

This was a constantly recurring theme when we shared a meal with modern, emancipated women in an Italian restaurant in the Cihangir district, close to Taksim Square in the centre of Istanbul. Author, manager, university lecturer, they are all convinced that we are being naive: naive about the true intentions of the AKP.

How can you really believe in the good intentions of someone like Erdoğan? Only ten years ago he was in favour of a partial introduction of sharia law. Do you really think that he has ditched these ideas from one day to the next? Look at the second-class position of women in the AKP. Look at the extremely low levels of employment among conservative Muslim women. Do you really believe that these former Islamists will leave us alone? They don't really need to intervene actively, they simply go along with the slow Islamisation of society. Just look and see how many women are wearing headscarves when you go out onto the street again!

There is a lot of emotion in these confrontations with women who are afraid that the achievements of the past are in danger of being swept away by yet another wave of headscarf-wearing members of their sex and their representatives in the Turkish Parliament.

## Özal

In the debate about the future of Turkey, the secularists are opposed by a motley company of Islamists and former Islamists, unaffiliated intellectuals, and social organisations, some of which are founded on Islamic principles and some not. They stress that it is the very people who defend the present balance of power who are the real conservatives, pointing out that the founding fathers of modern Turkey, out of fear of Islam, created a system that has dogmatically driven back the role of religion as far as possible. The first generation of Kemalists in the middle of the twentieth century saw religion as an outdated world view. They deliberately brought Islam under strict state control and deliberately imposed their radical secular vision on a population that did not share that kind of outlook. Atatürk and his fellow revolutionaries saw themselves as

champions of the Enlightenment and hoped for a change of mentality in the population. Their view was that the ban on religious expression in public and the strict control on the interpretation of Islam was a necessary protection against religious extremism and the danger that religious fanatics would stir up the 'ignorant' population against the republic.

Islamic and liberal critics alike argue that this Turkish variant of secularism is a classic example of 'assertive' or 'aggressive' secularism that aspires to push faith right back into the private domain, if necessary through coercion and prohibition. This can be contrasted with what is sometimes called 'passive' secularism, as recognisable in the US and most European countries, where the state adopts a neutral position on all religions and has no objection to religious expression in the public domain.

In Turkey, the call for a gradual transition to a less aggressive form of secularism is getting louder and louder. There are reasons of principle behind this but it has also come about because a large proportion of the population has never identified with the beliefs and value systems of the secular elite in Istanbul and Ankara. That section of the population has become more and more articulate in recent decades and increasingly clamorous in its demand that now finally it should also be listened to.

The rise of this section of the population is a consequence of a number of structural changes in the Turkish economy and society. One of the breaking points in Turkish history was the liberalisation of the economy in the 1980s by Prime Minister and later President Turgut Özal. State influence on the economy was reduced, creating more scope for companies outside the circle of the powerful monopolies associated with the state and its secular ideology. It was Özal too who allowed private newspapers and TV stations to start competing with the state media, which had mainly served as a vehicle to distribute the Kemalist ideology. The outcome of all this was that companies in Anatolia, run by conservative Muslims, became more and more successful and at the same time increasingly dissatisfied with established politics. Another consequence was that views and opinions gained access to the media, which had been marginalised for years as being inconsistent with a state ideology that was geared to progress and modernisation.

## Breaking open

The success of the AKP according to many, supporters and critical observers alike, is an expression of the gradual shift in the balance of power in Turkish society. They regard the AKP as the representative of political and cultural outsiders, who are demanding a place in the system. They are the new kids on the block who are seen as a threat by the established elite. Even liberal and progressive intellectuals, who would never vote for a conservative party like the AKP themselves, admit that Erdoğan and his people are the first to have succeeded in breaking open the old system and challenging it, a development that for years many critical Turks have laboured for in vain. From a democratic viewpoint they therefore support the attempts of the present government to reduce the power of the army, for instance, and to increase freedom of expression. The critical moment for this coalition of convenience is when it comes to the influence of conservative norms and values closely based on Islam. Some progressive AKP supporters gave up after the early days because the pace of reform was too slow, but most of all because they were afraid that the tolerance that *they* summoned up for conservative viewpoints they did not share would not be afforded in equal measure by many former Islamists to people who think differently from them. Fear of the intolerance of hardliners in the conservative AKP won over their dislike of the rigid and undemocratic attitudes of the Kemalists.

Others who welcomed the AKP victories in 2002 and 2007 are less pessimistic and point to the long tradition of moderation in Islam in Turkey. They do not fear that continued political ascendancy of the AKP will produce a social climate in which they no longer feel at home and they are counting on the European Union to correct any lapses. For these people, the desire to break open the old system is more important than the uncertainty about what exactly a new system might look like.

## Déjà vu

One of the reasons why feelings are currently running so high is that ten years ago a conflict in Turkish society – that on the face of it seems similar to the present one – resulted in the last major intervention in politics by the army. On 28 February 1997, the army chief gave an ultimatum to the then government, led by the Islamist politician Necmettin Erbakan. That led to the fall of this government a couple of months later, whose leader was regarded by secular Turkey as the embodiment of everything that they had

resisted tooth and nail. Erdoğan and the AKP are regarded by some of their friends and all of their enemies as the direct successors of Erbakan and his Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP). They are therefore regarded with the same suspicion and some seriously consider the possibility that the army will get rid of Erdoğan in the same way that it once got rid of Erbakan. Although the comparison falls short on many points, it is still worthwhile looking back at the second half of the 1990s to see what the consequences were then of the election victory of a party with clearly identifiable roots in political Islam.

In the early 1990s, the polarisation between secularists and Islamists was manifesting itself in alarming forms, with regular deaths among journalists and intellectuals. As a result of fragmentation on the left and right of the political spectrum, the party that came out top in the local elections in March 1994 was the fundamentalist RP Erbakan's party made the most of its gains in the major cities and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became Mayor of Istanbul. The trend continued in the parliamentary elections in December 1995: the RP became the largest party with over 20% of the votes. A coalition of right-wing parties managed to keep the RP out of government at first, but this coalition fell apart in disarray after four months. In June 1996 the RP formed a coalition government with the DYP of the former, first female Prime Minister Tansu Çiller. Turkey was being governed for the first time in its history by an Islamist Prime Minister. The panic was not as great as expected, partly because the country was in dire need of stable government, if necessary under Islamist leadership. Nor was there much reason for the secularists to be concerned in the early months. The government was tolerated by the business community and the army but constantly criticised in the media.

Early in 1997 relations between the government and the army worsened, due to provocative statements and actions by extremist Members of Parliament and (Refah Party) RP mayors, and due to Erbakan's visits to Iran and Libya, which for many was sending out completely the wrong signal. On 28 February 1997, the army presented a long list of demands that was intended to curb the influence of the Islamists in the economy, education and the state bureaucracy. When after six weeks nothing had been done about these recommendations, that was enough for the military men. The army began to mobilise different groups against the government. Trade unions and employers combined in a 'Front for Secularism'; in May a fanatical secularist prosecutor demanded the

dissolution of the RP; the army discharged more than 150 officers on suspicion of Islamist activities and from June onwards organised press briefings about the imminent fundamentalist threat. New life was breathed into stuffy societies for the promotion of Atatürk's ideas and their membership swelled with new recruits from worried secular circles in the cities. The Atatürk mausoleum in Ankara, the secular temple par excellence, received more visitors than ever.

It is intriguing to see how hundreds of thousands of Turks suddenly started to put up pictures of Atatürk in their homes and cars or other places in the private domain in order to show family and friends that they still stood squarely behind the Father of the Nation and his ideas. Remarkable too, because up until then, while Atatürk had been a very dominant presence in the public domain with countless portraits in and on public buildings and shops, this had rarely permeated through to the domestic sphere. Articles and books about the early years of the republic rapidly gained popularity. On radio and TV programmes people spoke with scarcely disguised nostalgia about the optimism that characterised those years. There had been a unanimous sense that Turkey had set out on the route to modernity, a movement that in the eyes of many was now under serious threat. By taking the symbolism of the republic into the private sphere, people hoped to call a halt to this impending relapse to a pre-modern age.

## **Comeback**

By June 1997, the pressure from the DYP had become so great that Erbakan stood down. It was the first 'post-modern coup d'état' without the army having to set foot outside the barracks. The suppression of the Islamists continued. The RP was banned by the Constitutional Court in February 1998 and Erbakan was banned from taking part in political activities for five years. In the same month a case was instituted against Mayor Erdoğan for quoting an inflammatory poem and in April he was sentenced to ten months in prison, of which he served four.

The Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi, FP) founded in February 1998 was the successor to the RP. At the following general elections in April 1999, the FP lost a quarter of the RP supporters but still won 15%. In June 2001 the FP was also banned by the Constitutional Court. A debate ensued in the FP about the direction to take between the conservatives in the party and modernists who wanted to convert the party into a broad centre-right

movement and ditch the Islamic rhetoric. Under the leadership of Abdullah Gül and Erdoğan, the modernisers broke away to found the Justice and Development Party (AK Partisi) in August 2001.

In 2000 the former *New York Times* bureau chief in Istanbul, Marvine Howe, looked back on this period in her book: *Turkey. A Nation Divided over Islam's Revival*. She described Turkey as a country split along lifestyle lines: a secular lifestyle with freedoms and uncertainties and a religious lifestyle based on certainties and strict control. In search of answers as to how it was possible that Islam had been making a comeback for years in modern and secular Turkey, she heard from various sides that the secularisation enforced upon Turkey by Atatürk had also been very destructive. In the new republican ideology, Kemalism, no thought was given to the role that Islam had always had as a sort of societal cement, crossing social and economic fault lines. Eventually that need for a spiritual bond between people raised its head again, in many different forms and variants that deviate from the official interpretation of Islam being controlled by the state. Many Turks, originally mainly those from outside the major population centres, but since the mass migration of the 1980s also residents of the run-down suburbs around the cities, feel more at home with a party that openly stands up for the right to express those religious feelings without restrictions. Twenty years ago that was the party of Turgut Özal, in the 1990s it was the RP of Necmettin Erbakan. That need is still there despite, and partly because of, all the successes that Kemalism - also according to its critics - has had in the modernisation of Turkey.

## **Restrictions**

In conversations with moderate RP Members of Parliament, including Abdullah Gül who would later as an AKP politician become Minister of Foreign Affairs and President, and impartial observers, Howe was repeatedly told that the RP was certainly not about forcing more religion upon secular Turks, but about removing the restrictions upon believers. Examples of this are the official restrictions on religious practices and religious expression - read: wearing a headscarf in public buildings -, Islamist journalists who end up in prison for 'anti-secular' behaviour, and Turkish officers who are not allowed to go to the mosque in uniform and are discharged from the armed forces if their wives are covered.

After an extensive search among radical and moderate secularists and Islamists, Howe comes to the conclusion that the overwhelming majority of religious Muslims do not want to see radical changes in the way Turkish society and the Turkish state are organised. Fundamentalist demands, such as the reintroduction of an Islamic justice system (sharia law), can count on little support. What people do want is recognition of the fact that many norms and values, even in modern Turkey, are based on Islam, and for this reason there must be an end to the aggressive anti-Islam line of the army and the secular elite. Howe is positive about the chances of building a bridge between the moderate majorities in the secular and Islamist camps. Within secular boundaries accepted by everyone, more scope should be allowed for different religious expressions and lifestyles. Only on the basis of such a compromise can Turkey become a stable democracy, in the opinion of the American journalist.

## **AKP**

The Justice and Development Party (AK Partisi) was formed in August 2001. The founding of the AKP was a direct response to the decision of the Constitutional Court two months before to ban the FP of Necmettin Erbakan, just as it had banned the RP earlier. After a fierce internal debate about what should happen, the modernisers in the FP led by Abdullah Gül and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan decided to break away and form a new party.

From day one the question was what was the difference between the AKP and FP/RP, and whether men like Erdoğan and Gül really were able to break with their Islamist past, as they themselves claimed. There was huge suspicion among the secular section of the population, and even after five years with responsibility in government, there are still many people who think that Erdoğan especially is a wolf in sheep's clothing who conceals his real Islamist intentions under a cloak of modern rhetoric about democracy and human rights. Since the AKP was founded, its leaders have stressed that it is not an Islamist party, but a conservative-democratic party. For many suspicious secularists that is merely a word game and the real intentions of Erdoğan and his people are the same as they were in their time as prominent figures in the RP/FP. Nevertheless it is remarkable to see how consistently the AKP does its best to show that it is a completely different party from the parties from which many of its active senior figures originated.

It seems that Erdoğan's experience as Mayor of Istanbul from 1994 to 1998 has played a particularly important role. Friends and enemies alike admit that he was very successful, not because his policies were full of high Islamic ideology, but simply because he soon realised that politicians make themselves popular if they manage to improve basic facilities and public services for the benefit of large groups of the population. In particular, the fact that he managed to make local government in Istanbul more effective and less susceptible to corruption made him well-liked, even among residents who do not hold with his Islamist views. According to some observers, as a result of this experience the AKP, unlike the RP and FP, does not pride itself on promoting an Islamic identity, but rather sets itself up as the party that can make the state function better. That also means, according to this analysis, that the AKP has ceased to be an Islamist party. Its programme and the day-to-day political actions of the party are not based on religious grounds, and although the important AKP politicians who are vital to the party's image do project themselves as practising Muslims, the propagation of the faith and its translation into political proposals is no longer the goal of the party. That would make the AKP one of the first and best examples of a post-Islamist party. It is one of the reasons why the development of the party is being followed with such interest in the rest of the Islamic world.

### **Example**

During our visits to Morocco and Egypt it became clear to us how closely people are watching the development of the AKP and the response to it from the old establishment. Of course, everyone knows that the circumstances in Turkey and the history of Islam in that country are radically different in many aspects from the Arab world. Yet despite this, people everywhere are very curious about the way the AKP is trying to combine Islamic inspiration with a pragmatic and unconditional participation in political power. Those in the AKP are perfectly well aware of this interest. They are proud to serve as an example, for all the differences. When he was Foreign Minister, Abdullah Gül pursued, to the horror of many civil servants of the old mould in his Ministry, an active foreign policy toward the rest of the Islamic world: through the Turkish Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Conference to concrete mediation in the Israel-Palestine conflict, including inviting Hamas leaders to Ankara. In this way the AKP is trying to show that its European

orientation need not to be at the expense of a self-assured and active role in its own region and in the Islamic world. That strengthens Turkey's position as a strategic asset in its negotiations with the EU and makes clear to its neighbours that they can continue to rely on Turkey in the difficult process of de-escalation in the Middle East. The AKP knows that it has more credit here than the Turkish secular parties and so is becoming increasingly confident about embarking on a sophisticated self-promotion campaign in the Arab world.

### **Sarkozy**

There is also interest in the AKP experiment in Europe for that matter, especially on the question of which political movement the AKP considers itself to belong to. In other words, with which political family does the AKP feel most at home? Is it the Liberals, because of a shared preference for an open, market-oriented economy and their commitment to Turkey joining the EU? Or is it the Christian Democrats, because of great similarities in inspiration and the promotion of conservative values? Although the AKP has always refused to define itself as a Muslim democratic party by analogy with the Christian Democrats, the AKP has decided to seek to affiliate itself with the latter. That will not be easy, however, as opposition to Turkey joining the EU is great among the Christian Democrats and Conservatives. The French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, has left no room for misunderstanding about his belief that there is no place in the EU for Turkey. This means that despite the support of many Christian Democrats in Scandinavia and southern Europe, full membership of the Christian Democrat international family will have to wait for a while. It would be a logical affiliation, considering the similarities in areas such as cultural and education policy, the international orientation, and the composition and structure of the grassroots support. A conspicuous difference that remains is the different outlook on its own role in the political system. Most European Christian Democrat parties see themselves as defenders of the status quo, while the AKP still regards itself mainly as an anti-establishment party that wants to break through the state-oriented, authoritarian secularism. In the view of the AKP, the established parties in Turkey are the real conservatives.

## Break

Back to the question of the difference between the AKP of Erdoğan and the RP/FP of Erbakan. Of course, the self-image of the AKP as a conservative anti-establishment party whose primary goal is to improve public services for the religious majority is a direct reaction to the 'soft coup' of the army in February 1997. At a stroke it had become clear where the boundaries lay for a party that explicitly invoked the authority of Islam. For politicians like Erdoğan and Gül it was a matter of political survival. If they wanted to continue as political representatives of marginalised people in the cities and the increasingly self-confident Anatolian middle class, they had to force themselves to make a break with their political past, in terms of substance as well as style.

The most remarkable change of course on policy was the decision to support Turkey's membership of the EU. Both the RP and the FP had been fierce opponents of the attempts of successive government in the 1980s and 1990s to achieve candidate status for Turkey. Erbakan especially had used fiery Islamist rhetoric when in opposition to depict the EU as a conspiracy of Jews, Catholics and freemasons. In the run-up to the 1995 elections, he was still arguing to stop integration with the EU. The AKP had to turn away completely from this fundamentalist position. The party's founders came to the conclusion that a European Turkey would offer far more guarantees of the opening up of the rigid secular system that they stood for than continued Turkish isolation under the watchful eye of the army. Their assessment of the situation is that the religious freedom that the AKP is championing has a much better chance in a democratic and stable Turkey that has to comply with European regulations on freedom of religion and human rights. Consequently, they have made a clean break with their Europhobic and anti-Western past and wholeheartedly embraced democracy and human rights as core ideas in the new AKP narrative. Only by switching over to a new political identity that fits in with developments outside Turkey, such as globalisation and international human rights, is the AKP able to defend its legitimacy in Turkey. In foreign affairs it is able to enter into alliances with powers that earn it prestige at home and abroad. A further advantage is that this puts the secular opponents of the AKP almost automatically into a position of being opponents of democratisation and human rights. The aims of the AKP and those of the EU are virtually identical and that is, of course, very useful indeed to the AKP, while doubts still exist about a possible secret agenda. Driving back the role of the army

in politics, reforming the Kemalist judicial system, increasing freedom of expression (for liberals, progressives and Islamists) and strengthening civil society (again for everyone). Who could be against that?

Suspicious secularists are still afraid that this political metamorphosis is mainly prompted by tactical considerations. They think that it suits the AKP now to talk a lot about human rights but when it comes to the crunch they fear that the party will nevertheless choose to back the rights of its own conservative and religious grassroots supporters. This is a legitimate concern, especially as the AKP is still a very new party and has not had much time to prove how serious and tenacious it is about these issues. A degree of scepticism is therefore not out of place especially after the slowdown in reforms after 2005 and this will only be allayed if the AKP continues to support the European project and the values that go with it.

### **Anatolian tigers**

The founding of the AKP did not, however, only result from a conscious attempt at political redefinition. Many analysts agree that the rise of a self-confident entrepreneurial class in Anatolia has played at least as important a role. A quiet revolution has been taking place in the new urban centres of central Anatolia, as a result of the liberalisation of the Turkish economy in the 1980s. Until well into the 1980s, the Turkish economy was dominated almost entirely by businesses based in Istanbul with close links to the state and its Kemalist ideology. The new opportunities created by the policies of premier Turgut Özal were mainly grasped by a new generation of well-educated entrepreneurs in Anatolia. With astonishing speed they managed to develop successful small and medium-sized regional companies into players on the national and even international market. In many cases these entrepreneurs are still deeply rooted in the rural culture with its strong Islamic values, but at the same time they are uninhibited in their use of the newest production and sales techniques to sell their products, mainly furniture, all over the world. With a sense of drama and an eye on publicity, one think-tank, the European Stability Initiative (ESI), described the spectacular growth of these new industrialists as the rise of a class of 'Islamic Calvinists'. That label mainly referred to the successful combination observed by the ESI of Islamic values and a work ethic resembling that which, according to the famous sociologist Max Weber, was responsible for the rapid growth of capitalism in north-west Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is possible to dispute this comparison, but it shows how the phenomenon of the sudden rise of an Islamic capitalist class is being

viewed from diverse quarters with a combination of awe and amazement. These new players in the Turkish economy regard state intervention in the economy and the concentration of economic and political power in Istanbul as the most important causes of the recurrent stagnation in the Turkish economy and the unequal distribution of wealth across the whole country. They are also fighting back against the tendency of the secular elite in Istanbul to depict central and eastern Anatolia as backward because it is the strongly Islamic part of Turkey. Through their own fast-growing organisations they are doing their best to break open the political system for the benefit of the newcomers in the economy and their different ideas and beliefs. It should come as no surprise that the formation of a new party that combines respect for traditional Islamic beliefs with support for liberal economic policies can rely on a great deal of support from the Anatolian tigers.

## **Growth**

Looking back over five years of economic policy under AKP Minister and chief negotiator with the EU, Ali Babacan, the population of Ankara and the rest of Anatolia can scarcely be other than very content. After a disastrous year in 2001, the Turkish economy has made leaps and bounds since 2002, thanks also to the reforms under the previous outstanding Finance and Economic Minister, the Social-Democrat Kemal Derviş. Annual economic growth has been around 6% since 2002, foreign investment has increased spectacularly and inflation seems to be under control at last. Despite all this the official unemployment figure remains stubbornly at around 10%. That indicates, according to economists, that the current economic boom is just enough to cushion the many redundancies from obsolete industries with the parallel influx of new, young employees. You do not need to go far from the centre of Istanbul to see that the increased prosperity in Turkey is distributed extremely unequally. It is a half hour's walk from the chic boutiques of Nişantaşı to the tumbledown houses of Kaşimpaşa, the district where Prime Minister Erdoğan grew up. Only sustained growth in a stable political environment will be able to ensure that not only the smart Anatolian tigers and the new service sectors in the cities, but also the great mass of slum-dwellers who have moved in from the countryside, will benefit from the economic successes of recent years. It is hardly surprising that this was the main message of the AKP during the 2007 elections.

## **At the helm**

Rather more than a year after its foundation, the AKP won the general election in November 2002 in spectacular fashion. With over 34% of the votes it was the largest party in the new Parliament by far. The CHP of Deniz Baykal was the only other party that managed to reach the electoral threshold of 10%. None of the other parties, including the three government parties, managed to do that, and that meant that the AKP at a stroke had a two-thirds majority in the Turkish Parliament. The electorate was punishing the ruling coalition of Social Democrats, Liberals and Nationalists, who were blamed for the economic crisis of 2001 and punished for the equation of politics with corruption in public opinion. It was a reward for the party and party leader who had promised to end poverty and corruption. Or was it, as many secularists feared, also proof of a dangerous trend toward the Islamisation of state and society, this time headed by a party that knew perfectly well how to conceal what it was really doing?

After five years as the sole party in power, it is now possible to take stock of the first AKP government. When it comes to preparing Turkey for membership of the EU, friend and foe alike will agree that until December 2004, the moment when the EU decided to start negotiations on Turkish membership in 2005, the AKP had shown ambition unequalled by any of its secular predecessors. Reforms were pushed through at great tempo which, on paper at least, made Turkey a more democratic country en route to the EU. Implementing all these new laws in practice turned out to be rather more difficult, however. Unlike the government, all observers inside and outside Turkey agree that since 2005 there has been too little progress on crucial areas such as improving freedom of expression and guaranteeing the rights of ethnic and religious minorities.

## **Resistance**

This slowing down has a great deal to do with the difficulties that any government will come up against when it has to take on vested interests and positions, even if that is for a good cause, in this case accession to the EU. However, it also has everything to do with a marked increase in Turkish nationalism that in Parliament and on the street is translated into increasingly vocal resistance to European demands that are seen as partisan or unrealistic. Certainly now that the climate around enlargement of the EU has also become decidedly chilly in Europe, a growing number of Turks

sense that their country will never actually become a member of the EU, and so there is little point in jumping through all kinds of hoops to meet European demands that seem to get louder and stricter every year. In such a social climate, the AKP is also not immune from the growing Euro-scepticism. Although influential politicians like President Gül and Babacan, Gül's successor as Minister of Foreign Affairs, remain committed to the need for radical reforms, Prime Minister Erdoğan meanwhile seems to have become rather less enthusiastic, certainly now that an openly nationalist course without reference to the EU turned out to be successful in the 2007 election campaign. After winning 47% of the vote, the new AKP government will now have to prove that it is really prepared to go further on the obstacle-strewn route toward the European Union, despite the increased scepticism in Europe and Turkey.

In his second term, Erdoğan will also have to come clear on what exactly he means by a new definition of secularism. Nor can he evade the question any longer as to whether he intends to use the AKP majority in Parliament this time to relax the rules on wearing headscarves also outside of universities – the symbolic issue par excellence! A remarkable aspect of any assessment of the first AKP government is the fact that the party did not use its parliamentary majority between 2002 and 2007 to push through new rules on such a sensitive and important issue for its own grassroots support. Despite the fact that opinion polls indicate that the majority of the Turkish population has no objection to headscarves at universities.

## **Headscarf**

Shortly after its resounding July 2007 election victory Erdoğan did move. With the help of the nationalist opposition party MHP the government in the beginning of 2008 introduced changes to the constitution to allow adult students to wear a headscarf at university. Opposition came, as expected, from the main opposition party CHP. But also from university rectors that challenged the changes and were actively advocating disregard for the new reality. Although the army kept quiet, other state institutions voiced their concern and sometimes showed open defiance. Even after a clear majority in parliament spoke out in favour of changing the rules, the dust did not settle quickly. What remains unclear is whether the opponents of the new headscarf rules will give up their resistance in the end or whether we are

only witnessing the start of an ongoing battle to be played out in universities and courts.

In its first term the government had pinned its hopes in this matter on Europe, and particularly on the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, which was asked to pass judgement on a case concerning the ban on a woman wearing a headscarf in Turkey. A ruling by the Court in November 2005 brought no clarity, however; on the contrary, it merely fuelled further debate. According to some observers, it was the outcome of this case that drastically dampened Erdoğan's enthusiasm for Turkish EU membership, as he was disappointed to have to accept that the implementation of reforms via the European route would not be possible on this issue, one so sensitive for many Muslims.

## European Court

The Court in Strasbourg ruled in fact that the complainant, Leyla Şahin, was rightly denied access to a number of lectures and examinations at the medical faculty of Istanbul University in 1998 for wearing a headscarf. Supporters of the headscarf ban immediately thought that, with this judgement in the highest instance of the highest European Court, the battle was decided once and for all in their favour. Others felt that the Court had simply not dared to fell one of the most important pillars of the Turkish state, namely secularism. After all, the judges only said that as the country's democracy is based on secularism, Turkey was respecting the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) by banning students from appearing in college with a headscarf or beard. It did not say that the ban on female students wearing headscarves was a good thing in itself. The minority opinion of the Belgian judge is interesting here; he did find that Şahin's rights had been violated. Anyone who reads the ruling of the European judges will not come away any the wiser and will be forced to conclude that this was the beginning of the debate about the headscarf rather than the end of it. The questions remained open and should therefore be answered in Turkey, not in Strasbourg. What is ironical about the 'Şahin v Turkey' case is that the Turkish government was wholeheartedly in agreement with the complaint. Erdoğan himself is an avowed opponent of the ban on headscarves and his own daughters are at university in the US so that they can wear the headscarf while studying. But it took him another three years to come up with a proposal that is supported by the majority of the population but still strongly opposed by the defenders of the legacy of Atatürk.

## **Imam Hatip**

Another of the AKP's election promises concerned education, specifically the schools known as Imam Hatip schools. This was always a sensitive issue, which played an important role for the army in its 'soft coup' of 1997. Imam Hatip schools are secondary education institutes for training imams – leaders of prayer in the mosque – where, in addition to the standard curriculum, about eighteen hours a week are spent studying the Koran and theology. Strict adherents of secularist ideology have always been suspicious of them, certainly when the number of pupils greatly increased in the early 1990s. After the coup in 1997 it was made more difficult for these pupils to go on to higher education. Erdoğan, who attended one of these schools himself, wanted to abolish this unequal treatment of prospective students. A bill to that effect was adopted by Parliament in May 2004, because the AKP had a large majority. The strictly secular and very powerful Education High Council (YÖK) contested the law successfully right up to the highest court. After the 2007 elections and the nomination of AKP-friendly people to YÖK, everybody is waiting for the government to have a second try.

## **New consensus**

After the impressive AKP election victory in July 2007 and the poor showing of CHP, the party defending the Kemalist legacy, many secularists are afraid that Erdogan will finally show his true face. The headscarf proposal and the rumours that more is to come seem to prove to sceptical secularists that their suspicions about the supposed secret agenda of the Prime Minister were well-founded after all. Both government and opposition are using all their energies and political capital to try to prove their point. Tensions are rising again and there seems to be no end in sight.

This suspicion – smouldering for all these years – formed the background for the mass demonstrations in the spring of 2007. The immediate cause was, of course, the impending election of a President from an Islamist background and the threat of a first lady wearing a headscarf. Now that Abdullah Gül has finally become President, after the huge victory of the AKP in the July 2007 parliamentary elections, the ongoing row over the headscarf is proof that the problems are not resolved. It has become clear over the past two years that there is deep mistrust bubbling just under the surface of Turkish society, which sucks up enormous energy and if it

continues unchanged will make the already troubled journey towards membership of the EU even more arduous. Secularists continue to believe that any relaxation on a particular issue will open the floodgates to a total undermining of the modern society that they hold so dear. Former Islamists of various complexions see in the defence of the status quo a deliberate attempt of the secular establishment to exclude the new economic and cultural forces from power. If there is no end to this stalemate in the foreseeable future, it will seriously hamper opportunities to make further approaches to Europe vis-à-vis Turkey's ultimate membership of the EU. A society that is at odds with itself and in which large groups do not trust each other, will not be able to combine forces in the way that will be necessary to take this momentous and difficult step. Without a new social consensus about the direction in which the majority of the Turkish population wants their country to go, fear and suspicion will continue to dominate the political and social debate.

### **Status quo**

The secularists therefore need to give up their sometimes paranoid habit of regarding everything that comes out of the AKP quarter as a first step in the wrong direction. They will also have to accept that, in a globalised world, Turkey has something to gain from an open economy and an open democracy. Restrictions that were defensible in the past have become obstacles that are no longer acceptable in a country that wants to join the EU. Instead of taking an alarmist stance and rebuffing every change, secular opposition parties would do better to come up with their own proposals to make clear that the secular principles of the Turkish republic are compatible with the demands of a modern society, in which the majority accommodates religious and ethnic minorities instead of intimidating them.

Parties and movements that set themselves up as defenders of a secular republic in the tradition of Atatürk will, however, above all have to prove that they are not out to defend the status quo. Out of a fear of change, many secularists make the mistake of covering up the faults of the present system with the cloak of inevitability. Very cautious steps taken by the AKP towards finding a political, non-military solution to the Kurdish problem are jeered off the platform by nationalist politicians and columnists as giving in to terrorism. Government plans to at last purge the Penal Code of articles that still allow charges to be brought against writers and journalists for insulting the Turkish nation are damned by the largest

opposition party as an insult to the proud Turkish people. Blatant attempts by the army to influence political decision-making, such as the so-called e-coup in April 2007, are justified by diehard Kemalists with reference to an impending assumption of power by the Islamists.

## Opposition

It would be a boon to Turkey if a social-democratic and liberal left opposition were to form, in Parliament and outside, that would keep the AKP on its toes by demanding that the government reform the country faster, tackling the structural level more than they are doing so at present. Instead of this, all the opposition is doing is putting the brakes on the AKP by making unashamed use of its many crucial positions of power in the Turkish state. The army, the judiciary and the state bureaucracy are still bulwarks of resistance to more far-reaching reforms. That opposition is sometimes clear to see, for instance in the judgment of the Constitutional Court on the invalidity of the election of a new President in the spring of 2007.

The concept of the 'deep state' has also risen to the surface more and more often recently, by which people mean secret networks of figures inside national bodies such as the army, the police and judiciary that have set themselves the task of perpetuating the current balance of power, if necessary by force. According to many mistrustful Turks, the 'deep state' was responsible for the murder of the Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in January 2007, as well as for the bomb attacks in Ankara and other cities a couple of months later which have never been cleared up. It might seem obvious to dismiss these speculations as a typical example of the Turkish predilection for conspiracy theories, but there are just too many signs appearing with a certain regularity that there are many and strong links between ex-generals, police commissioners and public prosecutors on one side and professional criminals and nationalist youth gangs on the other. Too many murders and attacks remain unsolved or are pinned on perpetrators who have allowed themselves to be used by people keen to remain in the background. Previous governments never dared touch these mysterious networks. But all of a sudden in January 2008 the police, with the approval of the government, did clamp down on a shady group called *Ergenekon*. Former generals, lawyers and journalists were arrested and accused of conspiring against the state and were linked directly with some

of the unsolved murders, including the one on Dink. It is still far too early to declare victory in the fight against the self-declared murderous defenders of the Turkish state. But it is a sign that some things are changing with politicians in power who have a personal experience in how repressive the state can be. Conviction secularists, who always set themselves up as defenders of the constitutional state based on the Western model, should be the very people to firmly distance themselves from this shady side of the Turkish state and assist the political opponents in this struggle to clean Turkey from the accumulated dirt of the past.

### **Leadership needed**

The former Islamists also need to speak in plain terms. Support for the AKP government from liberal and progressive quarters is starting to decline in Turkey and outside the country. This has everything to do with the lack of direction of the last two years. Opening up a rigid and undemocratic system can still count on a lot of sympathy, but they have not made clear precisely what the new system will look like. For this reason it is high time that the AKP leaders stated where they want to take Turkey with no ifs or buts.

If the goal is membership of the EU, then that aim cannot be put on ice for years with impunity. Among supporters of Turkish accession in Europe, there is a great deal of understanding of the frustrations of AKP politicians about the inconsistent and equivocal Cyprus policy of the European Union, which has allowed Greek Cypriots to block a compromise solution, difficult in itself, for two years. Countries like the UK, Sweden and Italy are also extremely annoyed about the anti-Turkish rhetoric of French President Sarkozy, if only because many people in Turkey have been given the impression, because of the excessive attention given to all his statements in the media, that the Frenchman is speaking on behalf of the whole of the EU. That does not alter the fact that people within and outside Turkey are getting impatient and are looking to the Turkish government to provide some political leadership, by continuing to hammer home in their own country that the long-term interests of Turkey will be served by joining the EU and that radical reforms are needed to achieve that.

## Rules of the game

If the goal is to redefine the concept of secularism, then new rules of the game and how exactly they differ from the present model need to be clarified quickly. Many liberal intellectuals and journalists who would never vote for the AKP themselves, agree with the desire to switch from an aggressive and dogmatic secular model to a form of government more like the American and north-west European variant of secularism (passive secularism). Continued speculation about what exactly the AKP wants is only playing into the hands of those who claim to know for certain that Erdoğan is bent on the total dismantling of the secular state.

If the goal is to relax the ban on the headscarf, then the confusion should not be allowed to continue about what form the new social compromise on this will have to take, and whether allowing female students at universities to wear the headscarf is the ultimate goal or merely an interim step. Internal differences of opinion probably explain why it has not been possible to get a clear statement from the AKP on this supremely symbolic issue. Just how sensitive an issue this is can be seen from the fact that the AKP has not selected any women who wear the headscarf as Members of Parliament. It would take much of the wind out of the sails of the sceptics if the AKP were to plainly opt for the French model, for instance, where female students at university are allowed to wear a headscarf but girls in primary and secondary schools and representatives of the state in all its branches are not. This would be a compromise that could easily be defended and that the secularists would find difficult to continue to oppose in the knowledge that many opinion polls support such a solution.

## Alevis

The most difficult dilemma for the AKP may be that of religious freedom for Muslims who do not feel at home with the interpretation of Islam as promulgated by the state. An estimated 25% of Turks regard themselves as Alevis, belonging to a movement within Islam that is far removed from the Sunni 'mainstream' in Turkey. The Alevis are extremely suspicious of the AKP, which they regard as exclusively representing the Sunni majority, who do not recognise the special character of the Alevis. The violent aggression against the free-thinking Alevis that cost scores of people their lives in the 1990s is still fresh in the memory. At the present time Alevi

criticism is mainly directed at the role of Diyanet, the Presidency of Religious Affairs, a kind of ministry of religion, that controls the official mosques, employs all the imams and through these imams disseminates the only permitted, Sunni, moderate interpretation of Islam. The Diyanet was founded by Atatürk to prevent the simple rural population from coming under the thrall of extremist variants of Islam. Many Europeans also look on in amazement at this very well-organised state control of the religion of the majority. The AKP will have to give the matter a great deal of thought before it decides to make a choice between the two obvious options. Either they open up the Diyanet with all its facilities to all movements within Islam – and also, some critics demand, to all the other minor religions – or they gradually run down this state institution, recognising that this kind of interference with religious practices in the country is no longer appropriate in an open democracy based on passive secularism. In the beginning of 2008 Erdogan himself made some encouraging gestures to the Alevi community. Only the future will tell whether this is the beginning of a serious effort to give to the Alevis the rights and freedoms they have been asking for such a long time or whether this was the PR move many sceptical Alevis fear it is.

## **Tolerance**

The most important question that the AKP and its supporters need to answer concerns the degree of tolerance that they want and are able to summon up for people who do not share their world view. Many liberal and progressive Turks are willing to defend the wearing of the headscarf at university, even though they would strongly advise their own daughters against it. Can the AKP summon up a similar generosity when it comes to provocative clothing or whisky drinking?

It is clear that the AKP has not yet managed to dispel deep-rooted suspicion among many Turks. With some they will never succeed, because these people are committed to the status quo. Many of the demonstrators from the spring of 2007 were not, however, by definition against the AKP or against the government's proposed reforms. The many women amongst them could be persuaded of the good intentions of the AKP if they saw that the party leadership was willing not only to respect the equality of women but also to defend it against the hardliners among their own supporters. There was a great deal of praise from women's organisations for the new Penal Code in 2004, which strengthened women's rights enormously in sensitive areas such as public morality, honour killings and violence

against women. The new Penal Code came into being following extensive consultation with the women's movement and was broadly supported in Parliament by the AKP and CHP. Another positive example was the campaign against honour killings in 2005, organised by the government in cooperation with the popular newspaper *Hürriyet*.

After initiatives like these, it is difficult to sustain the idea that the AKP is a misogynous party, but it will take more than this to dispel the mistrust among such as our female dinner companions.

Why do they not appoint a capable woman with a liberal world view to an important, visible post? That would make clear that the AKP is also there for women who are not members of their grassroots support. Would I be completely convinced then? No, but it would help. Do not expect us to be cheering for the AKP very soon, I don't see you doing that for the orthodox Christians in the Netherlands. If they leave us alone and do not make us behave and dress as they do, I will be perfectly happy.

## **Role of Europe**

Because Turkey wants to join the EU, Brussels has a big influence on how Turkey clears away the most important obstacles to its membership.

Fewest problems are to be expected in adapting Turkish laws to the thousands of EU directives and regulations. In technical areas such as the environment, transport and food safety, but also in more sensitive areas such as anti-discrimination, Turkey will have to apply the same standards as the member states of the EU. Important, complicated and sometimes very expensive though they are, changes like these do not affect the fabric of a society and, in the case of Turkey, do not touch upon the highly contentious issues that many in and outside the country are getting so heated about.

The top three issues that the EU has been concerned about for years and on which there is not even the beginning of a consensus in Turkey are the persistent restrictions on freedom of expression, a solution to the Kurdish problem and the role of the army. In all three cases, a fierce struggle is raging in Turkey between those who recognise that the present situation is untenable and has to change if Turkey wants to be able to join the EU, and those who believe that giving in to this pressure is equivalent to undermining the foundations of the Turkish state. The reformers know

that without outside support, that is without the help of the EU, it will be extremely difficult to change deep-rooted customs and beliefs. The EU realises that generally although some Europeans create the impression that they would rather play the role of disinterested outsider than that of involved political friend. Only if the EU allows no room for misunderstanding about where it wants to get with Turkey – full membership – and what role it has reserved for itself in this – supporter of the reformers – can it play a crucial role in the democratisation of Turkey. That can take many forms: from giving moral support to persecuted writers to financial support for ground-breaking projects, from training a new generation of public prosecutors to passing on good experiences of solving similar problems in EU member states.

### **Standard**

The last point is also the most that the EU can do to help with finding a breakthrough in the impasse between secularists and former Islamists. There is no such thing as a European model for a secular state that keeps an equidistant relationship with all religions and does not interfere, or only marginally, in the way believers express their faith in public. The differences within the EU itself are simply far too great. What is considered normal in England – an established church under the formal leadership of the head of state – would be inconceivable in France with its far-reaching separation of church and state. While in countries like Poland, Ireland and Greece there are strong ties between the state, the nation and the dominant religious community, the Netherlands, Austria and Belgium consciously support religious pluralism in an administrative, political and cultural sense. Or, as the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) put it: "There is no unambiguous, fixed European standard against which the current situation in Turkey can be measured. Nor are there any a priori reasons to assume that Turkey would, or would not conform with any of the available European development models".<sup>5</sup> The Turks will have to decide for themselves which model they find attractive, what they want to retain of their present system and what they want to take from which foreign country to add to it. It is incumbent upon the EU to show a certain

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<sup>5</sup> Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), *The European Union, Turkey and Islam*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004 (includes survey, *Searching for the Fault-Line*, by E.J. Zürcher and H. van der Linden), p. 38.

modesty here. That is not the same as indifference. It is our firm belief that it is in the enlightened self-interest of Europe that a stable, democratic and secular Turkey becomes a member of a European Union, whose ambition it is to encourage the democratisation and modernisation of its old and new neighbours. The opportunities that the EU has to truly influence developments in countries like Morocco and Egypt can only increase if Turkey is accepted as a full member of the European Union.

### 3. MOROCCO UNDECIDED: AFTER THE REFORMS, DEMOCRACY?

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“2006 is the year of the great change”, so predicted what is perhaps the main Islamist movement in Morocco, *al Adl wal Ihsan*, of ‘Sheikh’ Abdeslam Yassine. In their dreams, which they publish on the website of the movement, the Sheikh and his followers claimed to have sensed that something would really come of it. Poverty, corruption, immorality, the gulf between rich and poor, bureaucracy, the Western lifestyle of the affluent class: things could not go on as before. The pitcher can be taken to water so many times until it breaks, was more or less the message that Nadia Yassine, the Sheikh’s daughter, presented to us in the autumn of that particular year.

But it is now 2008. And nothing has changed fundamentally in Morocco. There is just as much fertile ground for radical reform movements of all kinds, intent on smashing the status quo, and in the most varied ways. By demonstrating at peaceful sit-ins against clear violations of human rights, such as in the city of Tetuán where, at the beginning of 2007, three lawyers were dismissed from office for life by the local court after they had published an open letter in a newspaper about corruption in the same court. Or by suicide attacks, such as in Casablanca in the spring of 2007, where two boys blew themselves up in despair in an internet café, in the middle of a working class district not far from the slum area they came from, when they could not find directions on the internet to the place where they were to detonate their explosives. In November 2007 rumours of a ‘gay wedding’ sparked riots in the northern city of Ksar El Kebir. Six men ended up in jail, accused of homosexual acts, amid outcries from Islamists that Morocco’s traditional values were going down the drain and liberal fears that the events signal a tendency towards more restrictive social norms. If anything, they illustrate the tensions between modernism and traditionalism facing Moroccan society.

## French

But what is actually wrong with the status quo? The general picture of Morocco since the 1990s is after all that of a country in which democratisation and reform have taken root and are sprouting shoots. The appointment in 1997 by King Hassan II of the social democrat Abderrahmane Yussufi as Prime Minister and the succession in 1999 of Hassan II by his reputedly 'modern' son, Mohammed VI, are without doubt important factors that have helped to determine that picture. And indeed: since the end of the Cold War much has changed in Morocco. Human rights are no longer trampled underfoot, the position of women has improved, it is possible to speak openly about injustices perpetrated in the past, and corruption is no longer a taboo subject. So what is the issue?

Despite a degree of freedom that is unknown in the region as a whole, Morocco retains the features of an absolute monarchy in which a small oligarchy holds all the power and wealth and in which the role of parliament is very limited; a paradox that characterises the situation in the country. There is a *deep state* in the form of the power clique surrounding the Royal Palace, known as the *Makhzen*. But it is not exceptional for that to be openly criticised.

Perhaps it is just coincidence but of all the people we talked to in Morocco, two spoke really fluent accent-free French: Nadia Yassine, daughter of the Islamist guru Abdeslam Yassine, and Ahmed Benchemsi, the very young chief editor of the secular progressive weekly *TelQuel*. They embody two extremes in contemporary Moroccan society. On the one hand, an Islamism that strives for an Islamic Caliphate without alcohol and with 'decently' dressed women. On the other hand, a French language magazine that breaks taboos on a weekly basis, whether it be on the acceptance of homosexuality, legalisation of soft drugs, human rights violations in Western Sahara or the exposure of corruption. What do they have in common? Their rejection of the status quo, their pressure for change, their criticism of the King. And as regards the representatives of these two extremes to whom we spoke: their French-language education.

## The King

Conversations with a whole series of politicians, scientists and journalists led us to the cautious conclusion that those movements that do not allow themselves to be 'tamed' by the palace, which refuse to play the game in

exchange for a small measure of power, are of great importance for true democratic reforms in Morocco. The range of such protest movements is enormous: it varies from the hardcore Islamists mentioned previously to zealous human rights activists, with everything that lies between in the shape of newspaper editors, moderate Islamist political parties and radical left and secular parties. Those movements are crucial because they expose the true obstacle to further democratisation: the political power of the king. But of almost equal importance is the fact that, without the active participation of the established secular parties, further democratisation cannot get off the ground. These movements have arisen from the independence movement – the Istiqlal party – and from the former left-wing opposition to the king – the *Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires*, USFP. In a reflex of self-preservation, they seem to acquiesce in their lot by sharing in government but without having any real influence. Their view is that Morocco can only be reformed in cooperation with the king. The rise and popularity of Islamist parties, about which more in a moment, makes them fear a future which is too democratic. These parties, among which the USFP is even a sister party of the European Social Democrats, clearly need some support to encourage them not to be afraid of democracy! Party building, through which they can stand up better to the Islamists with their broad popular base, is an important factor in that. Daring to put some distance between themselves and palace politics is another condition of winning back the confidence of the people. The level of distrust of politics was revealed by the big winner of the latest elections: abstention. In September 2007, two out of three Moroccans didn't even bother to turn up the polls.

In this chapter our attention will focus mainly on political Islam in Morocco. Before examining a number of the opposition movements in more detail, it is important to review briefly the most pressing problems of Morocco today, and the ways in which those in power are dealing with them.

### **Drop in the ocean**

At the time of our stay in Morocco in September 2006, the authorities had just decided to raise prices for basic foodstuffs. A representative of a major human rights organisation told us that his movement had decided not to organise a demonstration against this, for fear that it would end in a violent bread riot. One year later, violent protests did break out over price increases announced days before the beginning of Ramadan in September

2007. Riots in Sefrou, east of Casablanca, brought back memories of the social unrest in the early 1980s and forced the newly elected government to review its decision. But dissatisfaction over the increasing cost of living persists. Poverty is widespread in Morocco; 14% of Moroccans live on less than two dollars a day, 30% are said to belong to the middle class but in fact live on the poverty line. Only 16% of the population have health insurance.

The vast spread of slum areas around Casablanca makes these figures somehow comprehensible. We went to talk there to the local section of the *Parti de la Justice et du Développement* (PJD), the moderate Islamist party. The executive members from the Sidi Bernussi section of the PJD told us how, long before the suicide attacks in Casablanca in 2003, they had attempted to focus attention on the situation in the slums: the extreme marginalisation of the inhabitants was in their view a breeding ground for violence. "But everyone said: 'No, it's religious extremism, it has nothing to do with poverty'. After May 2003 they returned to the issue and suddenly unprecedented attention began to be focused on the slum districts". There are programmes to house people in new flats and, at the moment the keys are handed over, their old slum is demolished. "But it is still a drop in the ocean", says the local PJD Mayor, who himself does not have a budget and must wait to find out what the City of Casablanca and the government in Rabat want to invest.

## **Human Development**

As part of the attempts to counter radicalism, King Mohammed VI – on his accession he was called 'King of the poor' – in May 2005 launched a grand project, the 'National Initiative for Humanitarian Development' (INDH). Its aims are ambitious enough: by 2009 all slums must be demolished and the number of Moroccans living below the poverty line must be halved, among other things. The project, launched with great fanfare, seems to have rapidly fallen victim to its own ambitions. On its launch, it was received as being very promising. When over a few months every new public investment, every new law and every government speech referred to the INDH, people increasingly began to joke about it. "When I had to go today, I noticed that even the public loo is financed by the INDH", we read on a Moroccan blog. The INDH is broadly based and without clear focus. It is

endowed with funds, which for such a comprehensive purpose as the raising of the living standards of Moroccans, are totally inadequate.

The criticism of the INDH by the opposition, both secular and Islamist, is not muted. The way in which the INDH came into being has been under fire from democrats on both sides. "The Government had to read in the newspaper that the King and his clique had a plan to tackle poverty – that should not happen in a democracy", said a representative of a human rights organisation who wished to remain anonymous. But the most widespread criticism focuses on the continuing gulf between the small group of incredibly rich Moroccans, including the king and his clan (30% of the Casablanca stock market is in the hands of the king, according to one of our interviewees), and the rest of the population. It is implausible that inequality and abject poverty can be brought to an end by a single comprehensive programme. It is not enough. Nadia Yassine expresses it most graphically when she says: "The INDH is like a plaster on the body of someone suffering from Aids".<sup>6</sup>

## Literacy

43% of Moroccans are illiterate. The government's literacy programmes, assisted by international organisations, do perhaps offer hope, but there is a long way to go. International efforts are also greeted with great suspicion, particularly by the Islamists. It is again Nadia Yassine who voices that suspicion most incisively:

We are against American international aid programmes, against the programmes of the World Bank. They teach you to read so that you understand four letters: COCA COLA. Capitalism first takes everything away from us, then drip-feeds it back into us in order to manipulate us.

Be that as it may, literacy and education stand high on the 'to do list' of every Moroccan political grouping. It is also one of the keys to the success of the PJD that it becomes actively involved in the education of young people in deprived areas. In Sidi Bernussi the local elected representatives explained to us how the PJD provided free lessons in its district offices. *Al Adl wal Ihsan* also gives high priority to education but, at local level, is mainly concerned with spiritual education. According to

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Nadia Yassine, September 2006.

them, the problem is not only insufficient access to education, but also the way in which the existing education is presented. Education is a component of the strategy of the circles surrounding the king: "The *Makhzen* is making a mess of it: they are playing divide and rule. The elite go to the French lycée, the rest stay stupid!" says Nadia Yassine. She herself, like Ahmed Benchemsi, went to the French lycée.

## Chest

A third problem is corruption. Mohammed VI carried on where his father left off in the fight against corruption. In 2005, a Moroccan branch of Transparency International was established, with the declared intention of setting up an independent organisation to eradicate corruption in public life. The same year, however, Morocco stood at number 78 on the list of 158 countries identified by Transparency International as having perceived corruption and the country was given a score of 3 out of 10. Even though at the end of the 1990s the fight against corruption seemed to be bearing fruit – Transparency studies showed a downward trend – the promise of the new millennium was not fulfilled. It is true that, due to the attention focused on corruption, it has been acknowledged as a problem and a danger to continued development, particularly by the opposition and civil society. Everyone, secular opposition, Islamist opposition and human rights organisations, immediately cites corruption whenever the state of the nation comes up for discussion.

There is much speculation as to the reasons why Mohammed VI cannot get to grips with corruption. One possible reason, which is mentioned repeatedly, is his personal association with a small clique of oligarchs on whom he is very dependent and who would have the most to lose from success in the fight against corruption. That also brings us to the fourth great problem in the eyes of the opposition and the civil society in Morocco: the power of the king and the *Makhzen*, the palace entourage.

On the way from the airport to the centre of Rabat, we drove for a long time alongside a stone wall with battlements. Behind it, according to our driver, lay the Royal Palace. A little later we passed the entrance. Beside it stood an old square building. "The Royal Lycée," said the driver. There could be no better illustration of the road to power in Morocco: the educational establishment has been, in the eyes of many, the way for the present generation of oligarchs to gain access to the king. "Most people

who have anything to say in Morocco are ex-classmates of Mohammed VI," said one of the people we talked to.

*Makhzen* literally means 'chest' or 'place of storage'. It stands for the power of the King and his intimates. It is an old name that does not exist on paper, but in reality goes back to the pre-colonial period. In contrast to what is often thought, the power of the Makhzen under Mohammed VI has not diminished. However, the Makhzen is constantly changing, and a different generation to that under Hassan II now holds the reins of power. Although Morocco is a constitutional monarchy with an elected parliament and governments in which the main former opposition parties, of both left and right, are and have been represented, a large measure of power is in the hands of individuals who are appointed by the king from outside these parties and without intervention by parliament. The best examples of these are the so-called 'delegated ministers': ministers who are not accountable to parliament but determine policy behind the scenes. According to a representative of Morocco's leading human rights organisation, the Makhzen is the greatest obstacle to further reform: "It is a system which is stronger than Mohammed VI. You should not pin all your hope on one individual: even if he wants to, he cannot change things".

## Democracy

After so many negative comments on recent developments in Morocco, it is worth looking at what has changed for the better in the past few years. In 2008 Morocco is undeniably an entirely different country to that of the so-called Years of Lead under Hassan II, when torture and disappearances were the order of the day. Morocco is probably the country with most freedom in the region. That is the main impression after an intensive visit and conversations with various representatives of civil society: Morocco is a country in which much can be said and done. A journalist to whom we spoke confirmed that picture: "Under Hassan II, even at the end of the 1990s, three subjects were 'forbidden territory' for the media: God, the King and Western Sahara. Under his son we have published critical articles on all three subjects without getting into difficulties". He continues by philosophising on democracy in Morocco: "No, of course we do not have democracy. But pure institutional democratisation is not the only important criterion. We have a rich, active civil society which has made Morocco, despite its absolute monarchy, into the most democratic country in the Arab world".

The optimism of this journalist needs to be put into perspective: the *Nichane* affair of December 2006, when the paper was banned for two months for publishing jokes about the King and Islam, is fresh in everyone's memory. The suspended sentences for the editors were not as bad as might have been expected, but the chief editor threw in the towel and no longer wishes to practise journalism in Morocco. The limitations of Moroccan press freedom came to light in the run up to the September 2007 parliamentary elections as well. In early August *Nichane* was taken from newsstands all over the country. A day later, 50,000 copies of its sister weekly *TelQuel* were destroyed at the orders of the interior minister. Its publisher, Ahmed Benchemsi, reportedly having written an editorial questioning Mohammed VI's commitment to democracy, was charged with "failing to show respect to the King". Most recently, the appeals court in Casablanca upheld the seven-month prison sentence against reporter Mostapha Hurmatallah of the Arabic language weekly *Al Watan Al An*, who had quoted from military intelligence reports in June 2007 in an article critical of the authorities.

How relative freedom and democracy are without constitutional anchorage is also shown clearly by the reaction of the government to the terrorist attacks in 2003 and later in 2007. Literally thousands of people were rounded up on the strength of little more 'evidence' than the fact that they wore a beard and consorted with other bearded men. After the 2003 attacks a total of 5000 people were arrested, of whom 2000 were actually convicted. It should be noted that after the attacks of spring 2007 the Moroccan government was more measured in its response: there were only a hundred or so arrests.

This brings us to the central focus of our quest: the role of Islam in the democratisation of countries like Morocco. We have already seen that sections of political Islam are harsh critics of the present status quo in Morocco. Now we see that Islamists are also associated with terrorism and have thus become the targets of repressive policies. Clearly they could, with others, play a role in the democratisation process. Before we look further into this, it is worth reviewing, briefly, the main currents of political Islam in Morocco.

## The Prophet

Anyone who studies the relationship between Islam and politics in Morocco cannot bypass the king. He is at one and the same time the key political and religious figure in the country. The legitimacy of the Moroccan kings is to a large extent based on their direct descent from the Prophet. They are *Amir al Mu'minin*, commander of the faithful, hence the highest religious authority in the country. But at the same time the king also holds temporal power. And, although there have been a number of constitutional changes since 1970 to modernise the monarchy, the term 'executive constitutional monarchy', proclaimed by Mohammed VI in 1999, cannot hide the fact that the king and the Makhzen, discussed above, still hold the reins of power.

But the King is now being challenged in both areas. Politically, both the Islamists and the left-wing secular opposition are pressing for democratisation and serious powers for parliament. In the religious field, the main challenger to the king is the movement of Sheikh Yassine. He is on the defensive on both fronts but, according to a number of observers, this double challenge can help to advance democracy in Morocco and at the same time provide a means of rescue for the king. For, unlike the rulers of the Arab republics, the king can to a large extent abandon his political role in order to concentrate on the other: he can choose simply to be the guardian of religion. In that scenario the power of the Makhzen would have to be severely limited. Others point out that this is not a realistic scenario, because it would be disadvantageous to the substantial economic interests of the Royal family: a guardian of religion does not have the same opportunities as a temporal leader to create a climate favourable to his interests.

## Sufi

According to sociologist and student of Islam Mohammed Darif, the religious field in Morocco is dominated by three different players, apart from the commander of the faithful: the Sufists, the Islamists and the Salafists.

The great majority of Moroccans are Sufists: Sufism is unquestionably the most important religious tendency in the country. Sheikh Yassine used to be a Sufist: he was number two in the main Sufi movement in Morocco. He was bypassed by the son of the then leader and, for opportunistic

reasons, turned his back on his spiritual source. Yet Sufism remains a major source of inspiration for his movement *al Adl wal Ihsan*.

Sufis are mystics and lay no claim to political power. According to Darif, it is a religious tendency that is quite compatible with a secular state. The holders of power in Morocco have always endeavoured to integrate Sufism into the apparatus of state.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs, which has great influence over the official Islam that is practised in the country, is today again in the hands of Sufis, representing the traditional 'open' version of faith in Morocco. In the 1970s, the Makhzen had encouraged Muslim fundamentalism. The Wahhabis from Saudi Arabia for a long time had free rein in Morocco, also within the Ministry, in order to combat the left. Although Wahhabism is contrary to Moroccan religious traditions, no obstacles were placed in the path of the religious politics of Wahhabism at that time. The Minister for Religious Affairs was close to the Wahhabis. It was a period of great change in traditional Moroccan Sufist society. In the 1970s, for example, the subject of philosophy in the schools was replaced by that of Islamic education.

The Makhzen badly needs religion in order to acquire legitimacy. And religion is a powerful factor within the Makhzen. Mohammed VI has removed the Salafists from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Now the Sufis are again in charge. That happened after 11 September 2001, but the international war on terror was not the only reason for it. The Salafists were also becoming too independent and uncontrollable for those in power.

## Parliament

Islamism, in the way Darif defines it, has nothing to do with Sufism. He divides it into fundamentalist Islamism and popular Islamism. In the fundamentalist category, he refers mainly to the PJD. Its official name is *Hizb al Adala wal Tanmiyya* – Party of Justice and Development. Internationally, the French translation *Parti de la Justice et du Développement*, PJD, is used. It is not entirely coincidental that this is an exact translation of the Turkish AKP. There have been direct contacts with the AKP on several occasions. According to all the sources, the PJD also has links with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: "They are quite comparable", says Darif.

The PJD thus represents the main grouping of more or less recognised Islamists. They came into parliament for the first time in 1997, with nine seats. "Before that time we did not want to participate, because of

electoral fraud," said the then leader Abdelkarim Khatib. There is a rumour that the palace intended to keep the Islamists under control once they were no longer needed as a counterbalance to the left after the latter joined the government in 1997. The compromise was the PJD. The Party would therefore, so it is said, participate fully in the system and hence would not constitute a threat. This did not demand the scrapping of Article 19 of the constitution, a sort of catch-all provision from which the king can derive all manner of powers and which is a real brake on democratic development. Whether this interpretation of events is correct is open to question. Indeed, we were told by the PJD leadership that they accept the role of the monarchy and the power of the king, but they do aim to curb that power by way of democratic reforms. It emerged from our conversation that the moralisation of society along Islamist lines stood equally high on the agenda.

What the PJD's political priorities would be in case of participation in government remains uncertain. The elections of 7 September 2007 produced some gains for the PJD, but not the landslide victory that some had expected. According to opinion polls conducted in 2005 and 2006 by the International Republican Institute (IRI), the only polls with any credibility in Morocco, the PJD could win around half the votes in the 2007 elections. The party would thus completely dominate parliament. These forecasts hit like a bomb. But in reality, while voter turnout reached an all-time low, the PJD obtained only 11% of the vote. This translated into 46 seats in parliament for the PJD, six seats behind the governing Istiqlal. Abbas El Fassi, the leader of Istiqlal who became the new prime minister, chose the USFP, which obtained only 36 seats, over the PJD as a coalition partner.

The 2007 elections are both proof of the shortcomings of Moroccan politics and a sign that political reform is more than ever necessary. Despite remaining in opposition, the PJD has established itself as a political power that cannot be neglected. It is expected that the party, with its strong grassroots presence, will do much better in the local elections due in 2009.

## **Modern**

Almost all the people we spoke to in Morocco agreed: we need have absolutely no fear of the PJD. An oft-repeated argument, which at the same time underscores our doubts over the democratising power of the PJD, is: "Even if they were in the government, it would remain a government

without genuine power". It is an argument that party leader Othmani himself repeats to us: "Even if the PJD were to win an absolute majority, which we do not want, we would not have all the power, so do not be scared". Othmani, a mediagenic psychiatrist, has done much to make the PJD acceptable since he took office. In 2006, he even posed for the cover of a glossy men's magazine, not exactly something you would expect from a Muslim fundamentalist.

Another frequently heard argument *why* we should not be afraid of possible gains by the PJD: Islamists are in power in Turkey too, and that has not given any grounds for fear. Othmani cultivates the comparison with the AKP: "We are quite comparable with the AKP. We are a party with an Islamic frame of reference, but not an Islamist party. The frame of reference means that we introduce a number of values into our election programme. But we are very modern".<sup>7</sup>

In the editorial offices of *TelQuel* the answer we get to our question about what it would mean to have the PJD in power is: "Good for democracy, but we are not completely in agreement with their ideas". Even the IRI, not exactly a club that wants to be seen as a pillar of support to fundamentalist Muslim organisations, has programmes of cooperation with the PJD. Only the former left-wing opposition to Hassan II, the present government party USFP, openly places big question marks over the PJD: "The PJD feeds extremist thinking and calls essential achievements into question. Hence the comparison with the AKP does not apply," said then party leader El Yazghi.<sup>8</sup>

Within the established order of parties, the PJD undoubtedly goes furthest in its demands for constitutional changes: it wants parliament to gain full budgetary power and it wants the right of initiative for Members of Parliament. The governing parties Istiqlal and USFP favour the right of the palace to initiate legislation, something which according to a spokeswoman of the IRI works to the disadvantage of party formation and the political education of voters. For, in that way, the parties can never claim anything although they assisted at the birth of a number of major reforms in last few years. But, despite these demands, the PJD does not go

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<sup>7</sup> From conversations with Othmani, autumn 2006.

<sup>8</sup> From conversations with El Yazghi, autumn 2006.

so far as to question the role of the king. The PJD is therefore not a real threat. The only danger rests in the pragmatic pressure of the PJD for reform. In the longer term, that may well have a real effect on the balance of power between king and parliament.

## Yassine

We find Islamists of an entirely different kind, with a more uncompromising attitude, in *al Adl wal Ihsan*, Justice and Charity, of Abdeslam Yassine, mentioned earlier. This group openly criticises the king, something the PJD does not do, choosing instead to criticise the government. In principle, however, this makes little sense. After all, the government does not hold ultimate power. *Al Adl wal Ihsan* is, in the eyes of many researchers, more popular and more radical than the PJD. The movement does not say exactly how many members it has and, because they do not participate in elections, its true following has never been tested, but in demonstrations *al Adl wal Ihsan* has certainly shown its ability to bring a large number of people out onto the streets. According to observers, Yassine's movement would have enjoyed an even greater following if the PJD had won the elections. The PJD would be compromised by cooperation with the Makhzen and no longer be seen as a credible alternative by the poor masses and the lower levels of the middle class.

In our view, the modest election results for the PJD do not warrant the conclusion that the Islamic factor in Moroccan politics has been overestimated. After all, Yassine had considerable influence over the outcome. His appeal to boycott the elections resonated with an electorate disillusioned with the country's political class. This seems to have contributed to the low turnout and the limited gains of the PJD. It is a warning for the palace not to shrink from further reforms if it wants to channel popular discontent.

It is difficult to understand Yassine's movement. There are many stories about *al Adl wal Ihsan*, but little reliable information. It is shrouded in a veil of mystery, which explains part of its attraction. On no other subject were the opinions of those we interviewed in and about Morocco as divided as they were on *al Adl wal Ihsan*. "They do not shrink from killing their own people if it suits them", said one journalist; "Yassine's aim is to get his hands on power". "To establish a caliphate in Morocco headed by Yassine," a representative of a human rights organisation said to us. But, according to Darif, it is a movement that accepts the rules of play and will

eventually participate in the elections, and they are already negotiating with the government to obtain legal status. The victory of Hamas in the Palestinian occupied territories has, in particular, already fired the younger generation in the movement with enthusiasm.

### **No violence**

In Salé, the poor sister town of Rabat, we spoke to Nadia Yassine, daughter of party founder Abdeslam Yassine. We sought her out in her modest apartment where her father lived for decades under house arrest, just beside Salé jail, where members of al Adl wal Ihsan are imprisoned. The whole apartment block and the buildings next to it are, incidentally, owned by Yassine. A colourful fresh interior, several typical Moroccan seating areas, but in cheerful, bright hues. In a sort of military camouflage robe, Nadia served us mint tea and pastries, excusing herself that she could not taste them first, as custom demands, because of Ramadan.

What does she want to achieve? “Actually we think that everything here has gone wrong from the start: the religious role of the king, Morocco’s borders. But we remain realistic: for the moment we criticise the monarchy in particular”. Their methods? “We have decided not to use violence. We could have resorted to arms, we could have deployed militias to oust the regime. But we have chosen another weapon, education. Education and spirituality”. OK. But when we read through our notes, the words seem a little less innocent than they sounded in the conversation. Resort to arms? Deploy militias? Apparently, they have considered it.

On participation in the elections, Nadia Yassine is clear: “We are a political association, but we will not take part. It is a big theatre performance, manipulated by the Makhzen”. What does she think of the PJD? “That IRI study was not an opinion poll, it was a voting recommendation! The Americans still want to have a say on the post-monarchy period, hence they have chosen the moderate Islamists for the future here”.

### **Conservative**

Finally, reading between the lines, we get a clearer picture of what al Adl wal Ihsan wants exactly. The constitution must be amended. Something we also heard from the small left-wing secular parties. Nadia goes on:

When we say caliphate, we actually mean 'republic'. The king can stay, by all means, but only in a ceremonial capacity. We are prepared to submit to the voice of the people: we are very much in favour of a multi-party system. As the French expert on Islam, Olivier Roy, says: "it must happen through democracy".

When asked about matters such as headscarves or a ban on alcohol, the answer is still that it must be the free choice of the people.

The interview with Nadia does not make it any easier to get a balanced picture of al Adl wal Ihsan. Is it a dangerous Islamist movement that seeks the establishment of a theocracy in which civil liberties are curtailed because of the Koran, or is it an agreeable spiritual organisation that seeks greater freedom for individual religious conviction and a more just economic development of the country? Literature about her father and the origin of the movement does not really convey a clearer picture either. We therefore have to conclude that al Adl wal Ihsan is a political movement that non-violently seeks a change in the constitution to remove the political role of the king and which advocates conservatism in the morals of society.

## Jihadis

The third tendency in Darif's exposition of political Islam in Morocco is represented by the Salafists. As we have seen, in the past they were strengthened by *le pouvoir* to the detriment of the Sufis, when they gained influence in the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Some of them crossed over into the PJD and related parties. The remaining Salafists, according to Darif, are supporters of Bin Laden. It is a fragmented movement, but increasingly well organised. A human rights activist explained to us: "After the attacks of 16 May 2003 in Casablanca the crackdown by the Palace was too heavy-handed. Thousands were rounded up, over 2000 people were convicted and a great many imprisoned after show trials and torture". Many radical imams were also arrested. Experts in the field of extremism agree: by its tough approach the government knowingly turned the fragmented movement into a genuine party, the 'bearded ones' were doomed to come together. The government also gave them a concrete reason to continue their activities: a barbaric system that throws anyone who happens to be devoutly religious into jail must be opposed.

Before the attacks, there were two kinds of Salafists: the traditionalists, who remained loyal to the king, and the jihadis. The latter

were quite marginal. In particular, many traditionalists were thrown into jail: the authorities wanted to dramatise the situation in order to get a grip on society and to show the West how seriously Morocco dealt with terrorism. However, by so doing they created a radical problem for the future: the traditionalists were turned into jihadis in jail. "Close the jihad school," demanded *TelQuel* on its front page, referring to the overflowing Moroccan jails. The failed attacks in March 2007 and the announcement that an *al Qaeda in the Maghreb* had been established vindicated all those who had warned of further radicalisation.

### The left

Back to the key question: where is democracy to come from in Morocco now? If we devoted little space to what we referred to as the "left-wing secular opposition", it is because that group has regrettably remained insignificant in parliament and in the opinion polls. Regrettably, because they are the natural allies of the progressive European parties to which we ourselves belong. Thus, for example, there is the *Parti Socialiste Unifié* (PSU). An agreeable small social democratic club which is one of the few parties openly to advocate an amendment to the constitution in order to give the king a ceremonial role and to remove his decision-making power. "We want to change the monarchy into a democracy," says the secretary general, whom we met on the second floor of a crumbling apartment block in Rabat covered with posters and banners. But he himself had to concede: "The Islamists are much better than the left at winning souls among the very poor in the slum areas, with their projects based on patronage". The outcome of the elections, in which the PSU scored 5%, shows that the small parties of the left have no chance of playing an important role in Morocco in the near future.

So will democracy have to come from the Islamists? The PJD may cause a fresh wind to blow through parliament and give the poor a voice, but the Makhzen seems to have the party too well under control for it to pose a real threat to the power of the palace. It might take parliament a few steps further towards real power, but the PJD will not initiate any true reversal of existing relationships.

## Secularisation

Then there is al Adl wal Ihsan. If the movement stops dreaming – its website is full of the dreams of its leader and his supporters – and decides to take part in the elections, can it really make a difference? Al Adl wal Ihsan demands the abolition of Article 19 of the constitution, which gives supreme power to the King. The great unknown, however, is the rest of the programme of al Adl wal Ihsan. The westernised affluent class in Rabat and Casablanca fears the worst: segregated beaches, compulsory headscarves, bans on alcohol. The movement itself answers that this must be the free choice of Moroccans. Even so they were in the van of the demonstrations against the proposed amendment of the *Mudawwana*, the traditional Moroccan family legislation, which was to give women more rights. Finally, under pressure from the mob, the amendment of the legislation in 2004 was much less sweeping than had been originally proposed by the king.

Will the unprecedented degree of activity in Morocco's civil society lead to democracy? Human rights organisations, activist magazines, a booming cultural scene – these form an entirely different side of Moroccan society than al Adl wal Ihsan. Something they have in common, however, is that they want to put an end to the status quo. And, like Yassine's movement and the PJD, they seek a different answer to terrorist attacks than that provided by the government. An approach to the problem of radicalism at its roots, the widespread poverty, in the form of strict respect for human rights and the rule of law in combating terrorism.

In Morocco, as in much of the Islamic world, two developments are underway simultaneously: on the one hand, secularisation, of which the magazine *TelQuel* and to a certain extent a range of human rights organisations are the standard bearers. In Morocco secularisation means in particular: less Islamic influence on society and on everyday life. A more Western way of life. But most people still call themselves Muslims and feel themselves to be Muslims. On the other hand, Islamisation, of which the success of the PJD and al Adl wal Ihsan are proof. This development in fact seeks to strengthen the influence of Islam on society. This does not mean that more people must become Muslims, that is hardly possible in Morocco. Both tendencies have their sights on the current holders of power, the Makhzen. But you could also say that the huge contrast between the different opponents of the status quo is the very thing that plays into the hands of the Makhzen. For the PJD will ultimately prefer cooperation with the established order to a settlement with the secularists. And many

secularists, on closer examination, are only too happy for the king to be there as a buffer against the Islamists. Hence neither of the two is really helping to advance democracy in Morocco.

## Europe

Yet change must come from these two currents. Can Europe help? Everyone to whom we spoke in Morocco complained: "Where is Europe? Why do you not do the same in North Africa as in Eastern Europe? Why is there so little money for the Southern neighbours of the EU, especially Morocco?" It is true that the EU is not very ambitious: compared with what has been invested in Eastern Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall to make EU enlargement a success, the resources available for North Africa are peanuts. In the context of the Neighbourhood Policy, €654 million have been set aside for the period 2007-2010. The political will to become really involved is lacking in Brussels and in the national capitals of the EU, even though Morocco is the frontrunner in the region and is working towards an 'advanced status' in its relations with the EU. Morocco feels additionally disadvantaged compared, for example, with Tunisia, which receives almost twice as much money per capita from the EU, although in the field of human rights and civil liberties there is no comparison between liberal Morocco and dictatorially governed Tunisia.

Be they Islamists, the Makhzen or the secular opposition, all agree on the need for more European investment. "The EU must stimulate the economy and ensure that a middle class emerges, otherwise the risk of social explosion is great", says left-wing PSU party leader Sassi. "No development is possible in Morocco without closer cooperation with the EU. We want special status for Morocco in the EU," says the PJD. "The EU has aided Eastern Europe so vigorously since the fall of the Wall. Why not do the same for us?" says the leader of the USFP, a party in government. Even from the EU Representation in Rabat we heard criticism of Brussels: in comparison, for example, with post-communist Poland the investment of money and manpower is almost laughable.

Economically, therefore, much is expected from Europe, but what does that say about democratisation? "We have so much freedom because the world, the EU, is looking at us. Morocco longs to be respected, recognised, and gives the press the freedom it has for that reason," we hear from the editorial team at *TelQuel*. That makes things somewhat clearer: by

turning our searchlight on Morocco, we encourage respect for civil liberties. But also, everyone agrees, by encouraging the civil society and giving it a little helping hand. “A resolution of the European Parliament on human rights in Morocco helps us enormously,” says Mohammed Darif.

We have just described at length how human rights and civil liberties are already fairly well respected in Morocco. This can therefore not be the true key to further democratisation. “While support for civil society organisations in Morocco should continue, because their existence will make it more difficult for the monarchy to slip back into more authoritarian ways, such support is unlikely to lead to true political reform,” note American researchers Marina Ottaway and Meredith Riley.<sup>9</sup> We endorse that idea. Further democratisation must be secured in the political arena. Good contacts with all political parties in Morocco, secularists, opposition movements, Islamists and co-opted ones, and the encouragement of true competition for the favour of voters can play an important role here. Who knows, if Abdeslam Yassine read the year wrongly in his dream, just like the opinion polls got it wrong for the 2007 elections, it might turn out to be election year 2012 that brings the great change in Morocco. And if such a change comes to pass, it will have its repercussions elsewhere in the Arab world, for example in Egypt.

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<sup>9</sup> Marina Ottaway and Meredith Riley (2006), *Morocco: From Top-down Reform to Democratic Transition?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Middle East Series Democracy and Rule of Law No. 71, October.

## 4. STALEMATE IN EGYPT: IN SEARCH OF THE REAL BROTHERS

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The meeting with the Islamists from the Muslim Brotherhood takes place in an office in a working class district of Cairo. Bystanders watch us suspiciously as we step off the bus. This is understandable as we are accompanied by armed police guards from the highly unpopular state security service, who are following us because our party includes the former French Prime Minister, Michel Rocard. But no fewer than six or seven MPs are sitting waiting to talk to us in a room decorated with posters commemorating the birthday of Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Brotherhood. With pen and paper at the ready we start the meeting. We realise that this is an unusual encounter, since many foreign authorities shun contact with the Brotherhood to avoid offending the Egyptian government. This is particularly the case with Americans, who are officially advised against this sort of contact by Washington. Friends from the US have therefore asked us for a full report on the conversation. Sometimes the authorities react to these contacts by arresting Egyptians who have taken part in the discussions. The Muslim Brothers in the room sit watching tensely. Meetings like this are important for their legitimacy, but they seem to find it difficult to answer all of our sometimes rather bold questions. Now and again they consult or correct each other, which is striking as relations within the organisation are not exactly known for being democratic. There is a tradition of having a single leader known as the 'general guide'. The founder, al-Banna, was a charismatic man, and legend has it that when he sneezed in Cairo, the Brothers in Aswan shouted 'bless you'.

We have been warned that we could be facing a charm offensive from the movement, which last year issued a statement wishing all Christians a Happy Christmas!

## Islamic waters

Why go to Egypt in our quest to identify the relationship between Europe and the Islamic countries of the Mediterranean area? Egypt is the most important Arab state in terms of population and political standing, and still claims leadership of the region. The country has been through many phases over the last hundred years, starting with British colonial rule and monarchy with a nationalist tinge, followed by state socialism and then an economically liberal regime. Now it has entered more Islamic waters. A democratic tradition has never been able to take root. Egypt creates a divided impression, with a huge contrast between rich and poor and a society that is both open and closed: open to tourism, but closed in terms of the prevailing religious conservatism. International statistics do not paint a very cheerful picture of Egypt, which stood in 111th place in the Human Development Index in 2006. By comparison, Finland came 11th.

## Repression

If we look at the Mediterranean region we see a number of noticeable trends. Egypt is a good example of one of these developments. It faces the same challenges as Morocco, but unlike its Arab neighbour to the west it seems to be caught in a sort of internal deadlock that makes reform practically impossible. If we analyse the recent changes to the constitution, it even seems to be moving backwards. While Morocco has clearly become less repressive, the same cannot be said of Egypt, where, as someone put it, corruption and tyranny have become a method of government. The country is dominated by a conglomerate led by the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) and made up of the army, the ruling elite and a number of economic interest groups linked to them. Their power is partly based on an extensive system of repression, the legacy of the 'socialist' single-party state created by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the most famous Egyptian leader of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a 'deep state' with many tentacles, and it must be progressively dismantled if the deadlock between the regime and its main opponent, the Islamist movement, is to be broken.

The current situation does not appear tenable in the long term. Changes are needed, preferably democratic ones. But how risky is it to open up to democracy? What will the Islamists do with their freedom if they are granted it? This was the main question we hoped to find an answer to in Cairo. And how should the EU deal with this country? Do we

have to choose the lesser of two evils between the authoritarian president, Hosni Mubarak, and the political Islamists, or are there other ways?

### **Muslim Brothers**

The Egyptian authorities do not like it when foreign visitors want to make contact with the Muslim Brothers, the main Islamist organisation. But they cannot ban us from visiting a number of 'independent' members of the national parliament who in fact belong to the Brotherhood. In the most recent elections in 2005 the regime allowed 88 'independents' to be elected to parliament, which has a total of 444 members. Deals had been done in advance. The Muslim Brothers, fearing that they would be too successful, put up only 150 candidates. There was even an agreement with the NDP not to canvass in districts where VIPs like the President of Parliament were standing. Nevertheless, the Muslim Brothers' results surprised everyone. The elections were clearly less unfair than usual, and this was put down to the role of independent judges in monitoring the voting. Some opinion polls suggest that in free elections the Brothers would win an absolute majority. The traditionally low turnout in the country would also play into the hands of the well-organised Brotherhood.

### **Murder**

Tensions between the Brotherhood and the authorities had come to a head once again just before our visit. The assets of sympathetic businessmen were frozen, and a number of leaders were rounded up because they had allegedly incited a demonstration at the famous religious university of Cairo, where a group of young people in militant dress had held a small demonstration. According to the regime this was clear proof of the Muslim Brothers' violent nature; according to the Brothers it was a demonstration by an Islamic sports club, but they nevertheless condemned it. Al-Azhar University is a hotbed of religious opposition to the Egyptian state. We are advised to avoid the area on Friday. Often after Friday prayers the protest takes to the streets, with students coming to blows with riot police, who have a large presence. The regime clearly fears the political potential of the Brotherhood and started a new crackdown on the movement before the April 2008 local elections. In February police started arresting Brotherhood supporters, apparently in a move to prevent them from registering as candidates. Local officials were also reported to refuse to register

candidates as independents. The significance of these actions goes beyond simple containment: the revised constitution requires any presidential candidate to be endorsed by at least 250 local council and parliament members. Nevertheless, with hundreds of his supporters rounded up, the movement's leader Mohammed Mahdi Akef declared that it would participate in the elections no matter what.

The Muslim Brothers have a reputation for violent opposition, but this is not entirely accurate. They were involved in bombings during the 1948 war with Israel and an attack on Nasser in 1954, but they subsequently renounced violence, leading to the breakaway of a violent splinter group. This was the origin of the organisation responsible for the murder of President Sadat. Jihad initially played a role in the movement's ideology, but this was later taken up by the *Gama'at* and *Jihad* factions, which now no longer exist. It was only in the distant past that the organisation aimed to overthrow secular regimes.

The radical and fundamentalist interpretation of Islam preached by Osama bin Laden and his followers is based partly on the ideas of Sayyid Qutb, a former Muslim Brotherhood activist, who paid for his opposition to Nasser with his life. Qutb rejected the authority of the *ulema*, the established religious order, and branded Egypt a country of infidels. This inspired the groups mentioned earlier to carry out terrorist attacks, including the murder of President Sadat and attacks on tourist centres in the 1970s and 1980s, which did not exactly make them popular with the Egyptian people. The crackdown by the regime drove many radicals abroad, the most famous being Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's right-hand man. Many former supporters of this terrorist renounced violence altogether, while some actually announced that they intended to set up a political party.

The risk of domestic terrorism has not entirely disappeared with the exodus of radical leaders, however. Sporadic attacks still occur and, even more importantly, there are millions of young people without prospects who form a permanent breeding ground. Qutb's views have much in common with the radical variant of Salafism that has spread from Saudi Arabia. The Egyptian authorities seize any opportunity to identify the Muslim Brothers with terrorism and to discredit them, particularly since their success in the elections, thereby putting pressure on the movement. The events at Al-Azhar University seemed to be the start of a whole wave of detentions and trials before military courts. Reference is also frequently made to the Muslim Brothers' support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, an

organisation with a military wing. Its support for jihad in Iraq is also supposed to be a show of its true colours.

Sympathy for Hezbollah is not so surprising given the enormous popularity of its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, which according to a poll by the authoritative Brookings Institution in the USA puts him head and shoulders above everyone else in the Arab world. The Brothers' stance on the conflict in Iraq is also not so surprising, since the US action there is extremely unpopular throughout the Arab world. The Muslim Brothers also support Hamas, but then so does almost everyone else in the Middle East. This does not mean, however, that the Muslim Brothers should not be asked to make an unambiguous statement about the use of violence as a political tool.

### Theocracy

The people we talk to do not seem to want to follow in Qutb's footsteps, although he is still revered by many and taught in schools, and they oppose using violence as a means of turning Egypt into an Islamic state. They reject Qutb's view that Egypt is a country of infidels, and say that they have not been involved in attacks since 1954.

The Muslim Brothers' roots are in Salafism, a fundamentalist religious movement. There are two branches of this, one dating from the end of the nineteenth century and a more recent one that has come from Saudi Arabia. The first was rationalist and reformist and believed in an evolutionary process in which an Islamic state would develop naturally. The Muslim Brothers adhere to this tradition, albeit with more conservative views on the sharia than the original movement. The new Salafism is a revolutionary, jihad-orientated mixture of Qutb and Wahhabism. It is anti-rationalist and opposed to the introduction of Western concepts, which are regarded as an undesirable innovation.

The MPs at the meeting say that they are in favour of a civil state with a clear division of powers, and they accept a system of political rotation. They do not see the Iranian model of a theocracy as an example or indeed the rule: 'one man, one vote, one time'. They do not want a revolution, it would seem, just a march through the institutions. This appears to be in line with the significant policy change in the 1980s, when the emphasis was placed on gaining political power within the existing frameworks alongside the Brotherhood's conversion work.

Political power comes from the people, not Allah, the Muslim Brothers go on to say at our meeting. This sounds good, but when we ask about the role of Islam in their political vision they appear doubtful again. We have not forgotten what the Muslim Brothers' main election slogan in 2005 was: "Islam is the answer". This underlined once again that the Muslim Brotherhood is primarily a religious movement whose original objective was to establish an Islamic state based on the sharia.

Disseminating these views was and for many people still is their main task, known as *dawa*, or spreading the faith through propaganda. The democratic views they now hold are more recent, dating from 2004, when the Brotherhood presented a reform plan setting out their new ideas. Some observers believe that international pressure was behind this, while others say that it was agitation from the younger generation within the movement to be more politically active. A generation gap has opened up between those with experience of civil society and the older, more autocratic leadership.

## **Conservative**

It would be going too far to think that the Muslim Brothers have become supporters of liberal democracy. In essence, their view is that a democratically elected government in an Islamic country is there to apply the rules of Islamic doctrine in political practice. The people elect the rulers, but sovereignty stems from Islamic law, although in our discussion they neglect to say exactly what their interpretation of the sharia is. Governments change, but doctrine does not. It is very similar to a conservative democracy.

This appears to be what those at the meeting in Cairo believe, too. The context of the Egyptian state is Islamic, they say, and that means that Egyptians are an Islamic people who follow the sharia as a way of life. Because Islam is an all-encompassing religion there is no place for the separation of church and state, and the sharia is the main source of legislation, as Egypt's current constitution confirms. And what applies to the state also applies to individuals.

At the time of our meeting, leaders of the Brotherhood put slightly less emphasis on the application of the sharia, preferring instead to see themselves as a civil movement with Islamic foundations. It is difficult to tell whether this is just window dressing, but we can well imagine that these MPs want the Muslim Brothers to form a political party, and this can

only happen if the religious dimension is played down. Under the new constitution a party with a clear Islamic agenda has no chance of being recognised in Egypt.

There is also another more conservative branch within the movement that wants to turn its back on politics. For these Muslim Brothers it is more important to focus their practical work on making society more Islamic, which is what Islamic parties elsewhere are also trying to achieve. Their social activities help in this goal. This is also known as cultural Islam, and primarily involves promoting the Islamic identity in people's social and private lives.

### **Constitution**

The regime has not been impervious to the pressure created by the pursuit of this objective in society. The religious revival observed in other countries is making its political effects felt, and the country has for some time been becoming 'Islamised', partly at the state's instigation. Modern Egypt has never been 100% secular anyway. Its Islamic character dates back to the cooperation between Nasser's revolutionaries and the Muslim Brothers in the 1950s. Nasser and his supporters wanted a hybrid state. The result had to be not too Western, but at the same time not too traditional, and it was then dressed up using terminology taken from the anti-colonialist theorist Frantz Fanon. Islam was combined with socialism. Until recently the constitution was full of references to socialism, but an important place was and still is reserved for Islam. It names the sharia as the main source of legislation, although it is not applied strictly. The regime has given the Islamic clergy greater influence, but without relinquishing state supervision of both clergy and the mosques. Ironically enough, this could be said to have made Islamism 'socially acceptable' at the expense of a more liberal view of society.

Our discussions in Cairo do not directly address another criticism of the Muslim Brothers: their possible rejection of universal citizenship. Yet they are accused of having no room for the rights of the Copts in their vision, and of having a history of anti-Semitic statements. They are known to have said, for instance, that they would not accept a Christian president. This raises issues which the regime has cleverly capitalised on by referring to universal citizenship as a basic principle in the first article of the revised

constitution, so that everyone is equal before the law, regardless of their religion.

The question remains open as to whether the Muslim Brothers will observe international agreements, and particularly treaties with Israel, if they ever come to power.

## **Dialogue**

We are not able to cover everything in our discussions, and we agree to a request from the 'independent MPs' to continue our dialogue. We are handed a document setting out a number of the Muslim Brothers' key ideas to take home with us, and we are asked to respond in writing. The document appears to have been written by Dr Saad Al Katatny, the leader of the parliamentary group. He wants to improve relations between Islamists and the West, which are not good. Islamists are increasingly doubtful of the value of democracy because of the West's support for repressive regimes. There is a huge discrepancy, as they see it, between what the US and Europe say and what they do. Since 9/11 there has been an atmosphere in which all Muslims are tarred with the same brush and are victims of Islamophobia. Many Western leaders and intellectuals refuse to distinguish between moderate and radical Muslims, and repressive rulers in the region are making clever political use of this.

Al Katatny also calls on Muslims to change their views. The West is not by nature anti-Islamic, and Muslims must ensure that there are no misconceptions about what would happen if they came to power. The EU and the US need to clarify their view of democratisation and show that they are prepared to respect the choice of the electorate whatever the outcome, and not do as they have done in Palestine in giving Hamas the cold shoulder. Finally, he calls on the West to be more specific about what they expect from the Islamists, and to be clearer about the conditions under which they would be prepared to cooperate, instead of making all sorts of unreasonable demands as they are at present. This would create mutual understanding, which could promote successful links if the Islamists come to power. The alternative is escalating tension. The West will have to accept that there will always be differences and must therefore be more willing to accept them.

In our response we write that we want to encourage dialogue with moderate and non-violent Islamist parties. We will be pleased to help find the political middle ground with those that are prepared to observe

democratic and constitutional principles. Social ambitions, fighting corruption and striving for equality and dialogue between cultures and religions are all aspirations we share. For us, the difference between moderate and radical Islamist movements is extremely important. It is a misconception to think that there is one single Western view: there are different views, and Europe's view is one of many. Our focus is on supporting democratic principles and their application, including women's rights, for example. In our response we ask once again what guarantees the Muslim Brothers can give that they will govern democratically if they win the elections. And we also want to know the significance of the differences referred to in the Muslim Brothers' document. Do they relate to the application of the sharia, and what are the implications of this?

## **Reaction**

With no answer to these questions it is difficult to determine what a Muslim Brothers government would do about democracy in a free Egypt. Despite repeated requests, we have still received no response, and inquiries through the EU embassy in Cairo have been to no avail. So uncertainties remain. We find some answers in a survey conducted by the Brussels think-tank the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), which interviewed a number of representatives of the Muslim Brothers and Wasat, a Muslim party that has been in formation for some time now. Many leading Egyptian Islamists are openly in favour of democracy, but they often draw a distinction between democracy as a system of values and democracy as a policy instrument. Their objection to the European democratic model is that it only seems to apply to Europe and no longer holds true when it comes to relations with the Arab world. Another criticism concerns the materialistic and individualistic nature of the European model, which puts the individual before society. There is no room for spiritual aspects. What is more, European democracies declare as legal things that run totally counter to religious and moral principles. Nathan Brown, from the Carnegie Endowment in Washington, talks about the grey areas where the Muslim Brothers remain deliberately or unintentionally vague. This "institutionalised ambivalence" is focused on the role of the sharia - who decides on its application, for instance - the use of violence, political pluralism, individual freedoms, minorities and women's rights?. The Brotherhood's draft political platform, made available for discussion in the summer of 2007, shed light on some of these issues, but the fierce debate it

sparked among the Brothers themselves also showed that many questions are not yet resolved.

## **Stability**

We also visit representatives of the regime, of course. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the President of Parliament play this part extremely well and create a self-assured impression. Their message is that the government has things under control and is prepared to take steps towards further democratisation. But we also have to understand that they are still there to ensure the country's stability and that they will not allow any Islamist experiments. Islam is already part of Egypt, and religious parties are not necessary and still prohibited. We will not tolerate an Algerian situation in our country, they appear to be trying to say. There, in 1992, free parliamentary elections threatened to result in a resounding victory for the Islamist FIS party, which had been recognised by the regime shortly before. The government intervened and there was no second round of voting. For years afterwards Algeria was plagued by guerrilla warfare that cost tens of thousands of lives. The question is whether the comparison is entirely accurate. The Muslim Brothers cannot be put in the same category as the FIS because they have a completely different and much longer experience. They also avoid fierce confrontations with the regime. Nevertheless the argument is one that is used, not least by the deep state to justify the use of repression; a situation that is also found elsewhere in the region. The country is in the hands of an elite that controls the organs of state and much of the economy, and which is armed with a repressive apparatus that largely keeps society under control and thus ensures stability. It relies on the tacit support of the international community, which does not want another Algeria, and is comfortable in the thought that its neighbours are doing the same. The whole thing is led by a governing party that brooks no opposition and has erected a *cordon sanitaire* against the detested Islamists.

Egypt is governed by a bogus pluralism. The constitution looks democratic with a multi-party system, but the reality is rather different, and the main role of the NDP seems to be to protect the government from other parties.

## **Alternative**

Three conversations with small, secular opposition parties make it clear that they do not and cannot act as an alternative. They are tolerated, but

immediately encounter problems if they do anything too publicly. The leader of one of them, Ayman Nour from the Al Ghad party, dared to stand as a presidential candidate and is now in prison facing some rather vague charges. He called for liberal reforms, but also dared to attack Mubarak. This was in 2005, when there was some freedom during the election campaigns and a non-party political protest movement actually stood under the slogan "Enough!" However, not much is heard now about this association, in which secular members and Muslim Brothers worked side by side.

With its Nasserist roots the NDP might be expected to be more sympathetic towards left-wing parties, but nothing could be further from the truth, according to their spokesmen. The Marxist ideology of the officers' revolution of the 1950s has long since disappeared, and the last remnants of that period were recently dropped from the Egyptian constitution. The left in Egypt has never recovered from the attack on it by Nasser's successor, Sadat, who was suspicious of its political motives. He was happy to use the Islamists to do this, until they turned against him following the peace agreements with Israel.

However, the weakness of the secular parties is not just the result of the regime's opposition. They are elitist in nature and do not do enough to connect with the people. When they did have influence they were unable to change much at all in Egypt, which is why liberalism and socialism still have little support.

Incidentally, what all the secular parties have in common with the government is their rejection of the Muslim Brothers, whom some of them classify as fascist.

## **Arrest**

In the current situation these secular parties obviously cannot act as bridge-builders between the regime and the Islamists, nor do they themselves represent a political alternative. The 'democratic' reforms recently proposed by Mubarak and now adopted by parliament and approved in a referendum were supposed to create better chances for the secular opposition to grow. Mubarak knows that this is what international allies like the US and the EU like to see – both lodged strong protests against Nour's arrest – and they are not too bothered about the methods used to combat the 'Islamist danger'. The US and the EU make considerably less

fuss if Muslim Brothers are arrested. The revised constitution allows for a more proportional electoral system, and the regime gives the impression of wanting to build a secular barrier against the Muslim Brothers, for whom the new legislation is extremely unfavourable. The aim is to adapt the district system with its independent candidates. Religious parties are still banned and it is almost impossible to put up candidates through another party, which is what the Muslim Brothers have done regularly in the past. In a response to the changes, the Muslim Brothers started drafting a political platform in 2007, which could be seen as the first step towards forming a party. By barring non-Muslims and women from the Egyptian presidency, however, thus violating the principle of universal citizenship in the Constitution, this document puts another hurdle on the road towards obtaining the status of a political party.

## **Polarisation**

The Muslim Brothers are in a unique situation. Officially speaking they do not exist, but because of their social activities they have much support among the people at grassroots level. They are also able to use the mosques as a base for their campaigns. According to reports there are over 40 000 religious institutions in Egypt that are not recognised as such. The government dares not interfere here, although it does make it impossible for the Muslim Brothers to convert their social activities into political ones. Political expressions are quickly stifled in what sometimes seems to be a game of cat and mouse between the Muslim Brothers and the ruling elite. However, the Muslim Brotherhood tends to avoid large-scale political confrontation, and only allows demonstrations against the war in Iraq or in support of the Palestinians. The Muslim Brothers have also been campaigning against Israel since the 1930s, which has greatly added to their popularity.

So it is the rulers versus the Islamists. Relations are so polarised that there is no question of cooperation or co-opting. The series of recent detentions of Brothers confirm this view, though they can also be seen as the continuation of a pattern of confrontation and accommodation.

The relationship between the NDP and the Muslim Brothers is complicated. The Brothers have become an undeniable factor and dominate the social field, taking on an important government responsibility themselves. Their role as the champion of social protest could be even more important than their role as a movement against Western modernity. It is in

their interests to hold onto their sphere of influence. They have advanced into what we in Europe would call civil society: professional organisations and student associations, which are popular with many Egyptians. The question is, therefore, whether in the present circumstances the Muslim Brothers would want to split into a social and religious movement on the one hand and a political party on the other, which would mean laying themselves open to state supervision. With the existing system of patronage and the lack of political rotation it is becoming difficult for the Muslim Brothers to play a genuine opposition role as a recognised party. Operating in a twilight zone has its advantages, and the Brothers' ideological supporters are not afraid of being thrown into prison, which is one of the risks in the present situation. It is mainly the old guard that is taking this line.

### **Sheik**

The NDP controls the political arena, and where the Muslim Brothers offer social assistance NDP politicians have the powerful instrument of patronage. The Egyptian government also still has a strong grip on religious life through the official *ulema* (the established religious order) and the administration of religious subsidies. The supreme spiritual authority in Egypt, the sheik of Al-Azhar University, is the mouthpiece of the religious establishment, which has a major influence on legislation. During a meeting with our delegation he preaches tolerance and calls for an alliance of cultures. His desire for reconciliation is commendable, but he also shows himself to be a worthy representative of the regime that appointed him. He opposes Islamism and disputes whether his country needs a religious party. 90% of the population is Muslim, and they are in the good hands of the religious establishment, which is also known as 'Radio Islam' because it is so submissive.

Islam thus appears to have become a battleground for the regime and the Muslim Brothers. The Egyptian government is less secular than it appears on this. The revised constitution may refer to citizenship as a binding principle, but the very next article names the sharia as the main source of legislation. NDP MPs often try to be more Catholic than the Pope. Recently they denounced their own Minister for Religious Affairs because he had spoken critically about women covering their faces completely. The conservative section of the religious establishment appears to be tightening

its grip on the government and is laying down its own line more often. One distressing example was the academic Nasr Abu Zaid, who was branded disloyal for his views and was forced by a court to divorce his wife, totally against his will. The decision was subsequently rectified, but Abu Zaid had already left the country for the more tolerant Netherlands.

## **Wasat**

It might be said that a certain balance will be disturbed if the Brotherhood is officially recognised, but that would also happen, conversely, if it were totally repressed. Allies like Saudi Arabia, which has close links with the Muslim Brothers, would certainly not welcome it.

Recognising the Muslim Brotherhood as a religious party would also trigger an immediate response from the Copts, an influential Christian minority, who are far from happy about the rise of the Islamists.

The regime could have an interest in a secular party with an Islamist orientation, along the lines of the AKP in Turkey. Such a party, the Wasat or 'centre' party, is currently in formation, but time and again it is refused official recognition, sometimes on the pretext that it is a religious party and therefore against the law. But it is also argued that Wasat is not sufficiently different from other parties. For Wasat Islam is a culture, not a law, and is above all a source of guidance on ethical conduct. Wasat wants to keep political and religious activities separate. And when it comes to the application of the sharia, Wasat wants to follow a path that leads to progress and the development of the country. It accepts Christians as members and believes that all cultures are complementary. It is said that the government's delaying tactics in recognising Wasat stem from the fear that the new party would quickly be infiltrated by the Muslim Brothers. It might also stem from fears of the rise of a political movement that would follow the example of the AKP in Turkey. The founders of Wasat are former Muslim Brothers who turned against the conservatism of the leadership, plus a number of Coptic intellectuals. Another explanation for the failure to recognise Wasat is that it is to help the conservatives in the Muslim Brotherhood, who would prefer to see the back of this possible rival. The regime itself would rather deal with the autocrats within the Muslim Brotherhood.

Mubarak certainly has no plans for a radical change of course. The international pressure that forced him to make democratic concessions in 2005 has eased, and he now appears to be mainly concerned with his own

political succession. Egypt is a country of rumours and conspiracy theories. The president only allowed the Muslim Brothers more scope in 2005 to highlight the danger of their electoral strength, so that he could then crack down on them with international support.

He is now introducing limited reforms in order to try to ease some of the international pressure. In addition to the measures mentioned earlier there are modest proposals to strengthen the role of parliament. The state of emergency in force since 1981 is being replaced by anti-terrorism legislation, which is not actually improving the situation. The opposition criticises these steps as being too little and too geared towards retaining power in the post-Mubarak era.

## EU

Europe is simply not very visible, or so many people in Egypt complain. From the CEPS survey mentioned earlier it appears that many Islamists still know very little about EU policy on the region. People say that the EU does not follow a clear line, has little influence in the region, is not consistent and is too occupied with power politics. Its cooperation programmes over the last ten years have been fairly unproductive. EU policy is too much directed by the US and does not pay enough attention to the role of the Islamists.

However much the Muslim Brothers are socially active themselves, there are still no links with EU programmes. They refuse financial aid, but would be most willing to cooperate if it could be on an equal footing. The EU should not have an inflated impression of its influence in Egypt, however. Anyone hoping that our more balanced approach to the Middle East conflict and our support for the Palestinians would create a more positive image than that of the US is in for a disappointment. Europe talks a lot, tries to be nice and foots some of the bill, but the net result is still zero. That is Egypt's viewpoint. The EU is also guilty of double standards in calling for greater democracy while at the same time supporting repressive regimes. What upsets younger people in particular is the visa policy, which in practice keeps the EU door closed to most Egyptians. Then there is also the growing Islamophobia in many EU member states.

## Action plan

Egypt is an important EU partner in the Arab world. The EU is Egypt's main trading partner and its second-largest donor after the USA, whilst Egypt is the fifth-largest recipient under EU aid programmes. In 1995 Egypt was one of the countries involved in the Barcelona Process, which was supposed to result in a regional partnership for the Mediterranean area to promote stability, economic cooperation and cultural dialogue. In 2001 an association agreement was signed in this regard, setting out the basic principles for cooperation between the EU and Egypt. It specifically refers to democracy as one of the shared values.

From 2007 onwards practical cooperation largely comes under the European Neighbourhood Policy, through which the EU is carefully distancing itself from the regional approach of its earlier policy on the Mediterranean area. The Neighbourhood Policy action plans are agreed bilaterally, so the Egyptian government needs to approve all the planned projects. The action plan for Egypt includes projects ranging from training for civil servants to infrastructure improvements. €558 million are earmarked for this from 2007 to 2010, with only Morocco and the Palestinian territories receiving more from the EU. The action plan also refers to democratic reforms, and the EU wants to be able to have its say on individual human rights violations in bilateral talks on human rights.

There is opposition to this in Egypt, which is refusing to accept this sort of conditions from the EU any longer. This was the main topic of our discussions with the President of Parliament, who pointed out that Egypt is the most important country in the region and is not to be lectured to. His comments are consistent with a trend that we can see elsewhere too, such as in Russia. Western concepts of democracy are increasingly coming in for criticism, with countries asserting their own, usually authoritarian, views on secure or sovereign democracies and gradual change. The pro-democracy activities of foreigners have come under fire, and in Egypt one renowned American institute, the National democratic Institute is no longer allowed to operate.

After lengthy negotiations the action plan was finally signed in March 2007, shortly after our visit. Anyone reading it will be surprised at the large number of goals set in so many different fields and will come away with the impression that a close bond has been created between the EU and Egypt. It must be borne in mind, however, that the agreements have been signed with a government that will not be making any real effort

to achieve genuine democratic and social reforms. In addition, just as on earlier occasions, both parties put their own spin on things in official statements at the signing. The EU emphasised democracy and human rights, economic reforms, good governance and a targeted approach towards young people who often have no prospects. No reference was made to the situation regarding the Muslim Brothers, in which the EU is, mistakenly, careful to avoid involvement.

The Egyptian government kept to a specific interpretation of universal values based on the country's own cultural and religious characteristics. In other words, it is happy to talk, but there must be no discrimination, politicisation or double standards. It also said that reforms could not be imposed from outside. Here the Egyptian regime was clearly giving its own interpretation of the action plan and its relations with the EU. Practice in Egypt fits in well with this more hard-line stance. The National Council for Human Rights, led by former UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali and once the showpiece of the West, has lost its initial dynamism and now operates primarily as an ombudsman. The Nour case mentioned earlier is a matter for the courts, Boutros-Ghali tells us in our conversation with him.

At the EU Embassy in Cairo developments are closely monitored. The reports the Embassy sends to Brussels are accurate, but the EU appears to have no intention of changing course on the basis of them. Its policy remains ambiguous and equivocal.

## **Explosion**

It is not so easy to characterise the situation in Egypt in 2008, because it is one of sharp contrasts and extremes. The country is led by an almost pensionable autocrat who has gone from being the 'chief pilot' in the 1973 war to a sort of pharaoh now, leading to suspicions that he aims to found a dynasty. In addition, the Islamists are busily painting the country green without making it clear what sort of Egypt they ultimately want. And ordinary Egyptians? The survey by the Brookings Institution, conducted in 2006, suggests that Egyptians have the same views as other Arab nations. Bush is extremely unpopular, while Chirac and Chavez fared much better. People say that they feel Muslim but think that the government should do what is best for the country. There is no massive support for an Islamist government, but the personal integrity of Islamist politicians and their

work to combat poverty make them very popular. Egyptians are said to be naturally conservative and passive, but experts point to the risk of a social explosion with unpredictable consequences. The ruling elite does not appear to be able to count on much support. The Muslim Brothers, on the other hand, are benefiting from the religious revival, Islamist nationalism and the wretched social situation. Their constant support for the Palestinian cause also makes them popular.

The question therefore, is essentially whether the existing balance of power will hold for years to come. Many Western governments are clinging on to the present regime, fearing the possible consequences in the region if there is a democratic revolution in the current state of tension. But it could be even more risky for the EU and the US to gamble more on Mubarak and his entourage staying in power than on gradual reform. We would not want to put our money on the present apparent stability, not just for the reasons we have described, but also primarily because we must not abandon attempts to make Egypt more democratic. It is better to have democratic neighbours than authoritarian ones. And we must not overlook the religious factor here: moderate Islamists must be given a role in the process, and so the EU must seek dialogue with them much more actively. Whether or not this role can be played by the Muslim Brothers is unclear, however. Perhaps the process of change within the organisation will succeed, perhaps not. The situation has worsened for the reformers since the regime stepped up its repressive measures. This is illustrated by the Brotherhood's 2007 draft political platform, which retreats into old positions on women, non-Muslims and ensuring the conformity of laws to the sharia. But perhaps alternatives to the Muslim Brothers will emerge or could be encouraged. This will take time: there are no quick fixes.

### **Further**

This time must also be used to talk to the Muslim Brothers in order to obtain answers to the questions raised earlier in this article. These are by no means settled, as the internal debate on the draft platform shows. Muslim Brothers need time to clarify their political profile, to show greater flexibility and to claim greater political responsibility. We have fewer doubts about the Muslim Brothers' democratic nature than about the policy they might want to pursue. Because they are not forced to make political choices at present, they can be all things to all men. Indeed, their response to the criticism levelled at the draft platform is a return to a convenient vagueness on many issues. The leeway they are given is partly the result of

the religious climate in Egypt, which is conservative at the moment. A wider debate is therefore needed on the role of Islam in modern Egypt. We think that there can be simultaneous talks on two levels: on the basic principles and on practical reforms towards greater democracy and higher living standards.

### **Step by step**

The Wasat party must be recognised in order to give a voice to clearly moderate Islamists. For very many Egyptians the political choice is too limited, so greater scope must be created for secular alternatives. This should be one of the aims of promoting democracy. Existing or new opposition parties must give much greater attention to social issues and fighting corruption, and must be equipped to play a more active role in society. More competition would force the Muslim Brothers to be moderate and perhaps also to form democratic coalitions. Under pressure from its international partners, but also in response to globalisation, Egypt has started out along the path towards further economic liberalisation, led by the circle around Mubarak's son and possible successor. The European Union is supporting this process, and rightly so, for Egypt is lagging behind. But faithful to its own traditions, the EU should also invest in Egypt's social infrastructure and in the country's ability to create work for its rapidly growing population. Egypt will never have democratic and social stability without making this a real priority.

Above all, however, the state needs to be reformed step by step. This means opening up the regime and creating a transparent government that serves all Egyptians. Those in power should finally give some substance to all their talk of democracy, for example by giving parliament more powers and lifting the ban on religious parties. If the EU-Egypt action plan is implemented properly it should at the very least lead to a proper discussion on Egypt's future and whether the regime in its current form has an answer to its internal problems and external challenges. Even if the action plan is only half implemented, it will still restrict and undermine the deep state, creating room for those who do not belong to the ruling clique.

### **Aid**

Any discussion of a different role for the EU cannot overlook the US. Washington has traditionally determined the Western world's Middle East

policy, and the EU usually follows the American line, whether on Palestine or on relations with Egypt.

It seems that the EU is allowed to carry out laudable projects in its southern backyard and spend a lot of money on good causes, but does not dare pursue its own policy. The US may be critical of Mubarak, but it still gives him unconditional support, and in practice the EU does the same. This not only creates a fundamental contradiction between, on the one hand, all the talk of principles and democracy and, on the other, what is actually happening in practice, it also generates scepticism among supporters of democracy in Egypt and elsewhere and leads to the total negation of the Islamic factor in those countries. We are not helping ourselves here. Whatever we might say, in Egypt they know perfectly well that we will not support the only real opposition. This has to change, and we also need to make this clear to the US.

There is a middle way between doing nothing and Iraq-style regime change. It is an approach with a clear objective: a more democratic Egypt. This approach requires patience and involves the use of a number of instruments from the EU's 'soft power' toolbox, ranging from dialogue and diplomacy to trade and aid.

Without fulfilling all these conditions a democratic experiment could be a disaster, because a possible Islamist government would be operating in an institutional vacuum, without opposition or coalition partners and without counterweights in a country not used to democracy. What Turkey perhaps has too much of, through the legacy of Atatürk, and Morocco due to its monarchy, Egypt currently has too little.

## 5. STEERING WITH ONE HAND TIED BEHIND OUR BACK: SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

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Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the European Union has made a major contribution to the democratisation of Central Europe. Designing a democratic state under the rule of law was the most important condition set for the former Eastern Block countries that aspired to membership of the EU. Brussels punished governments that violated the democratic rules by putting their accession negotiations on the back burner, as happened, for instance, to the government of the authoritarian populist Mečiar in Slovakia in the mid-nineties. His successor came to power promising to bring the country back into the leading group of candidate countries; a promise that he managed to fulfil. Slovakia became a member state of the EU in 2004, at the same time as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, the Baltic States, Cyprus and Malta.

Romania and Bulgaria joined at the beginning of 2007. The EU had set the bar lower for these countries; too low, given the inability and unwillingness that Bucharest and Sofia are still showing when it comes to tackling corruption and organised crime. Nevertheless, the American democracy watchdog *Freedom House* has acknowledged democratic progress. There is, for example, a 'vibrant civil society' in both countries.

In its promotion of democratisation in these countries, the EU had a carrot and a stick at its disposal. The carrot was the promise of belonging to an area of permanent peace, with open borders and a high standard of living. Full membership would give the right to vote in the European institutions and the right to claim support from European funds. The stick was the possibility of freezing the accession process. Candidate countries that flouted the accession conditions ran the risk of ending up as political pariahs and economic paupers, isolated from the rest of Europe by high boundary fences.

## Limp carrot

The EU also held out the carrot of membership to the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey but only Croatia can be reasonably certain of being able to join within the next few years. The European carrot is starting to look somewhat limp to the other candidate countries. Many EU citizens are suffering from enlargement fatigue. Most European politicians have learned the lesson from the enlargement rounds of 2004 and 2007 that in future they must stick more strictly to the accession criteria. Some, such as the French President Sarkozy, even want to renege on promises of future membership that have already been made. It is understandable that many aspirant EU citizens, from Bosnia to Turkey, are asking themselves whether they are really welcome in the EU. Does the uncertain prospect of membership really make up for the sacrifices that the EU demands, the painful reforms and difficult reconciliation processes that it tries to exact from them with its stick? Might it not turn out at the end of this long road that the European carrot is well past its sell-by date?

Among Muslims in the aspirant countries, in particular, doubts are growing about the honourable intentions of the EU. Mustafa Eminefendić, our friend in Sarajevo, reports that the Muslims in his country were left in the lurch by Western Europe before, during and after the Bosnian war in the 1990s. He is European through and through, but feels that he is mistrusted and humiliated on account of his Islamic roots. This is the very reason why he has started going to the mosque. "The West has turned me to Islam", he says.

Many Turks also doubt whether their country will ever be allowed to join the EU, given the fear of Islam. It is partly due to this that the reforms have ground to a halt. That in turn is leading to increasing criticism from Brussels. Turkey and the EU are in danger of getting caught up in a spiral of mutual suspicion if the renewal of the democratic mandate of the AKP government is not seized by both parties as an opportunity to breathe new life into the accession process.

Promoting processes to further democracy in the countries neighbouring the EU is even more difficult when there is no prospect of membership at all. Countries like Morocco and Egypt have no chance of joining the EU, if only because they are not geographically part of the continent of Europe. Morocco's request for membership was turned down

in 1987. Without the carrot of EU membership, the stick that the EU can brandish against these countries is much smaller.

Moving forward with our Muslim neighbours is in these circumstances rather like riding a bike with one hand behind our back and, as every cyclist knows, gusts of wind, oncoming traffic and potholes can then result in painful collisions. That should not, however, be an excuse to avoid all confrontation. It should not be used as an argument to invest less political and financial capital in relations with these Muslim neighbours than in relations with Eastern Europe. Europe has a huge interest in stability and development in both cases. The political and economic stagnation in many Islamic countries feeds the resentment of Muslims against the West – and also that of Muslims *in* the West. The best guarantee of stability and development is democracy.

Democratisation is a long drawn-out process. The short sharp blow does not work, as we have learned from the American experiences in Iraq. The EU should not be steering a course toward regime change, but playing an active role in the politics of Rabat, Cairo and Damascus, even when those in power do not appreciate our involvement.

### **European Neighbourhood Policy**

The EU has developed a Neighbourhood Policy in recent years for those neighbouring countries, from Morocco to Ukraine, for which membership is not or not yet in prospect. The underlying principle is sound: the promotion of democracy and human rights leads to stability and development. In exchange for the desired reforms, the EU offers its neighbouring countries as much integration into European structures as is possible without becoming a member state. “Everything but the institutions”, was the slogan launched by the then President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, when the Neighbourhood Policy was still on the drawing board: no right to vote in the European institutions, but participation in the internal market, financial support and a freer movement of persons. The granting of these benefits is dependent on the extent to which the neighbouring countries implement the promised reforms, laid down in bilateral action plans.

Although there is no carrot of EU membership, the European Neighbourhood Policy still seems to be a tempting offer to the neighbouring countries, which could give the EU maximum influence.

Unfortunately, the results have been disappointing, on both the supply and the demand sides. The European budget for the sixteen partner countries amounts to less than €2 billion per year. When it comes to access to its market, the EU is no more generous, as it insists on exceptions for agricultural products, for instance. Initiatives from the European Commission for a migration policy that would offer temporary jobs in Europe for job-seekers from the neighbouring countries founder in the Council of Ministers.

What Europe is offering has not been sufficiently attractive, therefore, to prompt the governments of the Mediterranean to work harder on reforms. They will not allow themselves to be pinned down on repealing repressive laws. They block the participation of moderate Islamists in numerous Euro-Mediterranean consultative forums. The modest resources earmarked for democracy and human rights end up with organisations that have close ties with the regime. Democratisation, a tough condition for accession candidates, is no more than loose change in the negotiations with neighbouring countries.

What is most troubling is that some governments within the EU simply don't make the effort anymore. Alarmed at the success of Islamist movements like Hamas, Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood, they seem to be turning away from the pursuit of democratisation in the Mediterranean region. The traditional approach is gaining ground again: support for authoritarian regimes purely in the interests of stability in the short term and/or energy supply. European governments are swallowing their criticism of repressive measures, certainly when Islamists are the target. As a consequence, the EU is also guilty of selective indignation. Brussels protested to Cairo when the secular opposition leader Ayman Nour was imprisoned, but remains silent when large numbers of supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood are rounded up.

### **Firmer approach to incumbent governments**

The credibility of the EU is therefore at stake in the Mediterranean countries on our southern border. The gulf between democratic rhetoric and actual policies is all too obvious to the dissatisfied majorities in these countries, who – rightly – hold the governments in office responsible for the lack of jobs, prosperity, legal certainty and political say. When the EU presents itself as an uncritical ally of these regimes, we are feeding the

radicalisation that we say we want to combat, not least among Muslims within our own borders. That may yet lead to regime change in one or more of the neighbouring Islamic countries, but then it will come in the form of a revolution that brings new tyrants to power.

We argue for the abandonment of the short-sighted *Realpolitik* and for the revitalisation of the ideal of democratisation that lies behind the European Neighbourhood Policy. In order to increase its influence, the EU needs to offer a more attractive proposition to its Mediterranean neighbours: more relief funds and better access to the European market, but also more visas for students and scientists and more opportunities for temporary migration for work.

The drama surrounding the clandestine migrants who try to reach the southern coast of the EU in flimsy boats is reason enough to increase the opportunities for legal migration. Add to that the fact that the ageing European populations are experiencing increasing labour market shortages. We are faced with the task of developing a policy that is tailored to the labour market of each EU member state, but that combines the collective supply of jobs available, and publicises this in the countries of origin. Such a policy also needs to obviate the disadvantages of the guest worker schemes of the past. The work permits, exceptions aside, should offer no prospect of permanent residence. The goal should be that migrants take knowledge, experience and financial resources back to their country of origin. Payment to workers of the social security and pension contributions deducted from their wages on their departure would be an extra incentive not to try to stay in Europe illegally. Employers of illegal migrants should be dealt with severely, as proposed by the European Commission last year.

Legal migration of labour is not the panacea for illegal migration into Europe, but an indispensable part of any attempt to regulate the inevitable movements of migrants. A large share of the political credit of the EU, plus a growing share of its support funds are at present being spent on attempts to involve North African governments in helping to guard the borders. The EU wants them to discourage their own inhabitants, migrants from African countries to the south and refugees from elsewhere, but the cooperation from the North African authorities varies from being reluctant to poor. Opening up a route for legal migration would meet their wishes. It would turn a European problem into a joint challenge. That could give the EU more elbowroom for its pursuit of democratisation.

The Mediterranean neighbouring countries of the EU are also asking for greater access to the European market. When it comes to agricultural products, in particular, both processed and unprocessed, the EU still protects its market with import quotas and duties. More Euro-Mediterranean trade is not at odds per se with sustainable development. If unilateral trade concessions from the EU contribute to economic development in the partner countries, if this increase in prosperity benefits education and health care, not least for the poor, then that will advance the emancipation of women and their participation in this labour market. That would curb population growth, which in turn would greatly benefit the environment and the climate.

The biggest question is whether the poor really do gain from increasing export income. This is by no means certain in the Mediterranean countries, which currently have an extremely unequal distribution of income, and where opportunities for the poor to fight for their own interests are limited by the absence of political rotation. There is therefore a lot to be said for making increased access to the European market for neighbouring countries dependent on democratic reforms.

Stricter conditions are certainly necessary when the EU makes more generous financial support available. If a government refuses to include democratisation in the action plan, or to implement the promised reforms, the EU should draw consequences, in the form of reduced support. That sounds paternalistic, and it is. This is not just about development cooperation – there are poorer countries further away in Africa and Asia that are more eligible for that – but it is just as much about security policy.

The EU has offered Morocco, the most liberal country in the region, relatively less financial support than the dictator-led Tunisia. Our interlocutors in Morocco have expressed their indignation about this. They are right to do so, because the EU should not create the impression that it rewards repression. On the contrary, our policies should increase the cost of repression for authoritarian regimes.

Moroccan politicians have a strong case when they claim an ‘advanced status’ for their country in its relations with the EU. Lately, some European governments and the European Commission have signalled their willingness to meet this demand. The other side of the coin is that the EU should be ready to cut back on gifts and loans, to put cooperation on the back burner, for countries that flout democratic standards. There is no

reason to yield in advance to incumbent governments' arguments that their firm hand is the only alternative to the dictatorship of the Islamists, with the latter being tarred with the same brush as terrorists. This politics of fear is a dead end road.

### **Free and fair elections**

The EU must make the case for democratic reforms that create the conditions for real political contests in its neighbouring countries south of the Mediterranean: free and fair elections that force politicians and political parties to consider the needs of the whole population, that give the electorate the chance to punish the abuse of power, corruption and nepotism and to reward successful reform policies. That demands freedom to form political parties, to appoint candidates and to run campaigns. That also demands fair election procedures, a parliament with powers and an independent electoral management body. Respect for human rights, such as freedom of speech and freedom of association, is also essential. Without these rights parties can be silenced and a civil society cannot develop. An independent judiciary, which does not dance to the tune of those in power, is necessary to safeguard these rights. A free press is also indispensable. All these reforms, including interim steps large and small, lend themselves to inclusion in the action plans that the EU draws up with neighbouring countries.

Not only secular opposition parties, but moderate Islamists should be given access to the political arena. Democratisation does not amount to very much if the most popular social movement, and the one most open to change, is excluded from participating. A country like Egypt would do well to lift the ban on forming religious parties.

Admittedly, on our visit to Cairo we too had our doubts about the Muslim Brothers. Their willingness to observe democratic rules, universal human rights and international agreements is not beyond dispute. The written questions that our parliamentary delegation submitted to the Brothers after our meeting with them have still not been answered. Perhaps they have not resolved these questions yet. However, their present status - officially they do not exist - does not challenge the Muslim Brothers to come up with a political programme that throws more light on their intentions. If they were allowed to form a party, it would then become clearer whether or not they are prepared to respect constitutional

principles. If not, then a ban on their participation in elections would meet with few protests from Europe. In that case a more moderate party such as *Wasat* would probably get the chance to translate the call for more Islam and less social inequality into a political manifesto.

Of course, a party programme cannot rule out the risk that the Muslim Brothers would abolish democracy once they had won an election – one man, one vote, one time – and then set up a theocracy. That is why the EU should not stop at requiring the regimes in neighbouring countries to hold free elections as soon as possible. Democratisation entails more than that. A strong and pluralistic middle class, a free press and an independent judiciary are the necessary buffers against parties that take the slogan ‘winner takes all’ too literally. Support for training magistrates, for non-governmental organisations and for independent media – even when they sympathise with the Islamists – should be given much higher priority in the European Neighbourhood Policy, even if these forms of assistance are not high on the list of priorities of the incumbent regimes. Support for democratisation need not come directly from European or national governments. When civil initiatives receiving European support run the risk of being portrayed as ‘foreign agents’ by the authorities, it may be better to route aid through development and human rights organisations.

### **Deep state**

Democratisation amounts to more than reforming laws. In many of the EU’s Islamic neighbours, the constitution and other laws are more liberal than what happens in practice. This is why the same party invariably remains in power in countries with a multi-party system, such as Egypt and Tunisia.

The ‘deep state’, in its various manifestations, is a powerful obstacle to progress: manipulation of elections, parliamentary decisions, judicial decisions and public opinion; intimidation, bribery, detention, torture or liquidation of political opponents. There is a broad range of unlawful methods by which senior figures in the government, the army, intelligence services, police or the justice system perpetuate the balance of power, whether or not in collusion with religious authorities, economic interest groups or organised crime.

Even Turkey, which can pride itself on having a democratic tradition, has a secret network like this. Prime Minister Erdoğan spoke openly about

this on Turkish television in 2007. As a reform-minded newcomer, he has been seriously thwarted by the deep state. His complaint gained credibility when, in January 2008, the police arrested dozens of members of the *Ergenekon* group. The accusations against them, including their involvement in several political killings, seem to be well-documented.

In Egypt, President Mubarak is the spider at the centre of the web of the deep state. He can 'order' a charge against members of the opposition and have them put in jail. In Morocco the web seems to be more powerful than the spider. The Makhzen, the 'circles around the palace', determine the pace of democratic reforms. And the king himself? "Even if he wants to, he cannot change things", confided a human rights activist to us in Rabat.

Action plans for democratisation should not only cover better laws, but also contain tests for the extent to which the authorities observe existing laws. Thanks to independent human rights organisations, international human rights rapporteurs, watchdogs such as *Transparency International* and *Freedom House* and our own diplomats of the EU, testing the implementation of the law in practice is not an impossible task. Every violation of human rights or the law demands an appropriate diplomatic *démarche*.

International observers at elections are a means of exerting pressure to ensure compliance with the law. Certainly when Islamists request the presence of election observers, the EU should make a case for them to be sent out. That would help the European commitment to democracy to gain credibility.

### **Beauty contest**

Operating stricter conditions in the bilateral relations between the EU and its Mediterranean neighbours may create the impression that Brussels wants to play one neighbouring country off against another. Will this not make Euro-Mediterranean cooperation a kind of beauty contest, where the biggest prize goes to the participant that pleases Europe the most? Should the multilateral dimension of the Barcelona process not be given far more emphasis? Our impression is that it is not so much lack of will on the part of the EU, but conflicts and suspicion between its Mediterranean partners that are obstructing a genuine regional integration process. The Arab Maghreb Union, which five North African countries have joined, has simply not got off the ground because of the conflict between Morocco and

Algeria about the status of Western Sahara. Democracies usually cooperate better than dictatorships and semi-dictatorships.

From this perspective, the 'Union for the Mediterranean' announced by the European Council in March 2008 might well be putting the cart before the horse. This plan to revitalise the Barcelona process, a scaled-back version of French President Sarkozy's earlier proposal for a 'Mediterranean Union' rivalling the European Union, meets with a lot of scepticism. Not only in EU capitals, but also in Turkey. Many Turkish politicians haven't forgotten that Sarkozy's original proposal was partly designed to offer Ankara an alternative to EU membership, to which Sarkozy is still opposed.

At the same time, the projects on which the Union for the Mediterranean will focus, varying from energy supply and pollution to exchange programmes for students and scientists, are of undeniable importance for the sustainable development of the region. The challenge for 'Brussels', now that it has taken over the steering wheel from Paris, will be to make sure that these projects support the wider aim of democratisation and do not reward the countries with the most oppressive regimes. In the field of energy supply, it would be short-sighted to assist Algeria in exploiting its natural gas reserves without helping Morocco develop its nascent renewable energy sector.

If the Union for the Mediterranean only results in more meetings between officials, making solemn but noncommittal declarations, it will not fare better than the current Barcelona process. It makes far more sense to bring non-governmental organisations together, from the EU and from the neighbouring countries, to learn from each other. To get politicians from secular and Islamist camps round the table together. This could create a forum for reform-minded forces. At the moment they allow others to play them off against each other too easily. Secular opposition parties and Islamist movements often have an even greater aversion to each other than to the regime. This perpetuates the status quo. There is everything to be gained from reducing mutual suspicion and formulating shared objectives.

In the wider region of EU's neighbours, less obvious forms of cooperation could open up. The researcher Richard Youngs points out that the *Al Ghad* party of Ayman Nour borrowed its orange motif from the Ukrainian democratic revolution of 2004 (Youngs, 2006). The EU failed to bring Egyptian and Ukrainian democrats together: a missed opportunity.

## Secularists and Islamists

Islamist movements and parties are political factors that we cannot ignore. They form the main opposition movements in the countries on the Mediterranean Sea that come under the European Neighbourhood Policy. If democracy suddenly broke out, in many countries the Islamists would form the largest group in parliament or the government. Even from the more realistic scenarios of political transformation, their role cannot be airbrushed out of the picture.

It is an illusion to hope that the Islamists will be weakened by isolating them. That kind of strategy paves the way for radicalisation. It increases the risk that political change in the neighbouring countries will be achieved through violence. It leaves the path free for jihadis who are not pursuing any national goals, but whose aim is international subjugation to Islam. There can be no compromise with them.

For Europeans it is easier to talk to the secular opposition parties in these countries. The cultural gap is narrower. We share many of their liberal and socialist values and have a better understanding of their criticism of those in power. However, their role is a minimal one. They do not represent the great mass of the population.

When we spoke to the Secretary General of the *Parti Socialiste Unifié* in his crumbling office in Rabat, he admitted that the Islamists are far better at winning converts to their cause. Another leftist party, the *Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires*, has allowed itself to be co-opted by the regime. It is part of the government but does not have any power. When we argue for cooperation with parties of the left, it is to spur them on to have more courage, so that the political opposition to the Makhzen is not left entirely to the Islamists. Another reason is so that they do not take the route of the established secular parties in Turkey, who because of their aversion to political Islam and their complicity in the deep state have become obstacles to democratic reforms. Finally, should the Islamists come to power, a credible secular opposition can show itself to be a counterweight and an alternative.

In Egypt we spoke to three secular opposition parties, including the party of Ayman Nour. They are too small and too elitist to be able to make a difference at the moment. The new electoral system offers them more chance of winning seats in parliament than the Muslim Brothers, because of the ban on religious parties. To make use of these opportunities, however,

the secular opposition will have to ally itself more emphatically with the poor, and adopt social justice and the fight against corruption as campaign themes. They will then run the risk that the regime will hit back even harder. Even then we do not see them matching the popularity of the Muslim Brothers in the near future. A politician like Nour is more popular in the West than in his own country at the moment.

We urge the EU, therefore, to stop avoiding dialogue with Islamist movements, but to engage in it without preconditions. These discussions will be more difficult than those with the secularists, as we ourselves found, but the rewards to be gained from a successful dialogue are greater. This has been pointed out by Muriel Asseburg of the *German Institute for International and Security Affairs*: implicit in the dialogue with Islamists is the promise for the EU of “a broader influence in the societies of the region, rather than remaining confined to the rarefied circles of the civil society elites”, (Asseburg, 2007).

### **America’s dirty hands**

Up to now the EU has hardly done any better than the US when it comes to working for democracy in the Muslim world. If points were given out in international politics for good intentions – quod non – Bush could even claim to be in the lead: with the invasion of Iraq did he not at least try to parachute democracy into the heart of the Middle East?

The American President also surpasses all his European counterparts in rhetoric: “Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe because, in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty. As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment and violence ready for export”.

Bush spoke these words in 2003 at a meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington, D.C. At that moment in time Binyam Mohamed al Habashi was being held in a secret prison in Morocco, where interrogators were working on his genitals with a scalpel. The Ethiopian who was resident in England was picked up in Pakistan and transferred to Morocco by the CIA, under its extraordinary rendition programme for terrorism suspects. Mohamed, a harmless nobody

according to the British intelligence service MI6, is still imprisoned in Guantánamo Bay.

Other governments in the region, such as Egypt and Jordan, have also been called in by the American government to assist with the 'war on terror'. They can use methods of interrogation that are not permitted in the US. Naturally the regimes demand a price for this cooperation: no criticism of human rights violations and no political recognition for the Islamists. According to the American journalist Ken Silverstein, the US broke off its contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as far back as the end of the 90s, following complaints from the Mubarak regime. American diplomats are now officially prohibited from speaking to the Islamists. Silverstein points out the contradiction between Bush's doctrine of freedom and his choice of friends: "It is precisely Egypt's lack of democracy – the regime's willingness to throw Muslim terrorism suspects into secret prisons and employ torture against them – that has made it such a valuable ally".

The gaping gulf between words and deeds makes it difficult for the American government to start up a dialogue with representatives of political Islam. Add to that the fact that the government has to bear the American media in mind, which for its part does not want to offend the feelings of the pro-Israeli public with an over-subtle distinction between Islamists and terrorists.

The Europeans too can be blamed for hypocrisy, but they can count themselves lucky that the EU as such did not offer any support for the invasion of Iraq. Public opinion in Europe is less inclined to be led by the Israeli government when interpreting relations in the region. Several European countries have been complicit in the extraordinary renditions but they did not organise the torture programme. Meanwhile the EU and most of its member states have openly distanced themselves from it. To sum up: the EU is in a better position to enter into useful dialogue with the Islamists and to work on building up trust on both sides.

We do not doubt that Europe will find partners to talk to. Many Islamists yearn for international recognition. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood runs an English-language website ([www.ikhwanweb.com](http://www.ikhwanweb.com)), the Moroccan PJD has a site in French, English and Spanish ([www.pjd.ma](http://www.pjd.ma)). That illustrates their need for contact with the West. In 2007, Ikhwanweb ran a poll on whether the Brotherhood should engage in direct dialogue with the US – assuming that Washington would be willing to do so. The

fact that the Muslim Brothers raised this question is as telling as the outcome of the poll: 52% in favour, 39% against.

In February 2008, the editor-in-chief of Ikhwanweb, Khaled Hamza Salam, was arrested and put behind bars, apparently because of his protest against the use of military tribunals for trying Brotherhood leaders. The Egyptian authorities seem to consider moderates and reformers within the Brotherhood, such as Hamza, as their most dangerous enemies.

### **Cross-examining the Islamists**

What should the dialogue with Islamists be about? To start with, there are quite a number of issues on which they need to speak in plainer terms. In 2007, an American think-tank, the *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, listed a number of 'unanswered questions', which we paraphrase below. The questions were geared to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, but they could also apply in discussions with its political friends in the region.

1. *Which has priority, sharia law or constitutional democracy?*

Are the Islamists prepared to observe the rules of a constitutional democracy? Even when secular laws are adopted that they feel are not compatible with the law of Allah, the sharia? Will they confine their opposition to such laws to democratic means? Following in the footsteps of the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP), Mediterranean Islamists are increasingly comparing themselves to the Christian Democrat movement in Europe, to endorse their democratic credentials. Do they, however, accept, just like the Christian Democrats, that it is for parliaments and judges to decide which laws are permissible? Or would they, once they had come to power, entrust that review of the law to Islamic scholars, who could overrule the secular authorities?

The Carnegie Endowment does not doubt the willingness of the Muslim Brotherhood to submit itself to political rotation through free elections, but the significance of one man, one vote is seriously undermined if religious authorities are given a right of veto over all laws. We see that in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The draft political platform of the Brotherhood, circulated for discussion in the summer of 2007, did indeed propose a council of religious scholars and suggested their advice on new laws would be binding. This proposal

was severely criticised, however, both from the outside and from within the movement. In later statements, Brotherhood leaders made it clear that conflicts between parliament and the religious scholars would have to be settled by the Constitutional Court.

While the Egyptian Muslim Brothers are a touch too fanatical, the *Parti de la Justice et du Développement* in Morocco should be on its guard against adopting an all too meek position. The party has reconciled itself to the king being at the same time the highest religious authority and the most powerful political institution. That concession has made the PJD more acceptable to the powers that be, but it raises the question as to where it will find the lever for greater social justice and democratic development. What would the party manage to do if it became a part of the government, now that its demands for democratisation have been so moderated?

Under these circumstances participation in the government by the PJD is likely to play into the hands of its more radical rival, al Adl wal Ihsan. That movement wants to reduce the role of the monarchy to a ceremonial one, that much is clear. However, if they decide to participate in elections, Yassine and his people will also have to come clean on the relationship between sharia law and democracy.

2. *Do they aim to split into a religious movement and a political party?*

It seems discourteous to ask the Muslim Brotherhood this question, as the Egyptian regime does not allow religious parties. Nevertheless, the Islamists need to say how much distance they are prepared to accept between their religious and political wings. Religion and politics are two very different domains. Religion is concerned with absolute truths and the voluntary submission to these by believers. Politics is a matter of conflicting opinions and interests, of debate and compromising with people with different views. Would the political representatives of the Brotherhood be given the freedom by the religious leadership to listen to the electorate, develop their own viewpoints and enter into compromises? That political freedom is vitally important, as it will largely determine whether the Islamists can handle moral issues that touch upon sharia in a pragmatic way: questions such as wearing the veil or drinking alcohol, which the average voter usually loses less sleep over than religious quibblers.

The PJD seems to have appropriated scope for pragmatic action. For instance, after initially protesting against it, the party sided with a (diluted) reform of Moroccan family law that gave more rights to women. The party was flexible enough to label these rights as compatible with sharia law. The more radical al Adl wal Ihsan on the other hand continued to lead the conservative protest.

3. *How are decisions taken within the movement?*

The Brotherhood is extremely vague on this point; not surprising for a banned organisation whose leaders can be thrown into jail at any moment (and repeatedly are). It is due to this secrecy, however, that the image of an undemocratic organisation with an all-powerful leadership has stuck, even after the surprisingly open debate among the Brothers on their draft political platform in 2007. That image is difficult to reconcile with the political ambition to democratise Egypt.

Let's admit it, similar criticism can be levelled at the EU. In terms of openness and democratic control, its foreign policy pillar is behind that of other European policy fields. European diplomats and Islamists are both entitled to question each other's credibility.

The leader of the Moroccan PJD, Othmani, was elected by the party congress in 2004. Al Adl wal Ihsan on the other hand is largely a one-man-band of Abdeslam Yassine, despite the fact that his daughter Nadine dubs the movement a 'political association'. Critical questions will have to be asked about the structure of the movement if it becomes involved in elections.

4. *Do religious and ethnic minorities have equal rights?*

The British diplomat Lord Cromer wrote in 1908 "the only difference between the Copt and the Muslim is that the former is an Egyptian who worships in a Christian church, whilst the latter is an Egyptian who worships in a Mohammedan mosque".<sup>10</sup> Things are not so simple any more. Egypt has become strongly islamised in recent years and tensions between Muslims and Christians have increased. Senior representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood have poured oil onto the fire by proposing measures that discriminate against the Coptic minority. The 2007 draft political platform explicitly bars non-

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<sup>10</sup> Earl of Cromer, (1908) *Modern Egypt*, London, Vol. II pp.205-6.

Muslims from the Egyptian presidency, although Brotherhood leaders later recognised that Egyptian voters might legitimately decide otherwise at the ballot. A pertinent question to ask the Muslim Brotherhood is, therefore, to what extent they endorse the principle of 'universal citizenship' in the Egyptian constitution, and, if so, would that mean that when the Brotherhood forms a political party, non-Muslims could join it?

The moderate Islamic democrats of the Wasat party provide a good example. The initiators of this nascent party include, in addition to ex-Muslim Brothers, several Coptic intellectuals. That is universal citizenship in practice. The AKP in Turkey, in many respects a model for Wasat, could learn from this. It is strongly Sunni biased. By pursuing and displaying greater internal pluralism, Erdoğan's party could help reduce the suspicion that they arouse among religious minorities, especially the Alevis.

5. *What rights do women have?*

On this point too the Brotherhood should be required to put an end to its institutionalised equivocation. The rhetoric about 'women's rights in an Islamic framework' is not inconsistent per se – as can be seen from the pragmatic position of the PJD on the new family law in Morocco – but it is far too vague. What does it mean for divorce law, inheritance and access to public positions?

In some countries Islamists produce more female parliamentarians than the secular parties. The Muslim Brotherhood has also put forward female candidates for parliament, but their election was thwarted by the regime. In order to judge what women have to fear from the Islamists, we need to judge their standpoints and practices against the standards of the region, not our own European standards.

At the same time, however, Europe must not disavow its own beliefs on equal rights for women and sexual minorities. It is not necessarily a waste of time engaging the Islamists in debate on this. We can point out to them that the appeal to universal human rights gives the Islamists a political weapon against their oppressors. The EU demand for respect for human rights has helped the AKP in Turkey to remove obstacles to people of faith. However, that appeal to human rights loses its credibility if these rights exclusively serve the freedom of the Islamists and not those of people with more modern lifestyles. Egypt

has pledged itself to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the UN Women's Convention. If the Islamists are selective in respect of which of these obligations they choose to observe – for instance by barring women from top government positions, as the Brotherhood's draft platform does - then they are behaving in the same way as the incumbent regimes.

The EU should also make it plain that, were the Islamists to come to power, the EU would pursue all possible avenues to encourage other emancipation movements. After all, do the Muslim Brothers not know from their own experience how unfair it is to be excluded from exchanges with Europe by those in power?

It is also a good idea to point out to the Muslim Brothers that some of the suspicion in the West and at home about their agenda with regard to women could be dispelled if they turned against traditions that are hostile to women and have nothing to do with sharia, such as honour killing and female circumcision. In Turkey, the Erdoğan government gained credit for its campaign against honour killing. It did not dispel suspicion of the AKP, but it did lessen it.

6. *Would international obligations be observed?*

This question concerns not only human rights conventions, but also the agreements between Egypt and Israel. The revocation of these agreements by an Islamist regime would unleash an international storm of protest. More important than the recognition of these agreements, however, is the question of whether Islamists are prepared to observe them in fact. It would be worth the EU's while to investigate this fall-back option in its dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood.

In Morocco the PJD is already working on a pragmatic approach towards Israel, for the eventuality that it is called to join the government after the next elections. The line seems to be that, as a party the PJD will continue to avoid contacts with representatives of Israel, but as a partner in the government it would observe Morocco's international obligations.

7. *What is the socio-economic programme?*

Running a charitable network is not the same as governing a state and keeping an economy turning. What instruments do the Islamists aim to use to achieve a more equitable distribution of income? What

is their position on privatisations? What guarantees will there be against clientelism? No country is self-sufficient. Economic choices can have major consequences for international trade and investments.

The EU should engage in dialogue on these issues with the Muslim Brothers, the PJD and al Adl wal Ihsan without laying down preconditions. Whether the dialogue can move on to the next stage of cooperation, should these parties come to power for instance, depends very much on their answers to these questions and on the extent to which the Islamists can remove European qualms about the mixing of religion and politics.

### **Hamas and terrorism**

One important question is absent from the list of the *Carnegie Endowment*: the question of terrorist violence. The Egyptian Muslim Brothers, to whom the questionnaire was geared, have not committed any attacks for over half a century. They have moved away from violence as a means to achieve a more Islamic Egypt. However, the question is extremely relevant in the dialogue with Hamas, the Palestinian sister organisation of the Muslim Brothers. Until three years ago, these hardcore Islamists were still committing suicide attacks on Israeli citizens. They have not renounced terror and violence against Israel and that is why Hamas is on the EU's list of terrorist organisations.

Cooperating with terrorists is problematic but the EU countries made an error of judgment in deciding to avoid dialogue with Hamas, certainly after these Islamists beat the corrupt ruling Fatah party in the Palestinian general elections in 2006. The diplomatic boycott of the new Hamas government, combined with the suspension of direct aid, helped the hawks in Hamas to gain the upper hand over the doves. The isolation and impotence of its own ministers paved the way for radicalisation.

In June 2007, alarmed by American military support to Fatah, the hawks organised the assumption of total power by Hamas in the Gaza strip. The paradoxical effect of the refusal to engage in dialogue is that the EU, now more than ever, is being forced into some form of cooperation with Hamas, as it cannot abandon the impoverished residents of 'Hamastan' to their fate. Desperation breeds violence, undermining the peace process or what is left of it. The bloody confrontation between

Hamas and the Israeli army at the beginning of 2008 derailed the talks between the Israeli government and Palestinian President Abbas.

Doubts about the boycott of Hamas are increasing among European politicians. One way out of the impasse could be for the EU to make a distinction between the military wing and the political and social wing of Hamas. There would then be no cooperation with the first group, but there would be cooperation with the more moderate forces in the second group. Instead of the demand for the recognition of Israel, which is difficult to realise in the short term, the EU could settle for the unofficial ceasefire that Hamas has exercised since 2005 and the declaration that Hamas is working for a Palestinian state in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. The EU may demand from Islamists in the region who are interested in dialogue with the EU to support this line, even if a significant proportion of their grassroots supporters would for the time being not support it.

The peace process in Northern Ireland began with the making of a distinction between the paramilitary wing of Irish nationalism (the IRA) and the political wing (Sinn Fein). Negotiations between the political representatives and the British government ultimately led to the disarmament of the paramilitary wing. Tony Blair, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom until June 2007, played an important role in the Northern Ireland peace process. As envoy for the Middle East, he would do well to press this successful formula on his appointers: the United Nations, the EU, the US and Russia.

### **What do the Islamists want from Europe?**

When Islamists in the Mediterranean region accuse the EU of double standards, they are mainly referring to Hamas and the Palestinian elections these days. Pressing for more democracy in the Muslim world then not recognising a government that emerged from exceptionally free elections, and not even trying through engagement and support to encourage Hamas to adopt a more pragmatic position toward Israel – it is this mode of action on the part of the Europeans that is seen as a model of hypocrisy by many Muslims.

A more nuanced European approach to Hamas, as advocated above, would help the dialogue with the Mediterranean Islamists. It would increase their confidence that the EU would respect the outcome of free and

fair elections in Egypt or Morocco, even if a majority of the electorate voted for political Islam.

The EU needs to have the courage to risk a collision with Washington over Hamas. That would come as a welcome break with accepted practice. Although the EU has been more critical than the US in its statements about Israeli measures that are making peace with the Palestinians more difficult – such as the continued construction of settlements and a dividing wall on Palestinian territory – European policy still usually follows that of the American government. The confidential (but leaked) end of mission report of the Peruvian diplomat Alvaro De Soto when he left his position as UN coordinator for the ‘peace process’ in May 2007 illustrates this submissiveness. The EU is playing a vital role. It is the largest donor of humanitarian and development aid to the Palestinians. European troops in Lebanon are protecting the northern border of Israel against attacks from Hezbollah. Despite this the EU puts up amazingly little resistance to the US. It has hardly taken any political initiatives. The most striking feature of De Soto’s report is how few words he devotes to the EU and its member states.

De Soto (2007) wrote:

The US [...] is an indispensable player in the Middle East and it holds the key – if anyone does – to Israel. But we must be utterly clear-headed about the downside of being among the led, given that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is but one piece of the Middle East peace process, which should (but doesn’t) include the search for comprehensive peace between Israel and all its neighbours, including Syria, and also that the MEPP has become strategically subservient to US policy in the broader Middle East, including Iraq and Iran – a policy that has become discredited not just by the usual suspects abroad but also in the party in opposition in the US and irreproachable Republican elders.

These words were intended for De Soto’s UN colleagues, but the EU should also learn a lesson from them. Given the unwillingness of the Bush government to bring a settlement with the Palestinians and the neighbouring countries closer by putting pressure on the Israeli government, the EU should pluck up the courage to steer a more independent course. Israel and Palestine is no sideshow in the conflicts around the Persian Gulf. Anger about the lot of the Palestinians is the greatest obstacle to better relations between the EU and its Mediterranean

neighbours. If Europe were to show a more balanced and a more forceful commitment to the promised two-state solution, Islamists in the region would not fail to notice this.

The Islamists have other grievances and wishes that the EU should also take seriously. Uncritical European support for repressive regimes, which deny the principles of the Neighbourhood Policy, has already been discussed. Brussels must raise its voice against human rights violations, even when the victims are representatives of political Islam. When incumbent governments in neighbouring countries refuse to make verifiable promises on democratisation, or do not fulfil their promises, that should have consequences for the support that the EU gives them. The question of which forms of conditionality are the most effective lends itself well to discussion with Islamists and other opposition groups.

### **Cartoon scandal**

Islamists also demand respect for their faith from Europe. Statements from politicians about the backward and violent nature of Islam do not pass unnoticed in the Muslim world. European politicians who see no good coming from escalation should emphatically distance themselves from such Islamophobic comments, also in the international, Arabic and Turkish press. At the same time they have to make clear that European governments cannot protect Muslims from having their feelings offended. Europe is proud of its freedom of speech. That does not stop at other people's religions.

The fuss in 2006 about the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad printed by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005 made it painfully obvious that EU countries and Muslim countries have a different view on the limits to freedom of speech. A compromise would seem to be a less obvious solution here than an agreement to disagree. Discussing the sensitivities of both sides in the Euro-Mediterranean consultative forums, specifically to include Islamists, increases the chance of a timely de-escalation of conflicts such as the cartoon issue. After all, neither the EU, nor political Islam has anything to gain from a 'clash of civilisations', which would be grist to the mill of the nationalists in Europe and the anti-political jihadis in the Muslim world. Osama bin Laden must have been laughing up his sleeve at the cartoon scandal.

## Everyone looks to the AKP

At the height of the cartoon crisis, the Turkish Premier, Erdoğan, and his Spanish counterpart, Zapatero, published a joint appeal for calm and respect, in which they recognised that the Mohammad cartoons came under the concept of 'freedom of speech'. At the same time they expressed their moral censure at the lack of responsibility and respect on the part of those who had published the cartoons. The appeal was a difficult balancing act, which brought criticism down on the authors from both sides in the controversy.

Nevertheless, Erdoğan won admiration for his role as a builder of bridges – between democracy and Islam, between Turkey and the Arab world, between Europe and its Muslim neighbours. Shortly before the cartoon crisis, the Egyptian commentator Mohamed Sid-Ahmed described what made the appearance of Erdoğan so unusually refreshing for the Arab world:

What is new is the admission that a policy of avoiding violence presupposes the search for peaceful – that is, political – solutions of issues of contention. This entails always keeping channels of communication open and abandoning the politics of exclusion, which has the added advantage of defeating the advocates of violence and supporters of terrorism. That is the logic of Erdoğan in Turkey and also of the Wasat party, a breakaway faction from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Can this be the key to a policy of reform and change that has become indispensable if we are to overcome the present impasse?<sup>11</sup>

In Egypt, not only the secular progressives, which included Sid-Ahmed (since deceased), and post-Islamists as the founders of Wasat follow the adventures of Erdoğan's AKP with great interest. The purer Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood also see Turkey as a touchstone for their strategy of changing the political system from within. Issam El-Erian, one of the leading Brothers, was therefore concerned about the way the Turkish army tried to sabotage the election of an AKP President. "Military intervention would strengthen the arguments of jihadi leaders who warn

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<sup>11</sup>Mohamed Sid-Ahmed *Al Ahram Weekly*, 24 - 30 November 2005, available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/770/op3.htm>

against participation in elections”, he is quoted as saying in the *Financial Times* (2007).

In Morocco, Mustafa Ramid, an MP for the moderate Islamist *Parti de la Justice et du Développement*, has commented along similar lines: “Success in Turkey could lend moral support to Islamist parties that are playing the democratic game while failure will also have an impact”. Certainly for a party like the PJD, which bears exactly the same name as the AKP, it is difficult to avoid comparisons. For the time being the PJD is using this to its advantage. When we spoke to the party leader, Othmani, he was emulating the modern and post-Islamist character of the AKP. The AKP government inspires no fear, so why be fearful of an election victory of the PJD?

Othmani conveniently ignores the fact that the AKP is more controversial in its own country than abroad. Erdoğan and his party still have not won the confidence of the establishment and of many secular Turks, as witnessed by the chief prosecutor’s request to the Constitutional Court, in March 2008, to ban the AKP. The suspicion is partly inspired by frenetic Kemalism – an almost Jacobin aversion to a pluralist Turkey – but the AKP is partly to blame. The party has not made sufficiently clear how much tolerance it wants and is able to summon up for citizens who do not share its Islamic principles. The PJD should learn from the problems that the AKP has brought upon itself through this. The PJD also still encounters suspicion. Even so participation of the PJD in government could act as a spur to the democratisation of Morocco.

### **Turkey, a test case**

Less partisan observers in the region are paying particular attention to whether the Turkish wrestling match between the AKP and the establishment will play itself out within constitutional bounds. For the moment, the army dares not stage a real coup and the AKP has used legal means to skirt around the resistance to an AKP President. The street too – ‘no sharia, no coup’ – has made its influence felt. “The dedication of all to the letter and the spirit of the law and the constitution in solving a really serious political dispute is tremendously important”, wrote the Lebanese paper, the *Daily Star*. It is an irony of history that at the moment of updating this book it is still unclear whether the attempt by the Turkish chief prosecutor to close down the AKP will set the precedent of a

'constitutional coup'. The result could be a complete overruling of the wishes of the population as expressed in the July 2007 elections.

When describing relations between Turkey and the Arab world, it is important to be precise and realistic. Sceptics in Turkey and in countries like Morocco and Egypt are keen to make reference to the painful shared history: until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Arabs were the underdogs in the Ottoman Empire. Add to that the fact that many Arabic Muslims consider the Turks to be mere 'softies' when it comes to the interpretation of Islam, and the fact that there has been no secular revolution in the Arab countries such as the one that took place with the founding of the Turkish republic, and it is easy to come to the conclusion that people in the Arab world cannot and would not want to learn anything from present-day developments in Turkey. Such a total dismissal would, however, be an over-simplification and it is belied by the growing interest in Turkey and its ruling AKP. It is true to say that Turkey will never be able to serve as a role model for countries with a very different history and very different state and social models, but Turkey is now an example for its Islamic neighbours, or rather, a test case.

The growing interest in Turkey among those in the Arab world can be attributed on the one hand to the failure of Arab nationalism and on the other, to the hopelessness of jihad activism. Many people in the neighbouring countries are asking: How can it be that the Turks have economic success while we fail? Why is it that Turkey seems to have managed to reconcile democracy and Islam?

On the other hand, its higher status in the region is also the fruit of active self-promotion by Ankara. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey stood with its back turned against its former imperial territories in the Middle East for decades. The Kemalist elite did not want to belong to the backward East but the enlightened West. The AKP has shattered this false divide. It has done more in moving towards the EU than all previous governments but at the same time has strengthened links with the Muslim world in the areas of diplomacy, trade, culture and tourism.

The warm relations with its Arab neighbours have been made easier by the fact that Turkey has started to steer a more independent course vis-à-vis the US. The progressive democratisation has meant that Ankara can no longer ignore the fact that the Turkish people are far less pro-American than their leaders. In 2003 the Bush government wanted to station troops

on Turkish territory for the invasion of Iraq. The Turkish parliament blocked that, against the will of the AKP government. Turkey-watcher, Hugh Pope (2006), observed: “The US has long hoped that Middle Easterners would follow Turkey’s path. Ironically, this is now happening in part because of Turkey’s distance from US policy”.

### **Geopolitical gains**

With the influence it has acquired in the Middle East, Turkey is cleverly emphasising how much the EU has to gain in geopolitical terms by accepting Turkey as a member state. Turkish efforts to join the EU are not seen by its Islamic neighbours as a betrayal. On the contrary, Turkey has got further in its overtures to the EU than many of them thought possible and Ankara has won admiration for that. At a conference of Arab and Turkish intellectuals in Cairo at the beginning of 2007, delegates heard the argument that Turkish membership of the EU would be a good thing because it would give the Muslim world a voice in the EU.

Hopefully Turkey’s opponents inside the EU did not hear or read about that, because it would be grist to their mill: the accession of the Muslim country, Turkey, would undermine the Judeo-Christian and humanist character of Europe. These opponents ignore the fact that the great merit of the EU is that it has formulated its values to be inclusive, that is without ruling out any religion. The core values propounded by the Bosnian Grand Mufti, Cerić, in his *Declaration of European Muslims* fit in seamlessly.

The new Reform Treaty of the EU contains the following summary:

The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

It is these tried and tested values that the EU holds up to its neighbouring countries for the purposes of the accession process and the Neighbourhood Policy. If Turkey is converted to these values, and the EU nevertheless breaks its promise to allow Turkey to join, it will have a lot of explaining to do to all its Muslim neighbours, especially to the Islamists, to whom it has recommended the burgeoning synthesis between democracy

and Islam in the AKP as a recipe for stability, development and religious freedom.

The message that lies concealed in a rejection of Turkey is that Muslims are unfit for democracy. That is precisely what the most blinkered Islamists thought all along and what bin Laden would have the Muslims believe. However, without democracy it is not God's law that will prevail but the law of the strongest. Would Europe be safer if we resign ourselves to repression and revolts in the Islamic countries on our borders?

In addition to that there is the fact that there are Muslims living in Europe; they have been here for centuries. There is a chance that countries like Bosnia and Macedonia, with their significant Muslim populations, will join the EU before Turkey, because we cannot exclude the Western Balkans. A black hole in the middle of Europe would undermine our security, in spite of all the border fences. Muslims in the Balkans nevertheless regard Turkey's EU-membership as the real litmus test. Professor Berishaj gave us this advice in Pristina: "Europe should allow Turkey to become a member of the EU. By doing so the West would remove all the doubts of the Muslim populations in these countries at a stroke. Then people would believe that the West is not anti-Islam".<sup>12</sup>

### **Muslims in Europe**

There are millions of Muslims living in Western Europe, mainly migrants who have come for work and their descendants. Most of them are in a weak socio-economic position; their faith is under fire. Salafist preachers and jihad activists take advantage of their frustrations about social exclusion and Islamophobia and try to win converts to a fundamentalist Islam that rejects integration into European society. Muslim youngsters, searching for an identity in which they can take more pride than in their ethnic origin, sometimes end up in these movements. On the internet they find a 'pure' Islam that offers a ready-made solution to their identity problems. The rhetoric about the umma, the community of all faithful Muslims, gives them a sense of belonging. Pure Islam and the umma are completely imaginary, the hostility of its adherents to the West

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Professor Berishaj, 23 April 2006.

unfortunately, is not. Islamic terrorism in Europe is increasingly home grown.

We should not overlook, however, that there are many European Muslims for whom religion is becoming less important. They are going through the process of secularisation that the majority of Catholics and Protestants have already been through. For them Islam is no longer law, at most it is a source of inspiration. They are attached to certain familiar rituals such as Ramadan, but do not allow this to stand in the way of their social mobility.

The serious response to the radicals comes from thinkers and doers who are trying to reconcile Islam with Europe's democratic freedoms. They are studying the scope that Western constitutions offer for the observance of Islamic rules. Some of them, even those of the Salafist persuasion, have come to the conclusion that in European countries, precisely because of the protection that the constitutional state affords to minorities, there are more opportunities for an authentic Islam than in the majority of Muslim countries with their repressive regimes. A growing number of Muslims are getting involved in politics and making it into parliaments and governments. They are making use of the democratic freedoms that do not exist in the countries where they have their roots. Successful political action demands an appeal to values beyond those of their own faith, as well as the willingness to compromise. In this way Muslim politicians are putting the separation of mosque and state into practice.

"This separation of the secular and religious domains is the condition for liberating the forces of reform in the Muslim world", wrote Gilles Kepel (2004). The French scholar and analyst of the Islamic world is cautiously optimistic about the chances of a European Islam. He foresees that this will have a decisive influence on the countries in which Islam is dominant.

"I support the secular state with my heart and soul, but I am equally wholeheartedly against a secular society", the Grand Mufti told us in Sarajevo. A European Islam already exists in this part of Europe. The majority of Muslims in the Balkans see the advantages of the separation of mosque and state. They are not afraid that this will lead to a decline in piety. Why should Muslims in Western Europe, who are also a minority, not be able to come to the same conclusion?

## **Two-way traffic**

The potential significance of a modern European Islam for the democratisation of countries whose populations have a majority of Muslims is all the more reason to make every effort to combat the social exclusion of Muslims in European countries and to avoid humiliating stereotypes in the debate on Islam. In this way European politicians can support the reformers of Islam in their struggle against the radicals for the soul of the European Muslim. At the same time we think that Kepel's proposition can also be put the other way round: democratic progress in the Muslim world will be conducive to the integration of Muslims in Europe; certainly if the EU plays a visible role in this and can no longer be accused of double standards.

The contact between Muslims in Europe and in the Islamic world is not one-way traffic. European Islam in the making meets with competition on its own territory from imported imams who are oblivious to the adaptation of religious practices to the European context. It is competing with spiritual leaders as far away as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan who claim to be able to answer vital questions from European Muslims by email. Grand Mufti Cerić in Sarajevo alerted us to the dangers of poor and unbalanced spiritual leadership. Add to that the jihad activists who use the internet to spread propaganda and incite violence. Democratisation and modernisation in Islamic countries will not render these negative influences harmless, but will increase the chance of positive forms of influence. Western European Muslims who go on holiday to Morocco, a country that is in the process of becoming more liberal, are not infrequently surprised to observe that the people there are more relaxed about religious rules than people in their own migrant community.

It is precisely because of this reciprocity that it is important for the EU to use its limited influence on neighbouring Islamic countries to promote democratisation processes as much as possible. Islamists who overcome their reluctance to take part in elections, give a voice to the excluded and in so doing evolve into post-Islamists, for whom a certain separation of mosque and state is no longer taboo, are an important exponent of this.

## **Islamists and terrorists**

It is very important for the EU to make a distinction between Islamists and terrorists, even when the former do not always distance themselves

sufficiently from the latter. A struggle is also being waged for the Muslim soul in Islamic countries. Islamists increasingly see participation in national politics as the way to defend the interests of their grassroots supporters and to bring their goals closer. They are competing with the international jihadis, who reject politics and fill the gulf between their unattainable ideal and reality with hate and violence. It is possible to talk to the Islamists, because they have interests and are pursuing national goals. There is no useful dialogue to be had with the jihad activists, certainly not while they are footloose and their aims disappear beyond the horizon of human failing.

The inclusion of the Islamists in the political process encourages them to moderate their demands, simply because politics requires negotiation and compromise. Excluding them drives them into the arms of the jihadis who have ruled themselves out of politics. The extent to which al Qaeda will attract new recruits and copycats will partly depend on whether the EU manages to foster the hedging-in of radicals by democratic processes in its neighbouring Islamic countries.

Democratisation of the Muslim world is a real part of the long-term strategy against terrorism. In the short term the fight against terrorism demands huge efforts from the police, justice systems and intelligence services. A few experts on Islam have called upon Western countries to sink to the level of the terrorists if necessary, arguing that the Muslim only understands violence and intimidation. That is bad advice. Muslim anger against the West is fuelled by every death of an innocent Muslim, by every suspect who is wrongly convicted. That produces fresh blood for the armed jihad, even in Europe. The best defence of the constitutional state under the rule of law is to observe its principles, even against terrorists. Otherwise we are applying double standards.

The accusation that Europe uses double standards towards the Muslim world is unfortunately all too often justified. The EU and its member states preach democracy but make common cause with dictators. That is disastrous for the credibility of European policy in the eyes of many Muslims. If the EU does not visibly and consistently stand up for the oppressed, including oppressed people of faith, then it will throw away what remaining credit it has in the Islamic countries on its borders. Then it will be forced to try to steer development not with one, but with two hands tied behind its back which, as every cyclist knows, will not get them very far.

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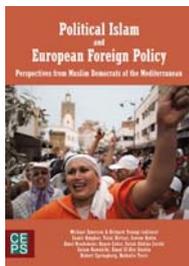
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