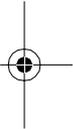




Arab Reform: what role for the EU?

Irene MENENDEZ GONZALEZ







EGMONT PAPER 8

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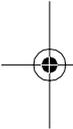
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Preface

The issue of Arab reform has been brought to the fore of discussion in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, and further intensified by the transatlantic debates which followed the Iraq war. In stark contrast with the ‘benign neglect’ and active support towards authoritarian governments of preceding decades, Arab reform in the West is now seen as a vital security interest and the main antidote to Islamist terrorism. Heightened concern with the democratic deficiencies of the region has given rise to a plethora of initiatives on both sides of the Atlantic. The US Greater Middle East Initiative, the “Partnership for Progress and a Common Future” launched by the Group of Eight (G8) in June 2004, EU-US summits, together with European programmes towards the Mediterranean and wider Middle East all attest to a commitment to reform.

Such developments have also sparked off debate on how best to implement the enhanced focus on reform. Recent initiatives have reflected transatlantic consensus on the sequencing of reform, where – despite differences in approach – emphasis is laid on the strengthening of civil society as a motor of reform and, more generally, on a gradual bottom-up approach. However, the apparent convergence in policy circles on the merits of gradual change has been increasingly challenged by experts of democratization processes on both sides of the Atlantic. The role of civil society as a motor of reform is increasingly contested, while cooperation with governments of the region has proved of limited relevance, especially in the post 9/11 context. Attention has thus focused on the need to target political institutions and other actors in the political arena as a complement to existing approaches.¹

In light of these developments, it is important to assess whether Western (particularly European Union) policies have a significant role to play in Arab reform. To what extent do existing and intended policies provide a window of opportunity to enhance reform? What to make of transatlantic cooperation? Does this call for a fundamental revision of EU strategies, or should EU approaches merely be improved? Although the focus shall be on European Union action, reference shall be made to initiatives external to the EU in so far as they affect and raise questions about EU policy (initiatives such as GMEI and NATO).

1. D. Brumberg, ‘Liberalization versus Democracy: understanding Arab political reform’, Working Paper 37, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2003; A. Hawthorne, ‘Middle Eastern Democracy: Is Civil Society the Answer?’, *Carnegie Papers* No. 44, March 2004; R. Youngs, ‘Europe’s uncertain pursuit of Middle East reform’, *Carnegie Papers* No. 45, June 2004.



ARAB REFORM: WHAT ROLE FOR THE EU?

This paper outlines the rationale behind European democracy promotion policies in the Arab region. It reviews European policies implemented in the area since the 1990s, and, after assessing them, concludes by suggesting ways in which to enhance European strategies of reform. It will argue that while the comprehensive approach underlying EU policies, from the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the European Security Strategy to Wider Europe, provides an appropriate framework to tackle the problems of the region, EU policies need revision to be successful. In particular, EU policy should address the Islamist dimension of Arab civil societies and enhance the use of conditionality. That said, since genuine reform must ultimately come from within Arab societies, there are limits to what any external policy of reform can achieve. Nevertheless, external actors can and must certainly help in the process.

Irene MENENDEZ GONZALEZ



1. Reform: a (new) imperative?

The discussion on and commitment to reform in the Arab world is not new.² Arab experience of liberalism dates to the constitutionalist period under Ottoman rule (1870s-1910s), followed by a period of parliamentarism under colonial dominance (1920s-1950s), and culminating in the wave of political liberalization – ripples of the so-called ‘third wave’ – which spread, albeit unequally, throughout the region in the 1980s. Thus, several Arab countries, including Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan, embarked on a number of political and economic reforms during the period in what was seen as evidence of a transition to democracy, today largely stalled.

Equally long-standing is the debate on democracy in the Arab/Muslim world. Long regarded as the ‘democratic exception’ in academic circles, the discussion on Arab reform has been broadly divided between culturalist and counter-culturalist arguments on the reasons for the absence of democracy and whether it can emerge. Advocates of the culturalist thesis point out to a fundamental incompatibility between democracy and Islamic culture, the latter’s features making it impermeable to democratizing influences. Among these are an aversion to rational thinking (a prerequisite to modernization), the priority of faith over reason, the emphasis on community at the expense of the individual and the fusion of public and private, temporal and spiritual spheres.³

Widely criticised for its ahistorical and undifferentiated view of modernity and democracy, the culturalist or Orientalist interpretation has been countered by the ‘contingent’ or neo Thirdworldist view, which sees the absence of democracy as a reflection of worsening socio-economic conditions suffered by Arab peoples under years of Western-supported autocratic government.⁴ Emphasising the existence of democratic elements in Islamic-Arab political culture and institutions, such views maintain that democracy could eventually develop under given

2. A. Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, London, Faber and Faber, 1992.

3. B. Lewis, ‘The Roots of Muslim Rage’, *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990, 266:3, pp. 47-60; S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1996.

4. J. Esposito, J.L. Piscatori, ‘Democratization and Islam’, *Middle East Journal*, Summer 1991, 45:3, pp. 427-440; G. Martin-Munoz, ‘Political Reform and Social Change in the Maghreb’, in A. Vasconcelos and G. Joffé (eds.), *The Barcelona Process, Building a Euro-Mediterranean Regional Community*, London, Frank Cass, 2000.

conditions.⁵ This has led some analysts to see the broadening of political participation as evidence of democratization, especially concerning developments within civil society. Among them is Saad Eddin Ibrahim's conviction that the prospects of liberal democracy in the region have never been so bright.⁶ In this perspective, the reasons for the persistence of authoritarianism range from the existence of 'rentier states', largely untouched by local pressures for democratization, socio-economic underdevelopment and political culture, to external factors such as regional conflict (exacerbating the sense of regional insecurity and thus hindering any move towards openness), foreign dominance and Western support for autocratic regimes.⁷

Neither has the EU 'discovered' the need for long-term democratization in the region after '9/11'.⁸ Democracy promotion policies has been a longstanding objective of the EU, and a product of moral and strategic imperatives. The very nature of the EU as a grand peace project through integration, together with the gradual move beyond mere economic integration towards a 'Community of values', have encouraged the development of a range of policies to promote democratization. In addition, the EU's military weakness has pushed it to become a 'civilian superpower', aiming to promote stability through economic development and trade, democracy, good governance and the rule of law. North Africa and the broader Muslim world in particular have long been a challenge to Europe, not least because of geographical proximity. Long regarded as an area of prime strategic interest, the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries are also ridden with potential instability and conflict. The importance of the region to Europe has grown through successive processes of EC enlargement and European East-West reunification, a process which has led the EU to pay more attention to its neighbouring countries.⁹

However, the debate on Arab reform has gained momentum in the post 9/11 period through a combination of developments. Outside the Arab world, the commitment to reform has been enhanced by the link commonly made in West-

5. A variant of the culturalist argument explains the incompatibility of democracy with political Islam as historical, not inherent. Like the contingent thesis, such historical interpretation leaves room for change under certain conditions. See Lewis, in *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002.

6. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, 'An Open Door', *Wilson Quarterly*, Spring 2004.

7. May Chartouni-Dubarry, 'Political Transition in the Middle East', in A. Vasconcelos and G. Joffé (eds.); B. Ghalioun, 'The persistence of Arab authoritarianism', *Journal of Democracy*, Oct. 2004, 15:4, pp. 126-132.

8. V. Perthes, 'America's « Greater Middle East » and Europe: key issues for dialogue', *Middle East Policy*, Autumn 2004, 11:3.

9. Gillespie and Youngs (eds.), *European Union and Democracy Promotion: the case of North Africa*, London, Frank Cass, 2002, p. 204.

ern policy circles between democratization and Western security concerns. The roots of instability and extremism are increasingly thought to be the product of the absence of democratization and modernization across the region.¹⁰ Pressure for reform has been exacerbated by the US invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq, exposing Arab governments to charges of incompetence from their citizenry and intensifying expressions of discontent with the status quo. Inside the Arab world, the realization by governments in the region that security measures would not suffice to counter radicalism and terrorism has prompted some Arab governments to carry out reform measures in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 – although such reforms were more likely prompted by a desire to project a more benign image abroad than by the acknowledgement of domestic repression as a cause of extremism.

Beyond such reactions, the discussion on reform was given greater impulse with the publication of the United Nations Development Programme's 2002 *Arab Human Development Report*. The Report enhanced the legitimacy of reform as an urgent pan-Arab issue. Openly critical of Arab governments, it denounced the deficits in education, good governance, freedom and women's empowerment across the Arab world and identified political and economic reform as crucial to dealing with the deep crises (economic, political, cultural and social) besetting the region. Particularly relevant was the increased emphasis on the political dimension of development. In contrast with earlier UNDP reports, a whole chapter was devoted to the issue of 'governance' (Chapter 7), followed by specific recommendations on institutional reform. These included strengthening legislatures, making the executive more accountable, introducing mechanisms for the alternation of power, independent judiciaries and freedom of association. The Report also introduced a distinction between economic growth and 'development', henceforth defined more broadly. Development was defined in terms of building, using and 'liberating' human capabilities. The former two involved improving health and environmental, educational and economic reform, while the latter called for increasing political freedom through greater political reform. Political reform was thus not only seen as a condition of economic and social development, but also as a goal of development. Lastly, the credibility of the Report derived from the fact that it was authored by Arab academics, thus providing an insider's look at the region's problems of development. Although contested within the Arab world, the Report nevertheless highlighted the urgency of reform and triggered discussion on how best to implement it.

10. Although the link between terrorism and the absence of democracy is simplistic and has been denounced elsewhere; see, International Crisis Group, 'Islamism in North Africa (I): the legacies of history', *Middle East and North Africa Briefing*, April 2004.

2. Political Reform in the Arab World: towards what kind of democracy?

2.1 The meaning of 'reform'

The emerging consensus on the need for reform, both in the region and among Western policy circles, has not been met by similar agreement on what political 'reform' means. The literature on the meaning of democracy and democratization is broad and subject to debate, not least because the very term 'democracy' is dynamic and a reflection of historical context.¹¹ Taken to mean 'democratization', 'reform' is largely defined as the process of transformation of the political system from non-democracy towards accountable and representative government. A distinction is made between phases of transition, or the initial phase in which democracy is not assured, and consolidation, in which democracy becomes 'the only game in town'.¹² From a political science perspective, democracy has been understood as a continuum from a minimalist to a maximalist position. At one end of the spectrum are those who insist on a minimal or formal conception of democracy, in line with Schumpeterian assumptions. On the other, are those who argue that democracy is not just about procedures for government but also about substantive rights. As captured by Kaldor and Vejvoda,

*"Formal democracy is a set of rules, procedures and institutions... Substantive democracy [is] a process that has to be continually reproduced, a way of regulating power relations in such a way as to maximise the opportunities for individuals to influence the conditions in which they live, to participate in and influence debates about the key decisions which affect society."*¹³

Thus, the former sees democracy as the regular holding of free elections and the introduction of basic norms (absence of intimidation, party competition, inclusive suffrage) that make free elections possible. A slightly more inclusive definition emphasises the introduction of liberal individual rights (freedom of assembly, religious freedom, free press, etc.), while a truly 'substantive' definition views democratization as 'the introduction and extension of citizen rights and the creation of a democratic state'.¹⁴

11. A definition of democracy has not been codified in international law. See Karen Smith, *EU Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, 2004.

12. J. Linz and A. Stepan, *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: South Europe, South America and Post-communist Europe*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University, 1996, p. 5.

13. M. Kaldor and I. Vejvoda, 'Democratization in Central and East European Countries', *International Affairs*, 1997, 73:1, p. 67.

14. J. Grugel, *Democratization: A Critical Introduction*, New York, Palgrave, 2002, p. 5.

However, while not necessarily the ‘best’ kind of democracy, this paper shall put forward a definition of political democracy which provides a concrete set of criteria against which to assess reform. One such definition of democracy is that advanced by Dahl. At the core of ‘polyarchy’, or political democracy, as defined by Dahl is *responsive* government – to the preferences of its citizens. Broadly, such responsiveness requires that citizens be able to formulate preferences, indicate their preferences to fellow citizens and government by collective and individual action, and ensure that such preferences weigh equally in the conduct of government. These requirements in turn translate into a series of institutional guarantees, amongst which are: freedom to form and join organizations; freedom of expression; right to vote; eligibility for public office; right of political leaders to compete for support, as well as for votes; alternative sources of information; free and fair elections, and institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preferences.¹⁵

2.2 Reform in the Arab world: who to talk to?

The new focus on democracy has also triggered debate about how best to implement reform. The past few years have witnessed a growing consensus on the limited democratic potential of bottom-up approaches. It has been observed that while some change did indeed take place in Arab regimes, it amounted largely to a ‘modernization of authoritarianism’ triggered by fiscal pressures and legitimacy crises. This has resulted in the emergence of ‘liberalized autocracies’, or states that tolerate or even promote a measure of reform enough to meet minimal demands for change from within but insufficient to allow mainstream political groups to challenge rulers’ political power – a way to blow off steam.¹⁶ It is the presence of entrenched elites of such ‘liberalized autocracies’ that is hailed as a new and powerful obstacle to reform, in addition to existing ones. Moreover, and contrary to the belief that underpinned policy during the 1990s – that partial liberalization outside core political institutions would produce a bottom-up pressure capable of spilling over into formal democracy – it is now increasingly argued that a focus on civil society and other non-governmental actors is at best neutral and at worst counterproductive for reform.¹⁷ Arguably, such groups are often apolitical and support the status quo, doing little to challenge established political distribution of power in authoritarian regimes.

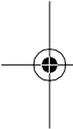
15. R. Dahl, *Polyarchy, Participation and Opposition*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1971, p. 3.

16. R. Aliboni and L. Guazzone, ‘Democracy in the Arab Countries and the West’, *Mediterranean Politics*, Spring 2004, 9:1, p. 83.

17. G. Salamé (ed.), *Democracy without Democrats? The renewal of politics in the Muslim world*, London, Tauris, 2001; *Op.cit.* D. Brumberg.



According to prevailing analyses, Arab civil society does not fulfil a number of criteria necessary to enhance its democratization role. First, civil society sectors are not sufficiently autonomous for the development of a pro-democratic movement. Most civil society actors (labour unions, chambers of commerce and the NGO sector) rely on close economic and personal ties with government officials and are reluctant to take any action which jeopardizes these ties. Secondly, most civil society organizations lack a clear pro-democracy agenda, which prevents them from mobilizing large numbers of citizens. Beyond the fact that they are financially and administratively linked to the state, the mission of most NGOs is to provide services and socio-economic development necessary to maintain social stability, while that of professional organisations such as chambers of commerce and labour unions is to serve their members – not to challenge political systems. This is in sharp contrast with service NGOs and community groups in South Africa and many Latin American countries which had a double agenda of development and promoting political change, and could thus mobilize support for both ends. Islamic organisations have traditionally shown ambivalent attitudes towards democracy, while sectors with a clear pro-democracy agenda such as pro-democracy NGOs are associated with the liberal secular elite and thus unable of mobilizing the so-called Arab street.

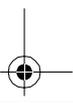


As one analyst has argued, ‘Democratization requires, among other things, an opening at the higher level of political institutions, contestation for national office and expanded political liberties. These changes cannot be brought about by small numbers of citizens working to improve neighbourhood garbage collection’.¹⁸ This is not to say that civil society is not important in the promotion of reform. Due to its role in the promotion of pluralism, civil society is an important social and economic factor. However, political reform requires dialogue and cooperation with actors in the political arena. Such reasoning does not exclude dialogue with governments. It merely calls for dialogue with political actors other than government elites.



The question that arises then is whether there are parties or opposition groups operating at the political level that are liberal/democratic in character, and willing to push for pluralistic politics. Western policy in the last decades has been based on the assumption that religious political parties and opposition groups throughout the Arab world were inherently authoritarian and anti-Western. However, this perception is blatantly simplistic. Far from being monolithic, the debate on reform in the Arab world is currently divided. In addition, and within the Islamic movement, currents of reform exist which seek to adapt Islam to the challenges of modernity and change through religious reinterpretation.

18. *Op.cit.* A. Hawthorne, p. 18.



Radical Islamism aside, most analyses have identified three broad perspectives. The liberal democratic outlook defines reform as the process needed to establish secular, Western-style democratic states. Democracy and human rights are seen as universal concepts and reflect shared values. Advocated by intellectuals, journalists, human rights and democracy activists and members of secular opposition parties – many educated in the West – the liberal view calls for Arab rulers to submit to constitutional restrictions, to the will of the people in free and fair elections and to term limits. They also demand abrogating emergency laws and security courts, ending state control over media, ending restrictions on political parties and civic organizations and establishing independent judiciaries. However, such Western-minded liberals are associated with a small secular elite and seen as subservient to the West, and have little or no influence over reform processes. A second perspective is that held by Arab nationalists. In their view, an Islamic democracy is to be established within the Arab-Muslim world and in opposition to any Western or alien democracy. It is envisaged as a ‘communitarian’ or ‘ethnic’ democracy in which individual rights (especially those of women and minorities) are subjected to community imperatives. However, particularly when voiced by governments, it is argued, such discourse is often used to counter Western pressure to reform.

A third perspective on reform is that of mainstream moderate Islamist reformers.¹⁹ The term ‘moderate Islamism’ is a Western invention referring to those Islamist movements that are peaceful and openly condemn violence, and advocate forms of legal political participation, pluralism and rule of law.²⁰ Moderate Islamists vastly outweigh radical fundamentalist Islamists, and constitute the main element of the Islamist movement in Arab civil societies. They include political parties such as the Justice and Development Party and al-‘Adl wa-l-Ihsan in Morocco,²¹ al-Nahda in Tunisia, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan (known as the Front of Islamic Action) and Hezbollah in Lebanon (Shiite and not Sunni). In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has notably evolved into a peaceful, pro-democratic force which explicitly proclaims acceptance of pluralist principles; the recently emerged Center Party (*Hizb al-Wasat*), a modernist branch of the Brotherhood, calls for greater representation of women within the party and the extension of membership to the Coptic Christian minority. Also

19. Islamism is understood here in its political mode: ‘Islamist movements’ are those which have recourse to Islamic ideological references in their pursuit of political objectives. This encompasses both radical and moderate movements.

20. See G. Martin Munoz, *El Estado Arabe. Crisis de legitimidad y contestación islamista*, Barcelona, Edicions Bellaterra, 2000.

21. However, the latter have been more critical with the regime. It is thus not legalised, although tolerated.

significant is the public break between the Wahhabist movement and the Muslim Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia over the intolerance of the former.

In Jordan and Morocco, mainstream Islamists have supported gradual, stability-oriented processes of reform, seeking cohabitation instead of confrontation with incumbent governments, and publicly rejecting violence as a means to attain declared goals. Acceptance of democratic principles is also apparent in the willingness to compromise shown by mainstream Islamists. Although many would argue to the contrary, the Muslim Brotherhood in most Arab countries (Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Yemen) seems to be working increasingly closely with Arab nationalists and liberals on two key shared goals: liberalisation of regimes in all Arab countries (which would strengthen the Brotherhood at the polls) and an 'anti-imperialist' agenda in opposition to US interventionist policies in the Muslim world.²²

These changes are reflected in the moderate Islamist discourse, marked by a series of Islamic modernist currents of thought which attempt to reconcile culture and religion with a kind of Islamic democracy. Although demanding the application of Islamic law (*shari'a*), Islamist moderates accept the need for it to take account of contemporary social and economic realities, and thus advocate an interpretation of Islamic law based on a *rational* reading (*ijtihad*) – Islamic law has to be interpreted according to the individual believer's rational interpretation – and processes of deliberation in its elaboration. Although politically costly, the experience of President Khatami's reform movement in Iran shows that there is a significant liberal wing within the reform movement largely supported by the young generations. Clearly, such reformist trends are far from the Western-minded liberal secular reformers; although 'moderate', they defend conservative positions on certain issues. Yet they depart from conservative Islamism through their embrace of Islamic modernist ideas dating back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reform movement.²³

Obstacles

Despite its potential, engaging with moderate Islamist reformers presents a number of difficulties. At a conceptual level, general assertions on the need for an 'Islamic democracy' have not been followed by detailed ideas on what such an Islamic democracy would look like, what political reform it would take and

22. Graham E. Fuller, 'Islamists in the Arab World: The Dance Around Democracy', Carnegie Papers, No. 49, September 2004.

23. International Crisis Group, 'Islamism in North Africa I: The legacies of History', *Middle East and North Africa Briefing*, April 2004.

what institutional structures might combine religious and secular values. The principle of *shura* is usually evoked as evidence of Islam's democratic character. Yet many others also see the *shura* council as an organ of deliberation, only informally consulted by political leaders, and far from being an elected body with formal powers. In addition, it has been observed that even moderate Islamist reformers are ambivalent towards democracy. Arab intellectuals (both nationalist and Islamist) continue to see the state as essential in the promotion of the 'grand causes' of the Arab nation: Arab unity, social and economic development, the application of the *Shari'a*, and the struggle against Israel and Western imperialism. Many fear political reform, in its liberal variant, will undermine the state's commanding position in society.²⁴

More importantly, many Arab intellectuals, including Islamist reformers, continue to regard the West with suspicion and mistrust, attitudes which ultimately hinder partnership-building. This rejection of Western intervention was made evident by the overwhelmingly negative reaction which the 2002 *Arab Human Development Report* provoked amongst Arab intellectuals in the region (both secular and moderate Islamist).²⁵ Such opposition to Western involvement as exists among many Arab intellectuals (and perhaps the majority of the population) is not new, and is related to a number of factors. Amongst them are: the experience with Western colonialism, the establishment of the state of Israel (with British and US backing) and the consistent support it has received from the West, failure of Arab oil-exporting countries to maintain control over the price of petrol since the 1970s, and US naval and military presence in the Persian Gulf area since the 1980s. For Arab nationalists and moderate Islamists alike, Western governments are either not really democratic or not interested in promoting democracy in the Arab world for a mixture of economic and strategic reasons.

This feeling of mistrust towards the West has been exacerbated in the post 9/11 period. The war in Afghanistan, the lack of progress on the Arab-Israeli conflict – and what is perceived as a timid reaction by the EU in the face of Israeli incursions – and the recent US and UK invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq, have intensified perceptions of Western intrusion and contributed to the rise of anti-Western feelings across the Arab world. As captured by one senior official, 'the Arab world does not mind American and European values, but it cannot stand American policies, and by extension the same policies when embraced by or tolerated by Europeans.'²⁶ According to a survey carried out by Zogby Inter-

24. Sami E. Baroudi, 'The 2002 Arab Human Development Report: Implications for Democracy', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Spring 2004.

25. *Ibid.* p. 138

26. Commissioner Chris Patten, in his speech on 'Islam and the West – at the Crossroads' at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, 24 May 2004.



national of attitudes in eight countries (Egypt, Israel, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia) highlighted a number of pan-Arab issues of concern, foremost among which was the absence of peace in the Middle East. Similar results have been emphasised by a Pew Research Centre survey reflecting growing discontent with US policies in the Muslim world.²⁷ In addition, the recent embrace of authoritarian governments as allies in the war against terrorism by the US and European governments alike has arguably weakened moderate reformers within more open regimes such as Morocco by creating an environment less conducive to accommodation with opposition groups.²⁸

At the level of government, such reluctance was clearly manifested in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria's outright condemnation and rejection of the Greater Middle East and North Africa Initiative as a Western attempt to impose change. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's reaction was equally firm, referring in its 2004 Reform Initiative to the need to reject all foreign-generated reform plans as interference in Egyptian affairs.²⁹

Engaging with moderate Islamist sectors of Arab civil society is an important challenge subject to difficulties. Despite the uncertainty over the democratic commitment of moderate Islamist sectors, the trend exists; it is in the interest of European strategies to foster its potential. European strategies should aim to extend dialogue with moderate Islamist reformers as a way of exploring possible new channels of communication and restore its credibility in the Arab world.



27. Pew Research Center, Global Attitudes Series, 'A year after Iraq war', March 16, 2004. Available on <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=206>

28. Alan Richards, 'Modernity and Economic Development: The 'New' American Messianism', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 10, No. 3, Fall 2003.

29. *Op. cit.* Hawthorne, p. 11.



3. The EU as a democracy promoter: a modest record?

Against this backdrop, how to make Western policies more effective? Before assessing European efforts of reform, it is necessary to outline both the rationale behind policies of reform and the institutional capacities of which the EU availed itself to promote reform.

3.1 The rationale and instruments

Western policies of reform in the 1990s have traditionally combined ethical and pragmatic concerns. The end of the cold war ushered in a period of new normative thinking marked by the questioning of the moral underpinnings of the West's democratization agenda. In contrast to the emerging normative consensus that sought to legitimise international intervention in the name of human rights and social justice, discussion on democratization was increasingly marked by arguments challenging the ethical legitimacy of Western democracy promotion efforts.³⁰ Fundamentally, however, Western and particularly European policies of reform were informed by the new theorizing on security that arose in the aftermath of the cold war. Challenging prevailing understandings of security, new theoretical approaches developed a more comprehensive concept of security to deal with what was perceived as the changing nature of the security environment. Questioning the traditional dominance of neo-realism and its emphasis on the military dimension of security, new approaches emphasised the nature of security as multidimensional and interdependent. According to this view, stability and security were to be achieved by the gradual dismantling of the political, social, economic and environmental causes of instability. Importantly, the more states had to cope with the effects of political, social, economic and environmental processes transcending national borders, the more they were forced to develop policies based on cooperation.³¹ Such were the assumptions underlying the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, with its three-basket structure and emphasis on cooperation. Thus, the EMP was based on the belief that economic liberalization, political reform, cultural understanding and strategic stability would be mutually reinforcing and complement each other to enhance well-

30. Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*, Notre Dame, Notre Dame University Press, 1994; J. Baylis and Smith, *The Globalization of World Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

31. B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, 2nd edition, Lynne Rienner, 1991.

being, stability and the EU's own security.³² Such a comprehensive approach was moreover consistent with the 'contingent' approach to political Islam, which saw the persistence of authoritarianism less as an inherent feature of Islamic culture than the product of the worsening socio-economic situation after years of autocratic government. EU policies would henceforth seek to address the social, economic roots of radical Islam so that political reform in due time would not lead to radical Islamist responses.

In addition, EU policies were influenced by the assumptions of the *democratic peace thesis* which gained widespread acceptance in the aftermath of the cold war. Albeit disguised in idealistic terms, the external promotion of democracy was in the utmost interest of the West:

*"Starting from the observation that no two democracies have ever gone to war with each other, a number of grounds could be advanced for expecting the proliferation of democracy to lead to a more generally harmonious international system. In balancing contending views, political pluralism tended towards moderation. Governments held accountable to their own populace would be encouraged to devote resources to social and economic betterment rather than external aggression. Transparent systems of governance would make the evolution of policies more predictable, while procedural checks and balances and the rule of law would reduce the scope for arbitrary acts, undertaken with an autocrat's personal prestige in mind."*³³

Thus, democratization and security came to be seen as two sides of the same coin. Lastly, and subject to debate, EU reform policy in the region was also dictated by economic interests. For some, the EU agenda reflected the pressure of transnational capital for a kind of 'low intensity' democracy; others emphasised the role of the private sector as a force behind reform, in which good governance played a crucial role.³⁴

Despite the new approach, however, EU policy in practice remained subjected to a number of contradictions which significantly limited its effectiveness. Foremost among these was the underlying concern for stability in the region to the detriment of genuine political change, or what one analyst has adequately

32. Rik Coolsaet and Sven Biscop, 'A European Security Concept for the 21st Century', *Egmont Papers*, No. 1, Royal Institute for International Relations, Brussels, 2004.

33. *Op. cit.* Gillespie and Youngs, p. 8.

34. *Ibid.* p. 10, for a brief overview of the debate on the relationship between the democratization agenda and Western economic interests.

termed the ‘democratization-stabilization’ dilemma.³⁵ As captured by Jünemann, ‘for Europeans, democratization is less a goal in itself than a means of attaining prioritized security goals’.

Thus, as soon as security interests come into conflict with democratization efforts – a likely probability in the process of political transition – the former is likely to take precedence over the latter. In broad terms, the dilemma arguably reflected a conflict between short-term and longer-term interests. While increased pluralism was aimed at reducing migratory pressure in the long term, too rapid a democratization process was likely to lead in the short term to political turmoil or even civil war. Moreover, it could also bring Islamist parties to power – as almost happened in Algeria in 1992. While the conflict between democracy and stability is arguably a structural deficit of the Barcelona Process, it has been exacerbated in the aftermath of September 11, since most Mediterranean partners have become crucial allies in the fight against terrorism.

In addition to the democratization-stabilization dilemma, European reform policies have been tainted by more traditional caveats. A reflection of the EU’s status as a ‘civilian power’, the gradualism underlying reform policies was also the result of compromise between northern and southern member states in an attempt to counterbalance diverging security interests – and did not necessarily reflect a common view of the priorities towards the region.³⁶ In light of their proximity, southern member states have traditionally been more reluctant to push for genuine reform due to the potentially destabilizing effects associated with political change – an unwillingness which was highlighted by the desire to exclude any references to democracy and conditionality in the initial Barcelona Declaration. In contrast, northern states such as Britain and Germany have pushed for a more stringent interpretation of the human rights clause embedded in the association agreements.

Lastly, and from an interestingly refreshing perspective of discourse analysis, one analyst has attempted to account for the contradictions inherent in the EU approach to reform by pointing out the presence of two conflicting security discourses – a ‘liberal reform discourse’ and a ‘cooperative security discourse’.³⁷ Both discourses present different and conflicting meanings to what the Mediterranean is, the security threats facing the EU and how these threats

35. Jünemann, ‘Security-building in the Mediterranean after September 11’, *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 8, n° 2-3, summer-autumn 2003, Special issue on ‘Euro-Mediterranean relations after September 11’, p. 7.

36. Esther Barbé, ‘Balancing Europe’s Eastern and Southern Dimensions’, in J. Zielonka, *Paradoxes of European Foreign Policy*, The Hague, Kluwer Law International, 1998.

37. H. Malmvig, *Cooperation or Democratization? The EU’s Conflicting Mediterranean Security Discourses*, Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Working Paper 2004/8, p. 3.



should be tackled, with important consequences for the effective implementation of policy. In the cooperative security discourse, threats are presented as ‘challenges’ common to both the EU and Mediterranean partners, to be countered by concerted action and cooperation. Both sides of the Mediterranean have an interest in cooperating, since security is indivisible. In addition, Mediterranean partners are articulated as different (the ‘other’), but equal partners – cooperation is thus based on ‘due regard for the characteristics, values and distinguishing features peculiar to each’.³⁸ In contrast, the liberal reform discourse presents threats as deriving from the political and social problems of the region, to be tackled by the promotion of democracy and liberal market reform. In this perspective, it is the security of the EU that is the main object of security, while the Southern Mediterranean is construed as different – unstable and conflict-ridden – and inferior. Simultaneously, therefore, ‘the Mediterranean is construed as a threat and as a partner, as an inferior and undeveloped subject to be reformed, and as an equal partner with whom the EU shares security perceptions and interests’.³⁹

Both a cause and effect of such contradictions, the simultaneous presence of two discourses has led the EU to ‘[waver] uneasily between different priorities and logics in its Mediterranean policy’, and made implementation difficult. In addition, however, such inconsistency in policy discourse may also partly account for the mistrust and suspicion among Mediterranean partners about the aims and motives of EU policy. The EMP is largely perceived as a security arrangement designed by the EU to tackle a diffuse threat from the South, invocations of partnership dismissed as rhetoric and political and economic liberalisation perceived as a way of undermining government control. Importantly, such double-edged discourse continues to underlie recent programmes such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the European Security Strategy (ESS). According to Malmvig, while both discourses are present to some extent in both documents, the former is largely an expression of the liberal reform discourse, while the latter is representative of cooperative security. In the ENP, democracy, pluralism and human rights are ‘essential requisites for political stability’, the Mediterranean region having a ‘history of autocratic and non-democratic governance’ (COM (2003) 104 final: 7). In contrast, the ESS makes reference to the ‘creation of a zone of peace, prosperity and progress through partnership’, towards which ‘reforms cannot be imposed’ but must come from within.

38. Barcelona Declaration, 1995.

39. *Op.cit.* Malmvig, p. 18.

In terms of the instruments, the EU disposes of a number of tools to carry out reform.⁴⁰ Embodied in the 1991 Development Council Resolution, the commitment to encourage reform in a systematic way was given visibility with the creation in 1994 of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), led by the Commission, which grouped together projects from different regions. Democracy assistance was further emphasised by the introduction of a new democracy clause in 1995 affecting cooperation with third countries and allowing for the use of political conditionality on recipient countries. The measures envisaged range from political dialogue and diplomatic tools, such as statements and the suspension of meetings at various levels of dialogue, to changing the content of cooperation programmes or withdrawing aid, imposing trade sanctions and suspending military or all cooperation.⁴¹ Within the institutional framework of the EMP, the main tools are the Association Agreements signed bilaterally between the EU and the Mediterranean partner countries. Political dialogue at the highest level takes place at the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conferences bringing together Foreign Ministers, plus a number of sectoral meetings between officers. Senior officials meet regularly in the Euro-Mediterranean Committee, while Association Councils supervise the implementation of agreements.

To sustain these objectives, the EU disposes of a number of means. At a regional level, the MEDA programme gives financial support to the goals of development, economic reform and democratisation, total aid to the region amounting to 5.35 billion for the period 2000-2006. Within the EIDHR, the MEDA-Democracy Programme developed in 1996 is designed to grant financial support to civil society members and public bodies with projects aiming to develop democracy and the rule of law. Lastly, the newly envisaged European Neighbourhood Policy aims to use existing tools such as MEDA until the next financial framework in 2006 to meet objectives for reform. After 2006, the creation of a New Neighbourhood Policy Instrument will specifically target social and economic reform.

40. Any assessment of EU efforts of reform is necessarily limited by the constitutional framework – the EU can only do what it is constitutionally capable of doing, the more so because of its particular nature as an international actor. Thus, the EU's ability to act is constrained by its institutional framework, marked by its 'dual decision-making' processes and competences (intergovernmental and supranational), which cut across the policy-areas (Common Foreign and Security Policy, Trade, Development Aid and Security Policy) and prevent unitary action.

41. Karen E. Smith, 'The use of political conditionality in the EU's relations with third countries: how effective?', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 1998:3, pp. 253-74.

3.2 Assessing EU Efforts

Although consistent with theoretical developments and equipped with the necessary instruments, EU democracy promotion policy in practice has been far from comprehensive or satisfactory. The ambiguous nature of the aims behind reform has translated into an inconsistent implementation which has ultimately hindered effectiveness and credibility. Across the range of EU initiatives, such ‘double standards’ were manifest in the priority given to stability (effectively, indulgence of limited reform carried out by authoritarian governments) over genuine political reform, and in the support for institutional reform (the promotion of ‘constitutionalism’) while at the same time opposing ‘substantive’ choices.

As the main institutional framework structuring relations with the Arab world, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) is a case in point. Launched in 1995 in Barcelona in the wake of the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, the EMP was intended as a programme combining bilateral and regional cooperation to address regional issues in an OSCE-like fashion, covering political/security, economic and social/cultural baskets. The underlying concern was the promotion of stability in the region; the unstated goal to prevent and control immigration from entering Europe by bettering political, economic and social conditions.

The record of the three baskets is contrasted. The first basket (political and security basket, based *inter alia* on principles of human rights and democracy) has the great merit of being the one regional forum which brings together Arab countries and Israel. However, it has achieved only modest results. By 2002, projects implemented have amounted to the setting up of a network of foreign policy research institutes and think tanks (known as *EuroMeSco*), diplomatic seminars held twice a year in Malta bringing together senior and junior officials from countries on both sides of the Mediterranean. The record of the cultural basket is equally limited; despite its recent enhancement, most initiatives to date have been largely elite-oriented.⁴² Notably, the introduction of the Valencia ‘Action Plan on Dialogue between cultures and civilizations’, focusing on youth, education and the media, as well as the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation, have still to bear fruit. The second basket, traditionally the focus of enhanced cooperation, has a better record. The conclusion of third generation association agreements with all Med countries but one (Syria) and the move towards deeper economic integration (launch of the Euromed Internal Market

42. R. Gillespie, ‘Reshaping the Agenda? The internal politics of the Barcelona process in aftermath of September 11’, in *Mediterranean politics*, vol 8, n.2-3, summer-autumn 2003, Special Issue on ‘Euro-Mediterranean relations after September 11’.

Programme, and advances towards the Euromed Free Trade Area) attested to a steady progress.

Broadly, however, EU strategy has remained subjected to a number of inconsistencies. Political reform was not a high priority. European governments have been highly indulgent of democratic shortfalls. Failure to systematically apply punitive conditionality on political grounds contrasted significantly with EU willingness to withhold aid packages where economic reforms were not undertaken. The breaking off of association agreement talks with Algeria in 1997, presented by the EU as a way of exerting pressure on the Algerian government to reform, was turned on its head when talks resumed in 1999 – with political conditions unchanged. Morocco and Jordan's new sovereigns were given almost unconditional support, whilst the tightening of pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia met with no substantial response from the EU.⁴³ Far from this, the allocation of official development assistance (ODA) in the region not only reflected little concern for political openness, but was manifestly conditional on economic reform.⁴⁴ Such indulgence towards authoritarian governments in the region has arguably been reinforced in the aftermath of September 11, as demonstrated by the scant reaction of the Western world to the electoral triumph of Tunisian president Ben Ali in October 2004 – and whose open disregard for human rights is no secret.⁴⁵ Direct aid to democracy projects was not only insufficient in quantity, but was also narrow in scope, most aid being 'bottom-up' rather than more politicized 'top-down'. In line with the prevailing emphasis on good governance, even aid classified as 'political assistance' related only indirectly to democracy – most was aimed at small business development, environmental associations and cultural cooperation.

In addition, such double standards as emerged in practice were enhanced by the emphasis on economic reform at the heart of EMP. Underlying the latter was the belief that economic modernization would automatically spill over into other fields of reform and lead towards political liberalization and good governance. Thus, funding for human rights and democracy projects received less funding than family planning or drug eradication programmes, making up for 2% of total European aid towards the region.⁴⁶ Quite apart from the consideration

43. R. Youngs, 'The EU and Democracy promotion in the Mediterranean: A New or Disingenuous Strategy?', in Gillespie and Youngs, p. 47.

44. As shown by Tunisia's success in securing a disproportionately high share of the MEDA funds in 1999.

45. The headline of a newspaper article is revealing, « Tunisie: Les bonnes performances économiques du pays et la lutte antiterroriste assurent au Président la clémence des pays occidentaux », *Le Monde*, 23.10.2004.

46. R. Youngs, 'The European Union and Democracy in the Arab-Muslim World', Working Paper No. 2, *Centre for European Policy Studies*, Brussels, November 2002.

that the relationship between economic liberalization and political reform has proven empirically dubious,⁴⁷ the emphasis on economic reform has arguably been counterproductive to the extent that it has allowed unresolved political and security issues to slow down economic progress.⁴⁸ More importantly, however, such double standards were apparent in the EU's insistence on a process of trade liberalization which was strongly skewed to its own advantage – and specifically manifest in the EU's protectionism towards certain markets, such as agriculture and textile, crucial to the Mediterranean partners.

The little attention devoted to political change was equally evident in frameworks other than the EMP. EU relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), articulated through the EU-GCC Cooperation Agreement signed in 1989, are focused on free trade issues and on cooperation in fighting terrorism and non-proliferation. Dialogue on political reform is conspicuously absent, while EU attempts to launch contacts on human rights issues have met with resistance from the GCC partners. Similarly, progress of the EU's Comprehensive Dialogue with Iran, envisaging negotiations on political and economic issues (currently absent), relate to Iran's external relations – not to democratic reform. Despite the introduction of a human rights dialogue in December 2002 on a prospective Trade and Cooperation Agreement, negotiations were largely linked to progress on four areas: human rights, WMD, terrorism and the Middle East Peace Process. Unsurprisingly, progress on a free trade agreement has been stalled due to tensions between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) over nuclear proliferation.

In addition to privileging stability over reform, European approaches have also been reluctant to support or engage with moderate Islamist elements, while insisting on the general need for political reform. Apparent both at grass-roots level and in institutions-oriented reform, such neglect of Islamist moderates effectively amounts to 'introducing European values and goals because of their reputed democratic significance'.⁴⁹ Not only is this questionable from a normative point of view, but it has also contributed to reinforcing perceptions in the Arab world that EU democracy promotion policies are a means of undermining Islamic identity. Thus, European civil society support has largely revolved around Western-style activist Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) rather than local groups based around the mosque, neighbourhood groups or professional syndicates. Out of the 48 democratization projects funded by the MEDA

47. Again, Tunisia's experience – notably the tightening of political pluralism in recent years – shows that economic liberalization has not led to political reform.

48. R. Balfour, 'Rethinking the Euro-Mediterranean political and security dialogue', *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, Occasional Papers No. 52, May 2004.

49. *Op.cit.* Aliboni and Guazzone, p. 88.

Democracy Programme-Europe Aid for the period 1996-2001, 33 centered on Morocco, while 15 others involved the country at a regional level. Of the 33 in Morocco, only 9 went directly to national NGOs, 18 to international NGOs, four were handled by governmental bodies and two were co-managed by Moroccan and international NGOs.⁵⁰ Another example of EU reluctance to engage moderate Islamists is the absence of pressure to promote freedom of association for Islamist non-violent associations. In Morocco, the impossibility for some religious associations of establishing religious organizations or the lack of official recognition makes them ineligible for EU funds. Similarly, there has been no financial support to organizations which explicitly aim to introduce serious institutional and constitutional reforms. As noted by an analyst,

“Despite the undoubted value of the bottom-up approach for countries in which the legacy of authoritarian government rendered the constructing of basic grass-roots democratic capacity particularly urgent, the EU’s political aid could more accurately be classified as aimed at specific human rights issues than at a comprehensive range of democracy assistance projects.”⁵¹

Overall, EU policies have been subject to a number of contradictions and double standards which have not only failed to induce significant political change in the region, but (perhaps because of this) have also undermined EU credibility.

3.3 Rethinking Reform after 9/11

Against this background, and in the aftermath of 9/11, European governments advanced a number of initiatives designed to address the limitations besetting EU policies. Across the range of initiatives is an enhanced focus on human rights and democracy, notably apparent in the Communication issued by the Commission on May 21, 2003 setting out the strategic guidelines for ‘Reinvigorating EU action on human rights and democratization with Mediterranean Partners’.⁵² Policy recommendations included the establishment of a ‘systematic’ dialogue on human rights issues, as well as that of a ‘technical’ subgroup for such ends. In order to enhance EU knowledge on the human rights situation in the partner countries and to ensure better coordination between the latter and the Commission, sources of information should be streamlined. Equally, workshops with civil society, including at a regional level, should be created to better identify

50. S. Haddadi, ‘The EMP and Morocco: Diverging Political Agendas?’, in *op.cit.* Jünemann, p. 73.

51. *Op.cit.* Gillespie and Youngs, p. 57.

52. COM(2003) 294 final, 21.06.2003.

priorities for reform (to be integrated in the National Action Plans of the envisaged ENP).

Further confirmation of the enhanced emphasis on human rights and democracy in the EU's external relations is apparent in the European Security Strategy (ESS) adopted in December 2003, as well as in the joint Commission-Council Secretariat paper on strengthening relations with the Arab world, dated 4 December 2003. The former emphasised 'spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights' as 'the best means of strengthening the international order'.⁵³ The latter goes beyond the vague enunciation of principles, suggesting that the combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches needs to be strengthened through a 'firm and frank' political dialogue and by identifying partners at different levels to build a dialogue with civil society.⁵⁴ Indicative of the relative shift in policy, the European Neighbourhood Policy or 'Wider Europe' framework effectively builds on such principles.

The European Neighbourhood Policy initiated by the Commission in March 2003 is conceived as a post-enlargement strategy to deal with the EU's neighbours after 2004 and aimed at constructing a 'friendly neighbourhood'.⁵⁵ Essentially, Wider Europe is designed as an alternative to enlargement for those countries that do not benefit from the prospect of EU membership. Thus, 'in return for concrete progress demonstrating shared values and effective implementation of political, economic and institutional reforms, including in aligning legislation with the *acquis*, the EU's neighbourhood should benefit from the prospect of closer economic integration with the EU... the prospect of a stake in the EU's internal market and further integration and liberalization to promote the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital'.⁵⁶

This carrot and stick exercise is backed by principles of conditionality and differentiation. The former includes the setting out of political criteria, or 'benchmarks', to be fulfilled through Action Plans on a country-by-country as well as a regional basis. The combination of such developments has the potential to enhance reform. Given the failure of the EMP to induce real political reform in the region, benchmarks would allow for the exercise of a degree of positive

53. J. Solana, 'A secure Europe in a better world. European Security Strategy', document adopted at the European Council, Brussels, 12 December 2003.

54. Council Secretariat and European Commission, 'Strengthening the EU's Partnership with the Arab world', D(2003), 10318, Brussels, 4 December 2003.

55. European Commission, 'Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours', Commission Communication COM(2003), 104 final, Brussels, 11 March 2003.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

conditionality with which to stimulate reform. Differentiated cooperation allows the EU to reward those partners who are making more progress, thus giving a much needed impulse to the multilateral dimension of the EMP – now practically reduced to bilateral cooperation.⁵⁷ In addition, the offer of new incentives such as the ENP Instrument, effectively a new aid window, could induce reform.

However, a credible implementation of such principles requires that the EU offer concrete incentives and develop clear ‘benchmarks’ providing attainable and measurable targets. The prospect of greater economic integration and human mobility within the EU, two incentives addressed in the Action Plans, may provide a new impetus for reform. But while the **Action Plans** recently drafted by the Commission arguably go in this direction, they fall short of granting genuine concessions or incentives.⁵⁸ Particularly with regard to the second basket, positive conditionality should aim to offer incentives in the field of the four freedoms – concretely, this would mean greater liberalization in the fields of migration, agriculture and textiles.

Although **freedom of movement** is high on the list of priorities for the target states, it is only partially addressed in the Action plans for the Mediterranean countries. Although aiming to facilitate the movement and integration of workers and coordinate social security schemes, there are no concrete measures relating to the movement of young persons or students, an issue which has traditionally hampered cooperation. In the case of Jordan and Morocco, the Commission hints at the possibility of “[examining] the scope for visa facilitation for short stay for some categories of persons to be defined jointly.”⁵⁹ Nor are there guidelines of any sort indicating what the procedures are to get into the visa-free list of countries.

Incentives in the field of agriculture are also **insufficient**. Thus, while steps for greater liberalization of trade in services are envisaged across the range of Med-

57. T. Schumacher, ‘Riding on the Winds of Change: The Future of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership,’ *The International Spectator*, 2/2004. It has been argued that the rise of an ‘EMP of concentric circles’ would likely put an end to the comprehensive and holistic approach inherent to the EMP. However, differentiated cooperation would not entail a redesigning of the three basket structure. Moreover, the Agadir Process, involving Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan, shows that differentiation is to some extent already a reality. See E. Philippart, “A Critical Evaluation of an Ambitious Scheme”, in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 8:2, summer 2003.

58. The first action plans of the ENP have been approved by the Commission on 9/12/2004, including Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority for the Southern Mediterranean countries, as well as Moldova and Ukraine.

59. http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/action_plans/Proposed_Action_Plan_EU-Jordan.pdf

iterranean partners, similar measures in the field of agriculture are lacking. In the case of Jordan, only the “possibility for further liberalization of trade in agricultural products” is contemplated. In the case of Morocco, agricultural reform is aimed at fostering conditions for the creation of a free trade area between Morocco and the EU. However, most measures are aimed at the promotion and exchange of information on agricultural policies, not explicitly at liberalization.⁶⁰ Added to this is the question of whether such offers in trade and migration issues – although insufficient – should be conditioned specifically within the sector concerned (within trade or visa policy) or should be attached to the fulfilment of political standards of democracy and human rights.

Such little space for conditionality is compounded by limitations with respect to the promotion of democracy and human rights as such. While the Strategy Plan drafted by the Commission in May 2004 set out a number of political priorities,⁶¹ such a commitment to the ‘strengthening of shared values’ has not been fully translated into concrete measures in the Action Plans. Most Action Plans refer to the need to enhance political dialogue and reform and broaden political debate. In the case of Jordan, action will aim to establish a political dialogue between the European Parliament and the Jordanian Parliament, as well as promoting in the medium term a national dialogue on ‘democracy, political life and relevant issues’. In this sense, the promotion of nation-wide political dialogue differs significantly from the proposal of the Commission Communication on ‘Reinvigorating EU Actions on Human Rights and Democratization with Mediterranean Partners’, which called for the creation of a ‘technical level of dialogue below the political level’ with a view to enhancing human rights.⁶² However, the enhanced focus on political dialogue remains rather vague.

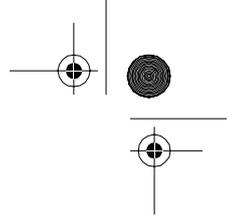
The focus on the broadening of political debate is also limited in scope. As in previous initiatives, intensified political relations are envisaged at the level of state institutions and with existing political actors. There is no explicit mention of engaging with moderate Islamist sectors in civil society throughout the region, which effectively limits the task of extending the discussion on democracy nation-wide. As argued by Gillespie and Youngs, “what is essential here is not only to build more bridges linking existing political actors...but to establish networks of dialogue and cooperation that involve *new* actors as well”.⁶³ The extension of debate about democracy to society at large would involve integrat-

60. http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/action_plans/Proposed_Action_Plan_EU-Moroco_FR.pdf

61. COM (2004) 373 final.

62. COM(2003) 294 final, 21.06.2003.

63. Gillespie and Youngs, ‘Democracy and the EMP: European and Arab Perspectives’, *EuroMeSco Brief*, December 2003.



ing non-governmental actors such as political reform campaigners, political scientists, political commentators and party activists into such dialogues, and funding them on a consistent basis.

Despite the renewed emphasis on conditionality, EU efforts have not differed significantly from earlier approaches; the commitment to reform so present in discourse has only been translated into policy to a limited extent. Policy continues to suffer from a timid engagement with Islamist society and conditionality is limited by the lack of real ‘carrots’. Not only is this counterproductive for reform, but is also likely to undermine credibility in the eyes of Mediterranean partners.

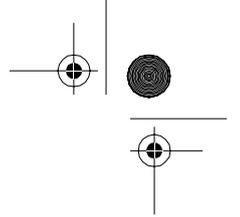
3.4 The transatlantic dimension: room for cooperation?

A fundamental aspect of European efforts of reform relates to the transatlantic dimension of EU policy, to date practically negligible. In contrast to the plethora of European programmes towards Arab reform, the only existing transatlantic framework for political cooperation in the Middle East are NATO coordination with regard to Afghanistan and the Quartet – the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue being of limited relevance in practice.

However, beyond the enduring debate about the nature of transatlantic relations, there is urgent need for cooperation and coordination in strategies for reform. There are undoubtedly areas of friction between the US and EU rooted in differences of approach. Europeans have traditionally denounced the strongly instrumental view of democracy promotion advocated by the US, seeing political reform as part of a broader process of social and economic modernization. This is largely reflected in the discourse of EU policy by references to the ‘spread of liberal values’, traditionally opposed to the US rhetoric of ‘regime change’, and largely exacerbated by the rift over the Iraq war. In addition, Europeans fear that association with the US might undermine their own efforts in the region due to the former’s loss of credibility. The US’s poor image in the region is hardly an advantage to assisting reform, to the extent that many regional NGOs refuse to accept American funding on the grounds that it will undermine their local legitimacy.⁶⁴ Finally, the suspicion among Europeans that a new initiative will supplant efforts to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict, long present in transatlantic relations, is a major point of divergence. US positions have tended to focus on con-

64. D. Dassa Kaye, ‘Mind the gap: the United States, Europe and the Middle East’, *Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations*, July 2004.





tainment of the conflict, while Europeans have long argued that a fair solution to the conflict and the attainment of peace is fundamental to long term stability.

However, there is also room for convergence. The past few years have witnessed a rapprochement between US and EU positions on democracy promotion, particularly with the emergence of more multidimensional and incrementalist initiatives such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the Broader Middle East Initiative (BMEI). Launched in December 2002, the MEPI consists of four central pillars: political reform, focused on the strengthening of democratic processes, particularly civil society, and support for fighting corruption and improving parliamentary elections; economic reform – helping regional countries' competitiveness and privatisation processes, encouraging foreign direct and domestic investment, helping small businesses grow; fighting illiteracy, building schools, educating girls, and introducing computer training, and finally, enhancing the role of women in the region. Governance-oriented, the programme has been criticised for its failure to alter the existing political order; as termed by Carothers and Ottaway, the MEPI largely represents the 'standard template' of democracy assistance.⁶⁵

Although seemingly discarded, the recent Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMEI), initiated at the June 2004 Group of Eight industrialized nations (G8), essentially builds on these principles to launch a process encompassing political, social and economic reform. Although the contents did not differ significantly from previous initiatives, the leaking of the programme before the formal launch in June 2004 met with negative reactions from both the Arab world and Europe. Europe expressed unease at what was perceived as a grand initiative based more on American conceptions on the terrorist threat than on regional needs – the 'Broader Middle East' covered Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as countries in the Arab world. Across the latter, the new programme was perceived as an attempt by the US to impose change on the region, reinforced by the suspicion that it was none but an attempt to distract attention from and avoid dealing with the Arab-Israeli peace process – not addressed in the initial leaking of the new initiative. Lastly, the criticism was voiced that, like its predecessor, the BMEI programmes did not adequately address political institutions.⁶⁶

Despite the scepticism which it encountered, the BMEI presents a number of positive aspects. Effectively offering a US-EU framework for democracy promo-

65. T. Carothers and M. Ottaway, 'The Greater Middle East Initiative: Off to a False Start', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Policy Brief No. 29, March 2004.

66. International Crisis Group, 'The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: Imperilled at Birth', *Middle East and North Africa Briefing*, 7 June 2004.



tion, it reflects a more cooperative approach – towards Europe and the G8 at least – than in previous years, and has arguably given new impetus to European approaches towards the region.⁶⁷ Notwithstanding differences in approach and suspicions on the EU side about US intentions, the BMEI could open a window of opportunity for greater cooperation among the EU and the US. The new programme also reflects a shift in thinking on the part of the Bush administration; a growing awareness, in the wake of the Iraq war, that the struggle against terrorism implies tackling the root causes of instability and not just imposing ‘regime change’. The new initiative thus comprises a number of political, economic and social reform programmes in Arab countries. Among its major novelties are the proposal for a new democracy fund and a regional forum for dialogue on reform – the ‘Forum for the Future’ – bringing together Western and Arab governments, and Arab civil society groups. The extension of the dialogue on democracy to representatives of civil society of the countries concerned is thus meant to enhance the element of ownership, necessary in the face of the loss of credibility by the West. However, it must be noted that the BMEI does not seem to be a priority anymore, and it remains to be seen whether such high-flown rhetoric will bear fruit in the coming months.

Lastly, transatlantic cooperation is also present in the framework of NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue. Launched in 1994, the Mediterranean Dialogue functions as an institutionalised forum for discussion and exchange of views between NATO members and seven Middle Eastern countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia). Aimed at promoting stability in the region, the Dialogue has only achieved modest success in practice, due to reluctance on both sides to intensify military and political cooperation.⁶⁸ Proposals to revitalise the Dialogue at the NATO summit in Istanbul in June 2004 reflect NATO’s willingness to play an increased role in the region, and include measures designed to upgrade the dialogue to a Partnership programme based on the Partnership for Peace (Pfp) experience. Enhanced political cooperation will include an increase in the frequency of meetings and consultations, and the promotion of a more flexible form of cooperation (NATO+n) which will allow those partners willing to deepen cooperation to do so. Enhanced military cooperation will focus on areas where NATO has a comparative advantage with respect to the EMP. In particular, cooperation on countering terrorism, information sharing and border control; military to military cooperation and training; defence reform and civilian and democratic control of armed forces.

67. *Ibid.* p. 11.

68. The lack of cooperation was partly due to NATO’s strategic focus on Central and Eastern Europe, and to differences in interest between the seven dialogue countries, with Israel and Algeria keen on intensifying military cooperation and Egypt and Morocco more sceptical.



However, NATO's proposals to enhance its Mediterranean Dialogue have met with criticism on a number of fronts. Arguing that the Mediterranean Dialogue can only play a limited role in Middle East reform, some analysts have posited that NATO lacks the political and economic tools necessary to tackle the root causes of instability in the Middle East, mainly internal in nature and demanding long term economic progress and political reform. Importantly, intensified cooperation on terrorism and defence reform could undermine the goal of democratization and political reform, already weakened by increased government repression in the aftermath of 9/11.⁶⁹ In addition, a Partnership for Peace built on the model applied to Central and Eastern Europe might also create unrealistic expectations such as eventual NATO membership, which the US and EU may not necessarily wish.⁷⁰



69. H. Malmvig, 'From Diplomatic Talkshop to Powerful Partnership? NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and the democratisation of the Middle East', *DIIS Brief*, Danish Institute for International Relations, May 2004.

70. V. Perthes, 'America's "Greater Middle East" and Europe: Key Issues for Dialogue', *Middle East Policy*, 11:3, Fall 2004.



4. Enhancing reform: the coherence of policies

The notion of ‘comprehensive security’ underlying EU policies, from the EMP to Wider Europe and the European Security Strategy, provides an appropriate framework to tackle the political problems of the region. Not only does it reflect the EU’s civilian tradition of foreign policy making and its capabilities in external relations – notwithstanding the evolution of the ESDP and the value of potential cooperation with NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue. It is also better suited to deal with the complex nature of the security challenges that emanate from the region, where economic underdevelopment, poverty, demographic growth, illiteracy and marginalization of women combine with authoritarianism to breed social and political discontent. However, EU policies suffer from a number of shortfalls which have undermined their effectiveness to carry out reform, and which need to be addressed in future policy. The challenge for EU policy is to move towards a greater degree of coherence which will allow it to attain the gradualism which informs its policies. This involves, on the one hand, an attempt to separate democracy promotion from broader human rights promotion, and on the other, complementing top-down and bottom-up approaches. In addition, EU policy must integrate a transatlantic dimension crucial to enhancing reform.

4.1 Within EU frameworks

EU policies have been marked in recent years by a confusion of democracy promotion with human rights promotion, largely due to the conflation of policy objectives under the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights. From an EU policy perspective, this has translated into policy focusing on those countries experiencing bad human rights situations to the detriment of those showing some commitment to political reform. It has also translated into limited political aid, in scale and scope. In addition, it has also led to discrepancies within the EU, resulting in a variety of initiatives at the national level which lack coordination at the level of strategy and implementation.⁷¹ From an Arab perspective, such confusion has often resulted in rejection by Arab governments of EU attempts to reform, dismissing Western models of democracy as too secular.

71. Examples are Germany’s *Task Force for Dialogue with the Islamic World* and the UK’s Global Opportunity Fund for engaging with the Islamic World.

Against this background, commitments to political reform would benefit from a **decoupling of the democracy and human rights agendas** and a specific focus on the former. EU policy should aim to expand political participation to broader sections of society and public opinion, in particular with regard to the Islamist dimension of Arab civil society. This implies engaging with new actors such as party activists, political commentators and reform campaigners in dialogue and cooperation. Given the diversity of views that has emerged across the Islamist movement in recent years, and the strong presence of moderate Islamist forces in Arab countries, engaging with moderate Islamists is fundamental to a legitimate process of political and social reform. EU policies should thus aim to fund pro-democratic Islamic forces. This implies the creation of institutionalised dialogue with those moderate Islamist forces (political parties and/or opposition groups) that have proclaimed acceptance of democratic and pluralist principles. Examples could include the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan, al-Nahda in Tunisia, the PJD and al-‘Adl wa-l-Ihsan in Morocco. Clearly, the degree of ‘moderation’ differs from one group to the other; although ‘moderate’, each party has its own discourse and position depending on their relationship vis-à-vis incumbent regimes. Priority should thus be given to exploring the nature of the Islamist movement, currently under-researched. Western policies could also explore various ways in which to link economic aid to such groups to political reform. Engaging moderate Islamism in the reform process also entails increasing support for grass-roots Islamist welfare organisations which enjoy widespread credibility among the population. This would help to establish trust between European donors and Islamists, which could then be harnessed to encourage debate on more political issues.

However, it has been observed that establishing a dialogue with Islamist mainstream would require using a concept of democracy that is less value-laden than the one currently in use.⁷² Arguably, the EU approach to democracy promotion is not limited to the creation of political institutions but includes a social and cultural dimension as well. This has led Southern Mediterranean partners to perceive Western reform efforts as interventionist and intrusive. Since it is obvious that a European model of democracy is not likely to flourish in the Arab world overnight, and given that Arab societies and governments are increasingly sensitive to what is perceived as Western intervention, EU efforts should promote concepts that are less Western value-laden but contribute to the establishment of the *formal* structures of democracy. Emphasis should thus be laid on fundamental rights and freedoms such as freedom of the press, association and rights of women, political party-building and institution-building. In this sense,

72. *Op. cit.* Aliboni, ‘Promoting Democracy in the EMP. Which Political Strategy?’, *EuroMeSco Report*, Working Group I, Third Year Report, November 2004.

the concept of the rule of law may come prior to the concept of democracy itself. This also implies that if Arab peoples wish to choose a legal order that is based on *shari'a* as the first source of law, they should be able to do so and the EU should be willing to accept this.

Broadening the debate on reform to new actors is not and should not lead to underplay action on governments, where leverage can be effectively used. The ENP has reinforced the use of conditionality in its relations with Arab countries, but the degree to which this commitment shall be implemented remains to be seen. In any case, the EU should make better use of the language it uses to encourage or denounce violations of democratic standards. It should compliment Arab states that have shown more commitment to democratic reforms (such as Morocco) and steadily denounce those governments which deviate from democratic commitments. As captured by one analyst, such actions will not change Arab regimes overnight, and will likely antagonize some, but they would 'add a new calculation to Arab governments' decision making [the reaction of the EU]'.⁷³ Also, the EU should broaden the scope of its funding to include issues such as political party building, civil-military relations and autonomous parliamentary capabilities, today virtually non-existent. One analyst has advocated the creation of a European Initiative for Middle East Reform, bringing together EU donors and specifically aimed at promoting democracy, increasing both the coordination of different initiatives and the visibility of European efforts.⁷⁴

In addition to broadening debate to include new actors, the EU needs to complement such actions with a firm and systematic **use of political conditionality**. Given the importance the Arab partners attach to economic development over political and security issues, emphasis should be laid on reinforcing the link between economic and political objectives embodied in EU policy. Positive conditionality should thus rest on offering trade incentives in a number of areas to compensate for the negative effects of harmonising internal legislation. In particular, EU policy should aim to increase the degree of liberalization in key areas such as agriculture and migration, for years the litmus test of Western willingness to engage in partnerships. This will not only reinforce EU credibility in the Arab countries, but will also make dialogue more acceptable to them. Cooperation in the field of migration, today reduced to the prospect of examining the scope of visa facilitation, could be used as a powerful incentive for reform. One analyst has suggested that a common visa regime be established for the Mediter-

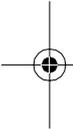
73. A. Hawthorne, 'Can the US promote democracy in the Middle East?', *Current History*, January 2003.

74. R. Youngs, 'European Policies for Middle East Reform: a Ten Point Action Plan', *The Foreign Policy Centre, Civility Programme*, 2004.



anean partners, while other proposals have revolved around a series of ‘quick start’ packages of visa facilitation measures for certain applicants like students or academics.⁷⁵ However, it should be noted that greater incentives in the field of migration and border control, currently tied to the Justice and Home Affairs agenda, should be tailored in a way that they do not impinge on reform efforts, as is increasingly happening in the post 9/11 period. The amount of aid allocated to civil society and human rights projects has been noticeably less than that invested in anti-migration controls and security cooperation with Mediterranean regimes. Such an imbalance may affect the effectiveness of policies aimed at fostering respect for democratic values.

In general, the EU should develop conditions linked to political reforms that are attainable. While the newly released Commission Action Plans within the ENP go in this direction, there have been no systematic efforts to link conditionality to particular programmes. As one analyst notes, the aim should be to promote institutional change to allow for greater autonomy in the area of work of each individual EU aid project.⁷⁶ Thus, funds for economic restructuring, currently channelled through ministries, could be conditioned on greater autonomy in the management of projects by private sector organisations. Lastly, negative conditionality should be envisaged, in case such conditions are not met. Although it is widely accepted that radical use of conditionality can be counter-productive, it is also acknowledged that some kind of firm pressure is often necessary to push for reform. Such pressure should however be applied incrementally and equally among partners to avoid accusations of double standards.



4.2 A transatlantic dimension of EU policy?

The integration of a transatlantic dimension in EU policy is essential to coordinate efforts of reform. This is justified not only due to the existence of shared interests in the region, but also out of a danger of Arab states playing the US and the EU off against each other, as has been the case with Syria. Recent developments are in this perspective a step forward; the G8 summit and joint EU-US declarations reflect the growing willingness to cooperate, at least at a regional level.

75. For the former, see *op. cit.* Schumacher, p. 97; for the latter, M. Emerson, ‘The European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy or Placebo?’, *Centre for European Policy Studies*, Working Document No. 215, November 2004.

76. *Op.cit.* Youngs, ‘Western policies for Middle East Reform’, p. 18.



However, with respect to the promotion of political and economic reform at an internal level, and given the differences in approach and the instruments in place, EU and US policies should aim to complement each other while remaining distinct.⁷⁷ EU policies could effectively lose credibility more than they could gain from too close an association – even at the level of perception – with US policies in the region, particularly in the context of the widespread discredit of US action in the Middle East due to the human rights abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison and Guantanamo. As one expert notes, “It is hard to see how the United States can push for a largely domestic-reform-oriented Greater Middle East Initiative – women’s rights, civil society and political empowerment – at the same time that most citizens and leaders in the region view the US as denying those very values in its occupation practices in Iraq... And it would be very difficult for EU policy makers to launch joint programmes with the US for the promotion of human rights or the rule of law in Arab and other Middle Eastern states as long as the US maintains its detention practices in Guantanamo.”⁷⁸

Nevertheless, a degree of cooperation is necessary at a regional level. The creation of a regional forum for EU-US cooperation specifically focused on Middle East reform, suggested elsewhere, would help identify ways of moving forward and dispel misunderstandings across both sides of the Atlantic. More importantly, however, cooperation is necessary to solve the geopolitical conflicts across the region and create the conditions conducive to democracy. It is accepted that the failure of the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) has triggered Arab nationalism and provided a pretext for Arab regimes to defer reform by holding on to political and economic power. Any attempt to push for reform in the region must therefore include an explicit reference to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a condition for successful reform – and not merely try to achieve progress *despite* the conflict, as is embedded in the ESS.

4.3 Toward a rethinking of current frameworks?

Attempts to enhance reform and revitalise existing structures have not prevented the emergence of discussions on a possible restructuring of frameworks towards the region. EU efforts in general have been marked by a lack of overall coordination which has weakened their effectiveness and coherence. Linkages between Brussels departments and between different partnerships regulating EU relations with the Arab world and Middle East are poor, undermining a coherent use of

77. As suggested in the ‘EU Interim report on an EU strategic partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East’, March 2004.

78. *Op.cit.* V. Perthes, p. 97.

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policy instruments at their disposal. In addition, the sheer number of initiatives and budgets on democracy and human rights has clouded visibility and further weakened coherence. At a substantive level, EU policy towards the region continues to be marked by a comprehensive, gradual approach to political reform which, while adequately suited to deal with the nature of the challenges besetting the region, needs to be complemented by a better and more coherent use of top-down approaches.

At the level of scope, debate has focused on the possible restructuring of the EMP. Some believe that Barcelona remains the most appropriate framework to address reform, arguing that the problems that have undermined its effectiveness in the past relate more to a lack of political will than to any structural problem.⁷⁹ The view underlying such arguments is that Barcelona is essentially the expression of Europe's soft power and that this structure has taken on strategic importance as the Middle East has become strategically significant to European security. Ultimately, the achievements of the Barcelona process have been underestimated, it is argued, and efforts should focus on revitalising it – not substituting it – to enhance reform.

Others have countered that the narrow geographic scope of the Barcelona process is not sufficient to deal with the challenges emanating from the region. The prospect of Turkish accession (recently approved by the Council in its December summit) to the EU is likely to have important effects on the geopolitical balance of the EMP, leaving Israel as the only non-Arab Mediterranean partner with eight Arab countries – which, given the virtual demise of the Middle East Peace Process, will likely undermine Israel's chances of involvement in the EMP's multilateral mechanism. Exposure to the new neighbourhood in the Middle East (with Syria, Iran and Iraq as the EU's neighbours in an area marked by instability and conflict) will likely emphasise the need to go beyond relations based on trade and political dialogue. In the light of such eventualities, some authors have suggested transforming the EMP's geographic scope into a more inclusive and flexible 'Euro-Middle East Partnership'.⁸⁰ Such a structure would imply redesigning the EMP into an intergovernmental framework with the EMP at its centre, allowing for differentiated cooperation among the EU and its partners and among the partners themselves. Others have advocated the creation of an 'EU-

79. *Op.cit.* Jünemann; Martin Ortega, 'Partners and neighbours: a CFSP for a Wider Europe', *Chaillot Paper 64*, EU Institute for Security Studies, September 2003.

80. T. Schumacher, 'Riding on the wings of change: the future of the EMP', *The International Spectator*, 2/2004; F. Neugart and T. Schumacher, 'Thinking about the EU's Future Neighbourhood Policy in the Middle East: From the Barcelona Process to a Euro-Middle East Partnership', in C. P. Hanelt, G. Luciani and F. Neugart (eds.), *Regime Change in Iraq*, Florence: RSCAS Press, 2004.

Middle East Contract for Democracy’, covering the wider Middle East and focusing specifically on political reform.⁸¹

While discussion on the possible upgrading of EU frameworks would be certainly useful in a long-term perspective, giving EU policy greater clarity and coherence, it is arguably too ambitious an initiative in the short and medium-term. Apart from the fact that Maghreb countries have political dynamics that are distinctive from those in countries such as Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) – let alone Iraq’s particular post-conflict reconstruction predicament – such broad initiatives also tend to ignore regional context, and in particular, the effects the absence of peace in the Middle East is having on Arab willingness to reform. At the risk of stating the obvious, it is important to note that while reform is a worthy goal in itself, no progress will be achieved unless a lasting peace to the conflict is found. Current efforts to resume talks on reform, including those which were hailed as novel and responding to the challenge of engaging with ‘the other side of the Islamist movement’,⁸² have been clearly undermined by the lack of prospects for peace. The *Forum for the Future* recently established by the GMEI and meeting in Morocco on 12 December 2004 has been marked by divisions on the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁸³ Efforts should thus concentrate in the short term on resolving the conflict *parallel* to engaging with reform within established frameworks.

81. *Op.cit* Youngs, ‘A Ten point Action Plan’, p. 34.

82. Mustapha Kamel Al-Sayyid, ‘The Other Face of the Islamist Movement’, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Working Paper No. 33, January 2003.

83. With US Secretary of State Colin Powell asserting that reform cannot await peace and Arab governments reaffirming the need to find a lasting peace as a precondition for reform. *El Pais*, 12 December 2004.

Conclusion

Reform in the Arab world is as a long-term process which must come from within. This is not to say that democracy promotion efforts are not necessary – on the contrary, external actors can and must help from the outside. But policies for reform require cooperative, sustainable and comprehensive strategies; while comprehensive, EU policy continues to suffer from a number of shortcomings. Amongst these are the lack of an overall strategy to engage with moderate Islamist sectors of Arab societies, and a disproportionate emphasis on bottom-up approaches to reform. At a regional level, the time is not ripe for ‘grand’ initiatives. The United States and, to a lesser extent, European actions and credibility have been severely undermined by the invasion and occupation of Iraq, inaction towards growing violence in the Arab-Israeli conflict and indulgence towards Israeli incursions.

The EU should thus focus on the implementation of Wider Europe, attempting to strengthen relations with the Mediterranean countries as a first step towards extending relations in the region. Partnership with the countries of the ‘Wider Middle East’ should thus be envisaged in the long term, with the MEPP under way and Western credibility restored. Moving towards greater partnership in the short term would be politically costly, and feed into the suspicion that such grand schemes are none but a way of diverting attention from the Middle East conflict and Iraq, still the focus of resentment in the Arab world. With regard to transatlantic cooperation, joint EU-US cooperation on reform is certainly necessary and feasible, but should be subordinated to the strengthening of efforts to resolve the conflict. Reengagement on peace is a high priority, and one that for the vast majority of Arabs transcends foreign policy and has become a deeply personal matter, a standard by which all else is judged.⁸⁴

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84. *Op.cit.* Chris Patten, citing the findings of a Zogby poll commissioned in 2002 by the Arab Thought Foundation.