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RICHARD YOUNGS

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ABSTRACT

Democracy should be conceived as an important element of European strategic policy towards North Africa and the Middle East, but the complex prerequisites to its stability-enhancing potentiality also recognised. While EU policy has come to incorporate such a perspective, its approach to democracy promotion in the Arab-Muslim world has remained tentative and nebulous in its conceptualisation of how stable and sustainable political change can best be encouraged. A summary of European democracy and human rights aid projects reveals the notable extent to which these have expanded, but also raises concerns over imbalances in the profile of EU political aid. In sum, this calls for a number of changes to EU policy that broaden the understanding of how different levels of policy instruments can dovetail together in a more comprehensive and sophisticated approach to democracy promotion.

[*] Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI).

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A distinctive element in Middle Eastern developments has been the region's resistance to the gradually accumulating 'third wave' of democratisation. This raises important security-related questions for Europe's Mediterranean policies, in the context of the EU's commitment to invest greater effort in promoting human rights and democratic norms. The centrality of such considerations is compounded by evolving perspectives on democracy's value in enhancing stability and mitigating conflict. Within the context of CEPS' broader project on the Middle East, this paper seeks to address this nexus of democracy-related issues, with the aim of suggesting how EU efforts in the field of democracy and human rights in North Africa and the Middle East might best be strengthened.

The paper commences with an overview of political developments in the Arab states of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), then explores debates over the likely impact of any prospective democratisation in the region. The EU's general approach to political change in North Africa and the Middle East is then analysed, and finally, an outline is offered of European democracy and human rights initiatives funded in the Mediterranean since the mid-1990s. The paper concludes by proposing a number of ways in which EU policies for encouraging political reform in the southern Mediterranean should be improved.

1. Arab politics: Variety and commonality

Some movement towards greater democracy in North Africa and the Middle East was witnessed at the end of the 1980s, as economic reforms engendered pressure for political reform. This did not develop, however, into sustained political liberalisation. The region exhibits much variety in the respective forms of legitimacy underpinning incumbent regimes, these ranging from distinct forms of mass movement, secular nationalism to religiously infused monarchical authority. Beyond the different forms of historical state-formation, however, common factors pertain across the region. The significant powers retained by militaries have been justified and legitimised by reference to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The economic structures of the 'rentier state' have undermined the processes through which economic modernisation increases the need for state revenues and thus engenders calls for greater popular control over the exercise of public administration. The North Africa and Middle East region is often cited as the most notable exception to the general statistical relationship between levels of economic development and democracy. Even some Gulf Arab states have introduced more significant political reforms than most of the EU's EMP partners. Arguably most significantly, of course, the perceived threat of political Islam has been used to justify political immobilism throughout the region. Hence, a balance between common and divergent factors can be witnessed across the different states of the southern Mediterranean.

Morocco has been routinely presented as the region's most reformist state. Incremental human rights improvements under King Hassan II culminated in the inception of a directly elected bicameral parliament in 1996, and in 1998 the coming to power of a coalition government presided over by opposition leader Abderrahmane Youssoufi. When Mohammed VI succeeded to the throne in 1999 further human rights measures were implemented. Prominent political prisoners were released, including Islamist leader Abesselam Yassine, and dissidents such as Abraham Serfaty and the family of Mehdi ben Barka were allowed to

return from exile. Perhaps most audaciously, the young king removed hard line interior minister Driss Basri, orchestrator of so much repression under Hassan.

Gradually, however, Mohammed's initial momentum of reform has stagnated and in some areas reversed. The Palace has retained tight control over key ministries and cabinet appointments. The regime's new anti-corruption campaign has been a highly personalised initiative of the King, aimed more at strengthening the latter's legitimacy than embedding a widely institutionalised rule of law. The power of the shadowy *Makhzan* has not been fundamentally undermined. There have been a number of high profile cases of journalistic freedoms being reined back and, in the wake of large scale protests against the government's planned widening of women's rights, an increasing number of demonstrations have been banned. Only officially sanctioned Islamist groups have been allowed into the political process; Yassine's Justice and Solidarity has not been allowed full political participation. The government is a coalition of former opposition parties, but 'consensus' is still the leitmotif, with little programmatic political competition; most observers see the principle of 'alternance' government as having co-opted opposition forces to support the basic parameters of monarchical rule. That is, critics argue that opposition forces have been stifled within a pacted process, winning limited political participation for acquiescing to and bolstering the basic premises of the Palace's dominance.

Jordan has been the region's other notable liberaliser. In 1989, King Hussein allowed the first parliamentary elections for nearly 30 years, emergency rule was ended, freedom of speech and association provisions were expanded and a number of political parties were legalised. By the mid-1990s, however, progress beyond partial reform had failed to materialise in Jordan. The electoral law was redrawn specifically to disadvantage the Islamist opposition. Unrest associated with Hussein's 1994 peace deal with Israel encouraged many parties to boycott the 1997 elections, and restrictions were gradually re-imposed on press and associational freedoms. Under King Abdullah democratic political space has further narrowed. Prominent deputies were pushed out of parliament in 2001 for criticising the regime. Elections were then postponed, with Islamists threatening to emerge in a strong position, and parliament was dissolved. The new king has had increasing recourse to decrees and imposed new restrictions on civil liberties and free speech. Demonstrations have been dramatically curtailed. The judiciary's effective independence has also dissipated. These measures have resulted from the growing unrest against Israel, an 'anti-normalisation' movement critical of the regime's peace treaty with Israel being targeted particularly harshly by the regime. At the end of July 2002, the Amman office of Al-Jazeera television was closed down. With the focus primarily on curtailing Hamas and other critical activities, Abdullah has appeared driven by an even more strongly security oriented outlook than his father.

Egypt has failed to exhibit even such limited political liberalisation. Executive powers derived from the continuation of emergency martial law were further strengthened during the 1990s and there was an increasingly systematic use of military tribunals. President Mubarak's National Democratic Party has remained overwhelmingly dominant in parliament and the emergence of any effectively autonomous opposition political parties has been obstructed. The non-violent Muslim Brotherhood and the Gamaat Islamiya (Islamic Group) have remained banned, while the government took firmer control over professional associations, syndicates and even village councils following a number of Islamist victories in elections to these bodies. A growth in civil society activity resulted in a new 1999 law restricting independent NGO activity; this denied official registration to, for example, the prominent Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights. Many have pointed to the Supreme Court's assumption of a more forceful role, for example when it obliged the government to rerun

elections to allow for adequate judicial supervision; these elections in 2000 were not, however, declared free and fair and simply reinforced the regime's political dominance. Another, even tighter law on associations was brought forward in 2002, with further restrictions of NGOs' ability freely to receive foreign funding and even more governmental discretion to prevent these organisations engaging in political activity. During 2002, an informal tolerance of Gamaat Islamiya has diminished and much attention has recently been given to the detention of Egypt's most internationally known civil society activist, Saad Eddin Ibrahim.

Tunisia has experienced an even more marked decline in political freedoms, since President Bin Ali's initial commitment to liberalisation at the end of the 1980s. A particularly notable tactic in Tunisia has been the use of government-created civil society groups to mirror and neutralise genuine NGOs: the resultant growth of Tunisian 'GONGOs' has ensured that civil society has functioned to implement and disseminate regime policies. As in Egypt, the regime has tightened its control over syndicate and professional association elections. Tunisia has, it is suggested, moved merely from single party rule to a de facto ruling party hegemony. Tunisian politics are also distinguished by the extent of bureaucratic-corporatism, this serving a further embedding of regime power. The ruling RCD (Democratic Constitutional Rally) has perfected such mechanisms of party-state fusion. Political opposition that has been allowed has been handpicked to exclude real opponents, and thus has constituted a merely symbolic form of political competition. The main Islamist group al-Nahdah remains banned, as Bin Ali has appealed to national unity in justification of increasing restrictions on political rights.

Syria has on most counts remained the region's most closed political system. Virtually no freedom of association or assembly has been granted. After Bashar Assad succeeded his father, there appeared to be some loosening of central control during 2001, but this was soon reined back as hard-liners in the Baath party regained pre-eminence. The government baulked at the new civil society forums that sprung up in anticipation of Bashar implementing further reforms. Press freedoms momentarily widened, but were then also constricted again. The military retains de facto control in Syria, under emergency law. Syria's effective control over *Lebanon* has also deprived the latter of the basic territorial integrity prerequisite to democratisation. All key appointments in Lebanon are in effect sanctioned by Syria, while Hezbollah is allowed to run the south of the country with considerable impunity. *Libya* is still dominated by heavily personalised rule, with few of even the basic institutional prerequisites to incremental liberalisation existing. Some analysts have pointed to the complex system of consultative committees in operation in Libya, but these in practice wield little influence. In 2000, Q'adafi dismantled a number of ministries, transferring power to local allies. Autonomous civil society organisations are not permitted, and political parties and the Islamic Group are prohibited.

Algeria witnessed one of the most spectacular and widely quoted democratic reversals in the world, when the army revoked elections in 1991 after the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) emerged victorious from a first round ballot. From 1995, the government commenced what was presented as a renewed process of democratisation, but most observers argue this has not permitted any meaningful political liberalisation. Indeed, a new constitution strengthened presidential powers, while Islamist opposition groups remained banned from political activity. Control over the media has not loosened, while the NGO sector has also remained heavily controlled. In the 1999 presidential elections only military approved candidates were able to declare themselves, with the military's obvious favourite, Abdelazziz Bouteflika, being elected after all other candidates withdrew. Under Boutefika's Civil Concord the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) disbanded and took advantage of an amnesty offered by the

government. The Armed Islamic Group (GIA), in contrast, actually stepped up its violent actions. The FIS's peace agreement with the government has not led to it being allowed to reengage in political activity. Interpretations differ in how charitably they view Bouteflika: in combat with army hard-liners to advance human rights; or himself tightening control and increasingly unwilling to contemplate the sorts of political reforms that were part of his electoral commitments in 1999. Legislative elections in 2002 produced a victory for the restored National Liberation Front (FLN), in a context of continuing restrictions on genuine party competition. More recently attention has focused on unrest among Algeria's Kabyles, this indicating an apparent widening of economic and social protest. Huge demonstrations in favour of democracy in 2001 were met with considerable police repression and further demonstrations were banned, although the government did intimate some concessions on Berber rights.

The *Palestinian Authority* is widely acknowledged to have developed into an increasingly corrupt and repressive governing entity since the first national elections held in 1996. Power has been increasingly monopolised by Arafat and his entourage. Judging degrees of democracy in the PA is, however, difficult and not comparable to other regimes: Arafat's power is actually still highly circumscribed, with the PA leader lacking the full range of sovereign powers and holding a portfolio of responsibilities more akin to that of a local governor. This is further complicated by the issue of citizenship rights, with such a large proportion of Palestinians outside the Occupied Territories. An underlying difficulty can be identified of PLO factions transforming from national liberation movement to democratic political parties operating in a freely competitive context. Gradually, a split has become apparent between the PLO old guard and younger politicians more focused on the need for political liberalisation.

2. Democracy: The risks and the benefits

One of the most prominent international relations debates of recent years has been that focused on the relationship between democracy and conflict. The 'democratic peace' hypothesis has assumed almost axiomatic status. Democracies are widely seen to be less prone to engage in international conflict; more amenable to dispute resolution efforts of third parties; and more embedded in mutually constraining economic interdependencies. Democracy has also been widely lauded as the system most able to assuage tensions within developing states, providing channels for the peaceful articulation of social and economic grievances.[1]

Significantly, however, many analysts have expressed scepticism over democracy's supposed virtues. It has been argued that security is still primarily a question of the structure of the international system and that interference in domestic political systems can only produce instability. Transitions from authoritarianism to democracy have in many states been periods of great instability, as new coalitions constantly shift and the frustration of newly raised expectations feeds into growing support for nationalist platforms. Democratic leaders may, it is suggested, actually be more disposed to play up external tensions to divert attention from the domestic constraints they face. Wealthy, Western democracies might not have gone to war

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[1] Amongst an almost infinite democratic peace literature, notable recent works include Russett B. and Oneal J. (2001) *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York, Norton); Ray J. L. (1995) *Democracy and International Conflict: An Evaluation of the Democratic Peace Proposition* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press); International IDEA (1998) *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiators* (Stockholm, International IDEA; Gurr T. (2000) 'Ethnic Warfare on the Wane', *Foreign Affairs* 79/3: 52-64.

with each other, but it would be wrong to extrapolate from this that poorer, more turbulent societies would become more peaceable through democratisation, where conflict over resources is so much more acute. Far from ensuring a helpful balance between stability and civic participation, some argue that forms of *partial* democracy have been the most conflict prone of political systems, possessing neither the capacity of authoritarianism to repress violence nor effective opportunities for interest representation. One increasingly prevalent view has been to suggest that stability-inducing political reform requires impartial and autonomous processes and institutions, but not necessarily a wholesale Western democratic model.[2]

This general debate over democracy has particular ramifications in the Arab-Muslim world. In accordance with the long-prevailing perspective towards the southern Mediterranean region, many still express concern over what they see as Islamists' instinctive hostility to the West and Western values. In line with this reasoning, democratisation would still constitute a danger to European and other Western states. It would simply allow and breed further antagonism against the West, and anyway be short-lived: whatever their current rhetoric to the contrary, Islamists would be likely to use elections as an expedient route to gain power, before consolidating their position through a reversion to more autocratic rule. Sceptics have, for instance, detected a growth of radical Islamism in Morocco as political space has widened in the kingdom. Political pluralism could also unleash even greater flows of migrants, as people fled from increasingly intolerant Islamist rule. New governments would, it is held, be far less amenable than current regimes to making progress on arms control and security cooperation. And, most dramatically of course, political liberalisation would be widely expected to give greater voice and influence to a pool of resentment towards the Oslo peace process.[3]

This pessimism has been increasingly discredited, as many have come to focus more on the potential benefits of democratisation in the Arab world. It has been increasingly asserted that Arab resentment towards Europe has resulted in large measure from the latter's support for authoritarian regimes that have suppressed growing pressure from Mediterranean populations for greater freedoms and individual rights. Democracy has been advocated as a means of easing migration and instability, and of furthering economic modernisation. Political liberalisation might also benefit commercial interests, helping to overcome unpredictable and arbitrary decision-making; the limited dispersal of technical market-related policymaking capacity; the absence of broad-based alliances behind reforms; the paucity of reliable and good quality information and statistics; and the limited cooperation between the different Mediterranean economies that has restricted effective market size for international investors far more than in other developing regions. Some Islamist groups have become more moderate, particularly in Egypt, where the Islamic Group called a cease-fire in 1999 and a further deradicalisation has been evident since the September 11 attacks. Despite this, and the

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[2] Sceptics include Mearsheimer J (1990) 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War', *International Security*, 15/1: 5-56; Mansfield E. and Snyder J. (1995) 'Democratization and the Danger of War', *International Security* 20/1; Gelpi C. (1997) 'Democratic Diversions: Governmental Structure and Externalization of Domestic Conflict', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41/2: 255-87; Barkawi T. and Laffey M. (1999) 'The Imperial Peace: Democracy, Force and Globalization', *European Journal of International Relations* 5/4: 403-34; Cousens E. and Kumar C. (2001) (eds) *Peacebuilding as Politics: Cultivating Peace in Fragile Societies* (Boulder, Lynne Reinner).

[3] For this view, see Gellner E. (1994) *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals* (London, Penguin); Lewis B. (1993) *Islam and The West* (Oxford, Oxford University Press); Pipes D. (1995) 'There are no Moderates: Dealing with Fundamentalist Islam', *National Interest* 41/3; Huntington S. (1997) *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, Simon and Schuster).

apparently smooth – if limited and carefully controlled – participation of officially sanctioned Islamist parties in government in Morocco, Jordan and Lebanon, regimes have not widened the scope for Islamists' political participation in any significant way.[4]

Much evidence might be cited to demonstrate that authoritarianism has not been a successful guarantor of European interests. Even in moderate Jordan, membership of Islamist organisations has risen dramatically since the late 1990s. In Egypt, Mubarak has found himself increasingly obliged to stoke up anti-Western feeling in order to bolster his own Islamist credentials and distract attention from unrest over domestic social and economic conditions. Syria's overbearing control of Lebanon has quite palpably bred more acute religious factionalism. Violence in Kabilya made it clear during 2002 that Algeria could no longer be viewed as suffering simply a contest between regime and Islamist radicals, but was rather increasingly rocked by widespread unrest over the lack of political opening. It is now clearer than at any time since the end of the Cold War that the West's support for incumbent Arab regimes has not secured firm alliances, with all states in the region - even Jordan - strongly against the prospective invasion of Iraq: when the West has sought to 'call in' support for this strategic challenge, far more opposition and resistance has been evident than at the beginning of the 1990s.

The 11 September attacks lead to much reassessment of the way that issues of political reform and alliances had been handled in the Muslim world. For many, the attacks demonstrated that support for autocratic Arab regimes, coupled with a limited discourse on human rights, had not produced a stable strategic balance. Nominally pro-Western regimes across North Africa and the Middle East, and from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan had increasingly funded *madrasas* turning out a highly puritanical brand of Islam. Contrary to the West's hope that these regimes could suppress anti-peace process pressure from society, many had been glad to foster this as a means of detracting attention from their own lack of legitimacy.[5] Indeed, across a whole variety of issues Arab regimes are seen as having had to play increasingly to domestic Islamist opinion precisely because of their lack of democratic credibility.

It is, of course, in the Palestinian Territories that the destabilising impact of corrupt and opaque rule has become most dramatically apparent. Hamas is widely seen as having risen to prominence through providing the kind of local level social benefits that the Palestinian Authority has failed to provide. The contrast between the fate of ordinary Palestinians still confined to camps and the personal enrichment of PA executive members has engendered increasing frustration. The PA has lacked the credibility and popular legitimacy to sustain any clampdown against suicide bombers after each periodic rounding up of suspects. The weakness of civil society around concrete development organisation has left a vacuum of democratic pressure. Many would argue that attempts to crush Islamist organisations have merely radicalised these groups, and that the latter need to be brought fully into decision-making through genuine democratisation. Debate is still structured around the notion of a national movement for sovereign identity struggling against Israeli hindrance and this has

[4] Those tending to this 'contingent' view include: Esposito J. (1992) *The Islamic Threat* (Oxford, Oxford University Press); Esposito J. and Piscatori J. (1991) 'Democratization and Islam', *Middle East Journal* 45/3; Joffé G. (1997) 'Democracy, Islam and the Culture of Modernism', *Democratization* 4/3; Roberson B. (1994) 'Islam and Europe: An Enigma or a Myth?, *Middle East Journal*, 48/2; Halliday F. (1996) *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation* (London, I.B. Tauris). For a general debate between proponents of these competing perspectives see the special edition of the *Journal of Democracy* on 'Islam and Liberal Democracy', 7/2, April 1996 and the conversation between Esposito, Fuller, Kramer and Pipers printed as 'Islam: A Threat? A Debate', in *Middle East Quarterly* 6/4, December 1999.

[5] Zakaria F. (2001) 'The Roots of Rage', *Newsweek Special Report* October 15, pp. 40-41 and p. 44.

stifled civic awareness of democratic process. To the extent that the PLO's legitimacy is integrally tied to the struggle for independence, the granting of a fully sovereign Palestinian state would, optimists suggest, clear the way for a more stable form of social debate and activism based around democratic values; trying to sideline the PLO before the creation of a state works against this grain, rendering the prospect of democratic stabilisation more distant. Much recent comment has cautioned that the current situation in the Occupied Territories presents one of the clearest cases of precipitous elections risking the further aggravation of an ongoing conflict; but it might alternatively be argued that it is also precisely the sort of case where delays in elections and a failure to disperse power have contributed significantly to instability.

A key question that flows from such trends relates to the precise form and degree of political change that might be most propitious. While acknowledging the stabilising potential of political liberalisation, many analysts have cautioned that change should be built around local institutional forms. Many have advocated an encouragement of a general spirit and awareness of human rights norms without the West seeking to transplant wholesale democratic systems. Islam might best be made more moderate around an Arab form of quasi-democracy, predicated on traditional organisations such as the mosque, the neighbourhood or village, the tribe, professional associations and syndicates, rather than Western style civil society groups. Analysts have cautioned that private economic groups are unlikely to be strong agitators for or vehicles of democratic widening, and that stabilisation might better be attained through a limited inclusion of moderate Islamists. Notably, relatively technical good governance measures have often been advocated in order to secure cleaner, less arbitrary and less corrupt government, these held to be of far greater concern to citizens than Western-style liberal democracy.[6] Further along this continuum, many have argued that the key is to improve respect for basic rights so as actually further to stabilise incumbent regimes. This was advocated specifically after September 11: a limited improvement in rights as a means of helping to head off full democracy.[7]

Another expression of this middle position has been seen in developmental-oriented thinking, as expressed for instance in the UN's first human development report specifically on the Arab world. This argues primarily in favour of the developmental value of political reform, stressing the need for a form of governance that most 'empowers the poor' and improves individual capabilities for development. While the report has been seen as highly significant in proffering the UN's first explicit advocacy of political liberalisation in the Arab world, the target of its opprobrium in fact seems in large part directed away from local political elites. Limited positive political changes are welcomed as appropriate, the benefit of these seen as hampered mainly by poverty and social inequities. Opposition parties are berated for choosing not to contest (what most would judge to be highly compromised) elections; and the UN's strongest criticism is reserved for civil society organisations themselves for lacking internal democracy, being confrontational and failing to develop a strong social base.[8]

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[6] Norton A.R. (1997) 'Political Reform in the Middle East', in L. Guazzone (ed) *The Middle East in Global Change* (Basingstoke, Macmillan); Salla M. (1997) 'Political Islam and the West: A New Cold War or Convergence?', *Third World Quarterly,* 18/4: 729-42; Kibble D. (1998) 'Monarchs, Mosques and Military Hardware: A Pragmatic Approach to the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in the Middle East', *Comparative Strategy*, 17: 381-91; Sarsar S. (2000) 'Can Democracy Prevail?', *Middle East Quarterly* 7/1: 47; Langhor V. (2002) 'An Exit for Arab Autocracy', *Journal of Democracy* 13/3: 116-22.

[7] See, for example, Indyck M. (2002) Back to the Bazaar, *Foreign Affairs.*

[8] United Nations (2002) *Arab Human Development Report,* chapter 10.

In fact, more than ever it is essential to recognise that neither extreme in the debate is entirely convincing. Problems and prevailing attitudes are reducible neither to intrinsic features of Islam, nor to social and economic grievances. Rather the central issue is the way in which Islam has been capable of being read within a particular economic, social and political context. These two elements should be viewed as conditioning each other: social conditions effect interpretations of Islam; such readings of Islam in turn effect the evolution of these same economic and social conditions. In some senses, after September 11, it seemed as if democracy was more necessary, in a context in which there was increasingly more limited room for manoeuvre in pressing for it.

3. The European rationale

Most Middle Eastern and North African regimes and dynasties were, of course, at their inception expressly mandated by departing colonial powers. The resultant network of 'client state' relationships were subsequently maintained through the Cold War. The EU's Renovated Mediterranean Policy (RMP), adopted in December 1990, was aimed at rebuilding alliances after the Gulf War and rewarding those regimes that had offered support in the campaign against Iraq. Egypt was particularly well supported in this regard. As a whole, the southern Mediterranean basin received a disproportionately generous increase in European aid during the early 1990s. Between 1991-95, the proportion of EC aid allocated to the Mediterranean increased from 11.8 per cent to 12.7 per cent – this contrary to predictions that the EU's new focus on Eastern Europe would lead to a downgrading of support for Arab states. Notwithstanding this, human rights considerations began slowly to surface. Human rights clauses were introduced in new Association Agreement negotiations with Israel, Morocco and Tunisia. The European Parliament withheld assent for the new Fourth Protocol aid allocated for Morocco and Syria on human rights grounds in 1991. After pressure from European governments, however, the EP then released these funds; indeed, in general, the human rights dimension to EU policy remained less prominent in North Africa and the Middle East than elsewhere.

The 1995 Barcelona declaration formally enshrined a commitment to foster 'political pluralism' – while also asserting the virtues of non-intervention and the right of each partner 'to choose and freely develop its own political, socio-cultural, economic and judicial systems'. The EMP was designed to enhance strategic stability through an inclusive framework of wide-ranging cooperation and deeply embedded collective security regime. More assertively than hitherto, it was acknowledged that EU security concerns could not be resolved in a sustainable manner through unconditional support for the region's nominally pro-Western authoritarian regimes. The 'clash of civilisations' thesis was robustly and frequently rejected in EU statements and documents. Authoritarian governments were recognised as the source of regional conflicts, nationalism, and increasing anti-Western radicalism. They had, it was argued, also been bad for Western investment, restricting the gains of economic modernisation to a small group of elite supporters.

Most observers have remained unconvinced that European intentions have in practice changed. They attribute to the EU a more defensive approach, favouring a logic of strategic containment over efforts proactively to attack the underlying political causes of instability. The persistence of this traditional perspective has, it is argued, relegated concerns over human rights and democracy to the status of empty rhetoric and encouraged further active support for dictatorships across North Africa and the Middle East. This policy continuity is held to betray

an uncompromising view on political Islam, the determination to suppress the latter outweighing any genuine desire to foster political liberalisation.[9]

Many aspects of European policy might appear to corroborate such assessments. A primacy of defensive-containment was most notably implied by the creation of the Eurofor and Euromarfor forces in the mid-1990s. Several EU member states have also invested heavily in developing missile defence systems specifically designed to rebut threats from the Mediterranean.[10] Cooperation between armed forces and law enforcement agencies has been pursued under the political volet of the EMP. Policy-makers acknowledge that securing Mediterranean partners' adherence to international arms control agreements has received far more diplomatic attention and effort than issues of political reform.[11] Most high-profile immigration policies have been tightened, pressure has been exerted for Mediterranean states to readmit ejected migrants, and huge amounts have been spent on new border control systems.[12]

Relative to these policies, European efforts in the field of democracy and human rights have been modest. The EU has sought to enhance 'democratic capacity' and widen support for democratic values, without exerting strongly coercive pressure on incumbent regimes. The declared aim has been to improve the long-term prospects for democracy without endangering short-term stability. The EMP's incorporation of human rights has been conceived as a means of entrapping Mediterranean partners in a process where their nominal commitment to political reform might increasingly oblige regimes to implement real change. EU governments insist that they are both committed and cautious in respect of political change in the Arab world; hence the reliance on soft power and peer pressure. The aim has been to establish trust and a momentum of reciprocal compromise through co-operation in the sphere of low-politics. Pressure for political change has increased, but in a context where a premium is placed on maintaining high-level diplomatic *process*.

It is self-evident that coercion and conditionality have not been favoured as policy instruments. The EU has engineered no direct, frontal assault on the region's non-democratic regimes. By far the main concern has been with ensuring that domestic developments remain as conducive as possible to the Middle East peace process. This has ensured continuing timidity towards, in particular, Muburak and King Abdullah. Policy-makers acknowledge that threats of concrete punitive measures have not been systematically made within the EMP's new political dialogue. Compared with other developing regions, the relative absence of CFSP statements criticising developments in the Mediterranean is striking. The EU has been keen to emphasise positive signs in political developments, especially in the case of Mohammed VI's reforms in Morocco and initial signs of movement from Abdullah and Bashar Assad. Little serious consideration has been given to aid or trade provisions being suspended on political grounds. The Italian, French and Spanish governments in power during

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[9] For instance, Chourou B., 'Security Partnership and Democratisation. Perception of the Activities of Northern Security Institutions in the South', in Brauch H.G., Marquina A., and Biad A. (eds) *Euro Mediterranean Partnership for the Twenty First Century* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000), pp. 163-188; Lia B. 'Security Challenges in Europe's Mediterranean Periphery – Perspectives and Policy Dilemmas', *European Security* 8/4 (1999): 27-56; Spencer C. 'Rethinking or Reorienting Europe's Mediterranean Security Focus', in Park W. and Wyn Rees G. (eds) *Rethinking Security in Post-Cold War Europe* (London, Longman, 1998), pp. 135-154.

[10] Pargeter A. 'Italy and the West Mediterranean', *ESRC Working Paper,* 26/01 (2001), p. 17.

[11] Dokos T. 'The Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Mediterranean: The Threat to Western Security', *Mediterranean Politics* 5/3 (2000), p. 11.

[12] Pargeter, 'Italy', *op. cit.*; Gillespie R. (2001) *Changing Perceptions on European Security in the Western Mediterranean: The Case of Spain,* ESRC Working Paper, 'One Europe or Several?'

the latter years of the 1990s if anything rowed further back from exerting pressure than their predecessors. Arms sales to the region have increased. The EU's Common Strategy for the Mediterranean, agreed in 2000, shied away from ratcheting up human rights and democracy policy.

In contrast, European governments have held back economic reform aid where market adjustment commitments have not been implemented. Indeed, policy makers acknowledge that the toughest politically-related pressure has been exerted in relation to specific cases of corruption or judicial blockages suffered by individual European companies. Far firmer pressure has been applied to the issues of cannabis production, environmental cooperation and birth control programmes. Compared with these aspects of the 'new security agenda', political reform has been encouraged in a far more indirect, second order fashion. Where political concerns have been pressed it has been in relation to individual human rights cases – and in particular the detention of prominent democracy activists. This has been done within bilateral association councils so as not to infect broader regional relations – this singling out of particular states sitting uneasily with the supposed logic of regionalising shared democratic and human rights identities. Many EU states specifically and forcefully distinguish between issues such as torture or women's rights and trying to export a wholesale model of democratic political organisation.

European governments have remained cautious in their dialogue with Islamist opposition forces. No significant common EU line has emerged on this question. Contacts with Islamists have been ad hoc, secretive and pursued nationally, with little information shared at the European level. Assessments of the appropriateness of engaging in such dialogue differ widely between different policy makers, often even within the same member state or institution. There has been no concerted EU pressure for Mediterranean governments to cede greater political space for more moderate Islamist groups. Indeed, on this issue the most notable developments have related to new laws tightening space for the activities of Islamist exiles in European states – the extent of such provisions in the UK and France being particularly notable. Protestations at detentions of Islamists have been rather less forceful than the attention given to cases involving more Western-style civil society figures, such as Saad Eddin Ibrahim: an imbalance that has not gone unnoticed in Arab societies.

Against such criticism, however, a more charitable view of European policy might also be possible. A softer and more implicit form of conditionality was reflected in the fact that national aid to the region did not become significant. Both Spain and Italy reduced aid to North Africa; the Mediterranean was one of the lowest recipient regions of German aid; the UK and the Netherlands also gave negligible amounts. These limited national flows partially offset the increases in Commission and French funding (the latter still accounting for around a half of the region's aid receipts). In sum, extracting a clear, single logic from European aid flows to the region is in fact difficult.

Morocco and Egypt became two of the biggest recipients of Commission aid anywhere in the world. Disproportionately generous amounts of MEDA funding went to democracy-backsliding Tunisia; yet Syria's political atrophy was one factor cited to explain this country's failure to attract any significant aid funding either from the Commission or member states. Morocco was rewarded with new funds after 1999, notably becoming Spain's single largest aid recipient: increases that might be decried as insufficient reward for Morocco being the region's star political reformer; or that might be questioned for being forwarded in a context where signals over the kingdom's ultimate political direction remained at best confused. Mohammed VI's reopening of the issue of Morocco's eligibility to join the EU required consideration of just how far states might be rewarded for adopting European style political

and economic systems. A key factor here is how the region's relative reformers have increasingly expressed exasperation that European funding remains so heavily oriented towards non-liberalising Egypt, this raised by other Arab states themselves to question the EU's genuine commitment to helping reform efforts. While the US has begun to wind down its aid allocations to Cairo, similar trends have not taken shape in the EU. Indeed, in its new 2002 strategy, the EU rather charitably opined that in Egypt there had been 'more progress than is apparent on the surface' and that the 2000 elections had been the fairest for a generation.[13]

Pressures have been more readily applied as the ratification of agreements have enabled bilateral association councils formally to commence – this in most cases having had to await lengthy parliamentary procedures that delayed progress until recently. In several negotiations debate over the human rights clause has been one point of conflict, but the EU has insisted on Arab regimes signing up to standard wording without desired references to Muslim 'specificities'. French and Spanish policies have not become overtly critical towards North African regimes, but they have gradually offered less explicit support to the latter.[14] Southern Mediterranean states have certainly viewed the EMP's new discourse on democracy with great concern, perceiving the EU's insistence on constructing a new partnership around such values as potentially constraining to future actions. While often appearing ambivalent on the Islamist issue, the EU has unequivocally supported the modest openings offered to Islamist groups in Morocco and Jordan. As in other areas, differences remained between member states. Southern states have been less convinced of the democracy promotion commitment; their security doctrines did evolve, but were still more cautious and alliance-oriented. The Commission has also been opposed to political conditionality being attached to economic restructuring assistance. Conversely, some predict a greater degree of Europeanisation in security perspectives as immigration develops into a common European issue.

Formal proposals that the EU's human rights clause be invoked have been considered recently in two cases. First, Israel, where a majority of states have declared themselves in favour of the EU-Israeli association agreement being suspended, but where Germany, the UK and the Netherlands have remained reticent – notably, here France's active support for suspension contrasts with its influential voice resisting other states' advocacy of punitive measures against some Arab states, this throwing into sharper relief Paris' subordination of democracy to other foreign policy criteria. In practice, of course, the EU has even continually put off firm action against Israeli labelling of goods from the Occupied Territories, supposedly not eligible for tariff preferences under the EU-Israeli association agreement. The second case has been Tunisia, where Bin Ali's resistance to human rights dialogue and increasingly repressive measures against domestic opponents has led the EU to exert tougher pressure. This is the case where MEPs have called most insistently for aid and trade provisions to be suspended due to increasing human rights abuses.[15] While this has still not happened, the degree of diplomatic criticism of Bin Ali has been ratcheted up and aid allocations reduced. This might be explained by a combination of, on the one hand, Tunisia being perhaps the least important state in the region in strategic terms and, on the hand, this being a case where trends are judged to have declined below a certain threshold of 'nastiness'.

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[13] Commission of the European Communities (2002) *Egypt: Country Strategy Paper 2002-6*: 9.

[14] See the respective chapters by J. F. Daguzan and B. Lopez Garcia in Gillespie R. and Youngs R. (eds) *European Union Democracy Promotion: The Case of North Africa,* special edition of *Democratization* (2002).

[15] *Agence Europe* 17/18 April 2000: 5.

Increasingly, policymakers protest a realisation that a modest focus on human rights actually offers a more feasible strategic purchase over southern Mediterranean states in a context where traditional security cooperation and approaches have resoundingly proved to be the least fruitful area of engagement. It is the defensive-containment component of European policy that has been most frustrated by the impasse in the Middle East peace process. All meaningful security initiatives have been blocked by Arab states. The Charter for Peace and Stability was by 2002 still not agreed and its proposed text anyway progressively diluted the late 1990s. EMP conflict prevention networks and initiatives have amounted to little. Prospective Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) have been watered down and replaced by the weaker concept of Partnership Building Measures. Arab states have blocked European proposals for military CBMs. The kind of measures pertaining in Eastern Europe under the OSCE or Conventional Forces in Europe treaty to increase transparency in and limits to the build up of heavy weapons have not proved feasible in the Mediterranean.[16] The aim of incorporating a strengthened version of the UN Register of Conventional Armaments into the EMP has also been frustrated, with Mediterranean partners holding back the relevant information. More specific EU proposals – for Mediterranean-wide mediation mechanisms or joint peacekeeping operations – have also not prospered. The paucity of successful hard security cooperation in the Mediterranean relative to other regions where the EU has pursued 'collective security regime' designs might suggest the *greater* importance of addressing strategic concerns through the democracy agenda.

Algeria has been regularly cited as the most evident case of European passivity on the issue of political reform. The common presumption is that since the revocation of the 1991 elections, the EU – influenced most strongly by France's specific concerns – has focused entirely on the need to suppress the political ascendance of the FIS. Even in Algeria, however, EU policy has evolved, albeit modestly. European strictures on democracy have increased, encouragement was given for the limited renewal of democratic reform after 1995, Algeria has absorbed more than a proportionate share of the EU's democracy and good governance funds, and the EU has sought to enmesh Algeria within a regional framework based firmly on the development of democratic norms. In 1997 the EU suspended association agreement negotiations with Algeria, because the regime's lack of political legitimacy was seen as undermining its ability to push through the tough economic changes required by the EU's trade agreement and due to the regime's failure to broaden and disperse institutional competences in a way that would assist a containment of violent conflict. The re-intensification of violence during 2000 encouraged European states, including France, to abandon many of the aid projects proposed in 1999, and in response to riots in the summer of 2001 the EU spoke out more strongly in defence of Berber rights than hitherto.[17] These changes constituted no more than subtle changes, as the EU has struggled with the challenge of focusing on rights issues while also openly backing presidents Zeroual and Bouteflika in their battles with army *erradicateurs*: the EU's 2002 strategy listed its main perceived concern as 'the weakness of the president'.[18] They nevertheless reflect a growing recognition that the absence of far reaching political liberalisation in Algeria has not produced stability.

In contrast, the lack of firm democratic conditionality has become increasingly evident in the case of Libya. Several national governments endeavoured to circumvent Libya's exclusion

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[16] Tanner F. 'The Euro-Mediterranean Security Partnership: Prospects for Arms Limitation and Confidence Building', Joffé G. and Vasconcelos A. (eds) *The Barcelona Process: Building a Euro-Mediterranean Regional Community,* Special Edition of *Mediterranean Politics* 5/1 (2000), p. 193.

[17] Agence Europe, 17 June 2001, p. 16 (Special Edition) and 30 June 2001, p. 5.

[18] Commission of the European Communities (2002) *Algerie: Document de Strategie 2002-6*: 30.

from the EMP by reinforcing bilateral links. Spain, for example, launched a series of ministerial visits, forwarded new development assistance, and negotiated a sizeable new Repsol investment in Libya.[19] The EU indeed vigorously defended its right to support investment in Libya against the extra-territorial sanctions threatened by the ILSA legislation. After the 1999 deal providing for the trial of the Lockerbie suspects in the Netherlands, sanctions were suspended (except on arms sales) and the EU went out of its way to incorporate Libya into the EMP. Commission president, Romano Prodi in particular courted Colonel Q'adafi. Libya's accession to the EMP did not materialise only because of Libya's objection to Israel's presence. Italy continued to be the firmest advocate of full engagement with Libya – and the largest importer of Libyan petroleum. By 2002, even the UK – the EU's long-time 'backmarker' on relations with Libya – was developing bilateral links with Tripoli. As with other 'rogue' states such as Iran, Iraq and North Korea, conditionality has been applied to external actions not internal political reforms.

Debate has, of course, increasingly focused in particular on reform of the Palestinian Authority. From the mid-1990s, the EU imposed firm conditions in relation only to macro-economic policy and fiscal reform, not issues of democratic quality or good governance. Concrete political conditionality has related to counter-terrorism, not democracy. Few objections were raised in response to the postponement of local elections. Little protection was offered against the PA's narrowing of associational space, arbitrary arrests or restriction of Islamist welfare organisations.[20] Only during the course of 2002 did the EU come to perceive a need for a dispersal of the power exercised by the Arafat entourage. This appeared to reflect an implicit recognition that the EU had miscalculated, to the extent that support for PA security forces had become part of the problem, with suspected links between these forces and violent militia and the way that a lack of transparency had facilitated weapons accumulation. European strategy at this stage came to promote the notion of day-to-day responsibilities being passed to a new prime-ministerial post. In the words of one policymaker, the European pressure on corruption and financial mismanagement moved from 'soft' to 'hard' conditionality. After some internal debate, the EU supported the holding of new elections, imposing conditions relating to the independence of the National Electoral Commission.

Recent debate has centred on the sequencing of reform, most analysts insisting that the creation of a Palestinian state must occur together with reform of the PA into a full 'nation-state' democracy; Palestinians must see that democracy means something in terms of securing progress on a final settlement.[21] While apparently keener to support governance reform, the EU has notably rejected president Bush's insistence that such reform occur prior to final settlement negotiations. This is presented as reflecting a less instrumental perspective on PA democratisation: a rejection of 'democratisation' being promoted primarily as a means of 'getting Arafat out' (or even more disingenuously, as many suspect, of the US setting reform hurdles so high that they will not in practice be obliged to exert any pressure on Israel).[22] Notwithstanding this difference and the undoubted significance of the EU's refusal to ostracise Arafat, the EU's outlook has itself exhibited a significantly instrumentalist logic: the

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[19] *El País* 2 February 1998: 22.

[20] Asseburg M. and Perthes V. (eds) (1998) *The European Union and the Palestinian Authority: Recommendations for a New Policy*, Siftung Wissenschaft und Politik S421 (Ebenhausen, SWP): 28-31 and 39.

[21] International Crisis Group (2002) *Middle East Endgame I: Getting to a Comprehensive Arab-Israeli Peace Settlement*, July.

[22] See Carnegie Endowment Forum (2002) *Toward Democracy in Palestine: Learning from other Countries*, July, at ceip.org.

focus has been very firmly on how reform can contribute to immediate improvements in security capacities and far less on the more general potential benefits of a broader democratic *process*. Consequently, policy remains beset by notable tensions. At the same time as advocating a broadening of political power away from Arafat, an insistence on the coalescing of security forces has actually reinforced Arafat's centralised control. It remains unclear how far the EU actively seeks full democratisation, rather than simply a greater transparency to prevent PA funds being siphoned off to terrorists. One diplomat suggested that the EU remained 'cautious' over political reform, eschewing any 'off-the-shelf template'. Proposals forwarded by Joshka Fischer and others for a UN protectorate, to be charged with implementing reforms to the PA, do not – in light of the Bosnian and Kosovan experiences – necessarily auger well for the generation of firm local support for or 'ownership' of democratic advances. Given the acknowledged unfeasibility of deploying such a UN operation in a pre-settlement environment, this option moreover addresses the importance of political reform in bedding down a peace deal but not in generating *prior* consent behind such an agreement. In light of this, European influence within the International Task Force on institutional reform was, according to diplomats, focused on addressing this issue of local ownership.

Central to the EU's gradualism across the whole Arab world has been the contention that political change can most robustly be built upon underlying economic modernisation. It is the absence of fundamental economic reform and market restructuring that is widely seen to have facilitated elites' retention of power across the Middle East, this applying in particular to the perpetuation of 'rentier state' economic activity. Indeed, Arab governments' resistance to the prospect of a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area has been attributed to regimes' desire to prevent 'spill over' pressures for liberalisation from the economic to the political spheres.[23] The general integration of the southern Mediterranean region into the rules-based world trading system would undoubtedly accord the EU more effective political purchase. On the other hand, a routine criticism of the EMP has been that the economic reforms imposed by the EU are leading to harsher repression and even tighter executive control deemed necessary by Arab regimes to push through liberalisation. Far from a mutually enhancing linkage between economic and political reform, many detect a *tightened* nexus between the state and dominant private sector firms, regimes successfully co-opting the private sector into an alliance to prevent economic reforms having broader political implications. The economic dimension of European policy has also made alliances with NGOs more difficult and less harmonious, as these remain focused on criticising EU commercial policies as much as their own governments. In practice, the economic-political link has been elaborated only in the most general sense. Most obviously there has still been no real movement on agriculture and other sectors of vital importance to southern Mediterranean economies: an old and ubiquitously forwarded criticism of the EU, but one that is still pre-eminent in Mediterranean perspectives on the EMP.

As the dangers of precipitate economic liberalisation have increasingly been flagged up, the EU does appear to have become more tolerant of Mediterranean partners' failure to meet their FTA reform commitments. Some European ministers now openly admit that they will not be looking rigidly to impose the original 2010 deadline for the free trade area, and increasingly policy documents and statements appear to downplay the significance of the economic relative to the social dimension. MEDA funds have been diverted away from infrastructure

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[23] El-Sayed Salim M. (1997) 'Egypt and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: Strategic Choice or Adaptive Mechanism', *Mediterranean Politics,* 2/1: 64-90; Weiss D. and Wurzel U. (1998) *The Economics and Politics of Transition to an Open Market Economy: Egypt* (Paris, OECD): 204.

projects into measures aimed more tightly at facilitating restructuring processes – job creation, small business development, micro-credit schemes and the promotion of joint ventures. By 1997 over one half of MEDA funds were being allocated to social projects.[24] The Commission was, for example, the largest donor to Egypt's Social Development Fund throughout the 1990s.

Despite this evolution of policy, the much-vaunted social and human basket of the EMP has itself remained subject to significant shortcomings. Most projects in the EMP's social volet have actually been strongly oriented towards the participation of elites – such as academics and artists – rather than popular sectors. The Commission's decentralised civil society-to-civil society programmes have remained far more limited in scope that was originally intended. The proportion of development assistance allocated for socialisation-type, civil society projects has been less in the Mediterranean than in any other developing region, except Asia.[25] Since the Palestinian uprising in the autumn of 2000, the EMP's Civil Forum has been increasingly hijacked by the violence in the West Bank, Arab NGOs boycotting several thematic meetings.[26] In several member states, such as Spain, a number of key cultural and educational projects related to migration were actually scaled down after 2000.[27] Moreover, the critic might charge the EU with having been rather 'one way' in its harnessing of the social dimension, concerned uniquely with promoting Arab acceptance of European norms and not European understanding of or tolerance for Islamic values – whether entirely justified or not, it is this charge made routinely by southern Mediterranean governments that has constituted one of the main obstacles to partnership-building spirit within the EMP.

There is some evidence to suggest that a defensive reflex has become more notable since September 11. The principal development of the fifth ministerial meeting of the EMP held in Valencia in April 2002 was the addition of a new justice and home affairs pillar to the partnership, enshrining commitments further to clampdown on illegal migration. Counter-terrorist cooperation was for the first time formally part of the ministerial agenda, while new association agreements signed with Algeria and Lebanon since the terrorist attacks in New York have included new clauses on security cooperation relating to anti-terrorist strategies.

From early 2001, however, and particularly in the wake of September 11, the Commission and several member states insisted that the social-cultural sphere was key to revitalising the EMP. The Commission argued that better developed 'positive' social programmes would best enhance the EMP's distinctive approach.[28]At Sweden's behest a separate social-cultural section of the Euro-Med Committee was established. New cooperation on cultural and rights issues was institutionalised through regularised socio-cultural initiatives at the bilateral level with Tunisia and Morocco. In 2001 the EU elaborated a new framework programme covering migration issues in cooperation with the Mediterranean partners. This appeared to have a far more positive slant, with new initiatives proposed on: raising southern Mediterranean migrants' rights above those enjoyed by other countries; cooperation on extending visa provisions; and projects on preventing the 'ghetto-isation' of immigrants. A formal agreement

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[24] Commission of European Communities (1998) *Implementing MEDA 1996-7*: 8.

[25] Cox A. and Koning A. *Understanding European Community Aid* (London, ODI, 1997).

[26] See Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (2001) *Rule of Law, Democracy and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership,* Report from the Human Rights Workshop at the Civil Forum, Marseilles, 10-12 November, p. 81.

[27] Gillepsie, 'Spain', *op. cit.*, p. 19.

[28] Commission of the European Communities (2000) *The Barcelona Process Five Years On 1995-2000* (CEC, Brussels), p. 19.

at the Valencia ministerial to strengthen the rights of legal migrants was the quid pro quo to Mediterranean partners' acquiescence to tougher measures against illegal migration. In February 2002 the EU held a ministerial level meeting with OIC states in Istanbul to explore ways of promoting civil society dialogue. A commitment was also made at Valencia to establish a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation to promote cultural understanding: this initiative was taken expressly as a response to September 11 and mirrored the Asia-Europe Foundation already operating under the ASEM process. One of the biggest EU aid projects in the Mediterranean in 2001 was a 'culture of peace' education programme in Jordan.[29] One senior official saw the EMP's future in focusing on 'the intangible benefits of networks' rather than attempts directly to impose short term, 'direct results'.[30]

4. Democracy and human rights assistance

The Mediterranean received 14 per cent of the Commission's democracy and human rights for the period 1996-99, above the region's overall share of Commission aid (just over 10 per cent, since the 1990s): that is, far from being an 'exception' to the EU's democracy agenda, the Mediterranean has absorbed a higher proportion of political aid than traditional developmental aid. Between 1996 and 1999, the Commission funded 306 democracy and human rights projects in the Mediterranean, totalling 27 million euro.[31] Human rights, women's rights and press freedom projects have been particularly prominent. A considerable amount of additional funding has also gone to judicial reform projects as part of the good governance agenda, in particular to initiatives related specifically to the processing of commercial cases. Indeed, the good governance agenda – benefiting from a far larger pool of resources under mainstream economic aid programmes than specifically delineated 'democracy promotion' funds – has more generally been broadened in scope, EU policy-makers stressing a more politicised conceptualisation of governance, in response to an explicit dissatisfaction with the essentially technical definition of this term employed by the World Bank.[32]

The scale of human rights and democracy funding has remained relatively modest, at approximately 2 percent of total aid to the region – less than amounts given for either family planning or drugs eradication. Many projects were delayed for long periods over the late 1990s. Contrary to the common perception of the EU engaging in a longer-term commitment than the US, several European officials indicate that Morocco and other states may already have received *too much* priority attention. US funding in North Africa has increased notably, while key European donors such as France and Spain now devote a far more limited share of their aid to political work (although overall the EU remains the principal political aid donor in the region). A reduced 7 per cent of the European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights budget was allocated to the Mediterranean for 2002. Only Tunisia, Algeria and the West Bank were included in the Commission's new list of recipient countries. Morocco's exclusion attracted particular attention, this being the state where most observers suggested that some positive dynamic of political change existed for external actors to lock onto. Notwithstanding

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[29] Commission of the European Communities (2002) *EIDHR Compendium 2001.*

[30] Presentation by the Director of the Commission's Middle East Unit, NUPI, Oslo, April 2002.

[31] Figures on democracy assistance presented here are taken from: Euronet Consulting (1999) *Evaluation of the MEDA Democracy Programme;* Commission of the European Communities (2000) *Implementation of the Democracy and Human Rights Initiative 1996-99* (Brussels, Commission); Delegation of the European Commission to Morocco (1999) *The Meda Democracy Programme, Information Note.*

[32] For more on this relationship between the good governance and democracy agendas, see Youngs R. 'European Union Democracy Promotion Policies: Ten Years On', *European Foreign Affairs Review,* 6/3: (2001), p. 9.

these limitations, the overall amount of aid devoted to association building has not been the principal concern raised by civil society actors in Arab states.

Other limitations pertain to the qualitative substance of the projects funded. While EU human rights projects are not subject to the approval of southern Mediterranean governments, European states have remained relatively cautious. A passive, application-driven decision-making process has prevailed; in some states, few proposals have been forthcoming. The overall profile of human rights projects has been narrower than in other developing regions, such as Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe.[33] All but a handful of projects have gone to NGOs, most of the latter urban-based Western-style advocacy groups with relatively limited organic social bases. While recipients have included politicised and confrontational organisations, European governments have agreed in general to focus on non-controversial civil society projects rather than more directly political projects. Most European donors acknowledge that they have been drawn mainly to civil society actors not working directly for democratic reform. European donors continue to work mainly through intermediaries, predominantly European NGOs, this being true even of support for private sector economic actors. As elsewhere, most aid has been concentrated in the larger cities, not in the rural environment where civil society is weakest. USAID has had a less reactive approach to project identification than European donors.

The EU has provided no support for the range of groups widely identified as elements of a potential Arab form of democracy - professional associations, syndicates, mosques, teaching circles, neighbourhood organisations and craft groups. Work in this area was limited to one academic project exploring 'original' local forms of democracy. No support has been offered for NGOs with any significant Islamist flavour. While the EU continues to be extremely circumspect in relation to Islamist groups, some of the latter remain ambivalent over the prospect of European funding. Some projects have attempted to approach this issue in a cautious, indirect fashion, supporting local NGOs to run seminars on Islam and human rights. Some opinions expressed suggest a very slight change in perspectives, indicating some recognition on the part of the EU and Islamists of the need to engage more positively with each other. However, policymakers acknowledge that, despite being increasingly considered as an important area to explore, there has still been no significant engagement with moderate Islamists since September 11. Meaningful projects on democratic values and dialogue-socialisation have also failed to materialise. The EU's high profile meeting with Organisation of Islamic Conference states held in Istanbul early in 2002 did not engender regular concrete follow up. One initiative was elaborated through the EP, engaging Muslim clerics in discussion on human rights values in Islam.

Projects on the judiciary, armed forces, parliaments, institutional reform, media and trades unions have been mainly for NGO-organised training, education, awareness-building campaigns, seminars and conferences. The Mediterranean attracted a disproportionately low share of overall Commission funding for political society institutions, such as parliaments or local administrations (4 per cent compared with the region's 14 per cent of the overall democracy budget). The most prominent example of this was a project supported by the Commission run by the Friedrich Neumman Stiftung focused on political stability and democratic participation, the role of the opposition, the strengthening of opposition parties and the importance of consensus building to stabilisation. Only one regional project has

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[33] Commission of the European Communities (1996) *Report on the implementation of measures intended to promote the observance of human rights and democratic principles*: 31; *Bulletin of the European Communities* 1997, 30/6: 29-31.

incorporated parliamentarians, raising public awareness of the democratic role of parliaments, this run by a Dutch organisation, Stitching Communication for Development. One other related project aimed at developing parliamentary-NGO links, but only in Lebanon – already benefiting from one of the region's most lively parliaments.

There have been few significant projects on strengthening political parties or civilian control over armed forces. Policymakers acknowledge that accountability measures elaborated within military cooperation programmes have, despite explicit commitments to the contrary, been negligible. Dialogue forums between the religions have excluded any notable opposition representation - a condition set by Mediterranean governments; EU governments have themselves been keen to keep a fairly indirect link to such initiatives.[34] Work on issues such as elections and legal independence has been supported primarily through European universities, institutes and training centres, rather than direct capacity support for local civil society.

A large proportion of other work has been extremely indirect, the most common example of this being support for local level environmental associations. Support for unions has been undertaken through European trade union federations, and has focused mainly on social rights and bargaining techniques rather than overtly on political independence. Good governance work funded under democracy budgets has prioritised technical and regulatory harmonisation with European single market rules. This has included a particular focus on the transparency of procurement procedures, the design of new fiscal systems to replace revenues lost through tariff removal and micro-credit projects aimed at strengthening local level decision-making capacities.

The private sector has not been systematically included in the association-building activities of European donors. The latter have continued to channel most of their economic aid through governmental ministries rather than direct to private sector umbrella organisations – although a new Commission programme has lately begun to provide direct assistance to employers' groups. Private sector work has relied heavily on the use of European consultants, brought in to advise on specific problems of industrial production/organisation. This has raised questions over whether the resolution of immediate economic challenges in this fashion might actually undercut the prospect for strengthening local organisational capacity.

Pressure against the blocking of human rights projects has not been strong. Mediterranean governments have sought to frustrate some new human rights initiatives, and have been particularly sensitive to the notion of support being given to political society institutions. The EU has had difficulty in identifying independent civil society organisations; this is shown in the distribution of MEDA Democracy funds, with Morocco, Jordan and Lebanon being relatively high per capita recipients, while Syria and Tunisia received only 1 per cent each and Egypt only 4 per cent of total funding.[35] Restrictions on the foreign funding of political parties in the Arab world have effectively blocked many European proposals. The head of the Egyptian Organisation of Human Rights was arrested for accepting funds from the UK and another European-funded organisation, the Group for Democratic Development, closed down in the face of official harassment. Spain has found it difficult to get aid through to Saharawi civil society groups.[36] Arab governments have sought to limit eligible recipients to government-backed 'NGOs'. The aim to create regional civil society networks within the

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[34] *Agence Europe* 19 April 1999: 15.

[35] Euronet Consulting, *op. cit, Evaluation.*

[36] Barrenada I. (1998) 'La Cooperacion No Gubernamental Espanola en el Magreb', *Revista Espanola de Desarrollo y Cooperacion*, 2: 125.

Mediterranean has been one of those most frustrated by the collapse of the Middle East peace process. The Civil Forum has been kept relatively marginal to EMP decision-making forums. European aid flowing into many of Egypt's private voluntary associations has been seen as directly supporting closely linked government networks of patronage.[37] Nordic states and the European Parliament pushed for the implementation of conditionality in relation to the autonomy of recipient groups, but this was not agreed by other member states.

Recipients talk of the value of European funding residing in the latter enhancing the 'credibility' or the 'weight' of local associations. This relatively nebulous assessment has prevailed over any structured evaluation process. Many recipients express a concern that little has been done to assist them obtain on-going sources of funding as European money is withdrawn. Concerns have been raised regarding the co-option of NGO associations supported by the EU, even if European donors have given significant support to the more critical sectors of civil society. Donors acknowledge that their projects often 'fill a gap' where state provision is lacking, although they appear not to recognise the long-term risks of this strategy for the building of local capacities. The credibility of EU civil society work has also suffered due to internal European polices on immigration and migrants' rights. As elsewhere, the need to improve coordination with other donors remains pressing. There have been a number of cases where European work directly duplicated projects run by other donors. Recipients also see competition between European donors themselves in largely unfavourable terms.

Notable features of human rights and democracy funding to the various states in the region include:

West Bank and the Gaza Strip Up to 2000, nearly 40 per cent of the MEDA Democracy budget went to Israel and the Occupied Territories, and one quarter of total EU aid to the West Bank and Gaza strip went to institution building projects. The EU has provided over half the funding that supported the setting up of the Palestinian Authority quasi-state institutions. Most of this has gone to: direct support for the PA's operating budget; the payment of public sector salaries; and provisions for the centralisation of fiscal revenues to the PA as part of the establishment of new structures for macro-economic policy-making. The overwhelming share of European funding has been channelled to the PA executive. Policy-makers acknowledge that during the 1990s projects included few provisions aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability and that much aid eventually proved simply to have provided more resources for the exercise of patrimonial rule. A major category was support for creating a strong police force, this forming the subject of one of the first CFSP Joint Actions.[38] Since the September 2000 uprising, increased amounts – rising to 10 million euro per month – have been forwarded to support the PA budget directly to offset Israel's withholding of revenues: it is here where a focus on transparency has been most forceful, with the EU imposing a freeze on new hiring, greater judicial independence, increased financial reporting provisions and the transfer of monies to a single IMF-monitored account. No local Palestinian monitoring of these provisions was included.

This focus on the PA executive was presented as a necessary first stage to democracy building after the Oslo accords. Critics observed that funding going to NGOs more than halved after the mid-1990s – although the shift between different categories of support might be seen as less illuminating in Palestine than in other cases, given that donors could only fund NGOs

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[37] Weiss and Wurzel, *The Economics and Politics of Transition:* 154.

[38] The breakdown of EU aid is given in Assenburg and Perthes, *The European Union, op. cit;* 31 and 46.

prior to Oslo and that the perceived challenge thereafter was to transform broad national movements into organisations running state-like institutions. By the end of the 1990s, some re-emergence of civil society support was evident. A new initiative offered funding for 27 human rights NGOs. The EIDHR supported the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights, the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights, the Palestinian Working Women Society, the Women Affairs Centre, and the Democracy and Workers' Rights Centre. As this funding increased, the EU did with some success press for Arafat to widen the political space available to these groups. Under the EIDHR increasing support was forwarded for human rights training of the security services: a continuing security focus was seen in a new 2000 Joint Action aimed at helping the Palestinian Authority in its fight against terrorism, but this did build in a more prominent human rights training component than previously.[39]

Other projects were developed on the media, such as the funding of a new journal to monitor the PA, reporting on executive abuses not published in mainstream media. Supposedly political budgets also came to focus on socio-economic ramifications of the conflict: these have provided, for example, for a Palestinian housing project in East Jerusalem, while the 2002 EIDHR strategy identifies support for the Palestinian small business community as a priority. In a raft of new EU institution-building projects agreed in September 2002, hospitals, the health ministry and small businesses were the biggest recipients, alongside the judiciary. The UK and other bilateral donors have introduced new funding for civil society, in post-2000 circumstances preferring to assist emergency service provisions rather than taking a directly political focus. The new 2002 EIDHR strategy identified the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a target state for democracy assistance and, significantly, committed the EU to imposing firmer conditionality in relation to the need for a new law on judicial independence in the Occupied Territories. Since 2001, the EU insists that it has begun to develop new 'benchmarks' for enhancing the transparency and accountability of the Palestinian Authority. However, these involved relatively technical auditing devices, rather than any focus on the underlying power structures of the PA, and were anyway discontinued as a result of the chaos to institutional structures occasioned by the Israeli incursions. A conspicuous absence in European priorities has been any systematic focus on challenges such as boosting the Palestinian Legislative Council or political party building. European funds provided for the PLC building in Ramallah; given the PLC's continuing subjugation to the PA executive this might be cited as one of the most notable cases of micro-level projects not being linked effectively into efforts capable of remoulding macro-level patterns of political power. Overall, 'democracy and human rights' funds allocated to Israel and West Bank Gaza are to an overwhelming extent in fact not aimed at all at political-institutional change but 'culture of peace' type Israeli-Palestinian cooperation at the level of civil society: the vast majority of EIDHR funds since 2002 has gone to joint Arab-Israeli educational, cultural, pro-peace groups initiatives and forums, and especially youth organisations.

Morocco A priority focus of European assistance in Morocco has been legal literacy for women. Technical advice on changes to human rights law and women's rights has also attracted significant funding. The primary recipients of EU aid have been the large, established human rights networks, Association Marocaine des Driots de l'Homme and the Organisation Marocaine des Driots de l'Homme – although even in Morocco most projects

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[39] Euronet Consulting, *Evaluation, op.cit*; *Agence Europe* 17/18 April 2000: 5.

have been lead and managed principally by European NGOs.[40] Some support has been forthcoming for the Confederation Democratique du Travail, albeit with acknowledged misgivings. The most distinctive feature of democracy and human rights projects in Morocco is the extent to which such funding has been channelled through the Human Rights Ministry, the Ministry for Education and the Justice Ministry - this arguably reflecting an over-optimistic view on official commitment to, and propensity genuinely to facilitate, political liberalisation. More recently, by far the largest European project undertaken in Morocco has taken place in the field of judicial reform. One reason why it was not deemed important to include Morocco in the EU's list of target states was that the government intimated that it would cooperate on human rights funding through mainstream budgets, by necessity directed to ministries and with official consent: in practice, the Palace has since scuppered a number of new initiatives forwarded on this basis. Since 2001 only one Moroccan NGO has received Commission democracy and human rights funding.

Algeria The principal Commission projects supported in Algeria prior to 2000 included: support for the police, this representing by far the biggest category of support (8 million euro during 2000-1); support for the media in particular through setting up a Media Solidarity Centre and funding training links with Rapporteurs sans Frontieres; women's rights, much of which reflected the EU's preference for extremely indirect approaches, one of the biggest projects going to the Association Algerienne pour la Planification Familiale, for example; and, also demonstrating the socio-economic bent to democracy assistance, education, rehabilitation and social insertion programmes, such as support for Enfants Refugies du Monde. Algeria was included as a target state for the EIDHR in 2002. The EU's priorities in Algeria were then listed as 'stability and security', fundamental liberties and good governance. New initiatives have included: judicial reform, with a new focus on transparency of and access to the legal system and training for women judges; police reform; the media; the rehabilitation of areas effected by terrorism; the strengthening of local administration; new information programmes on democracy. Apart from one Italian project on gender and development, all bilateral nationally funded work came from France. French political aid funds were defined not as democracy promotion, but as a government centred 'etat de droit' agenda, and amounted to 40 million euro in 2000; while Paris's 'human rights' initiatives consisted almost entirely of relatively soft cultural projects (cinematic cooperation, funding for artists, professional vocational training).[41] These priorities reflect a clear security-oriented design of political reform priorities in Algeria. Policymakers argue that in Algeria the EU can in practice only work with the government as and when it can be persuaded to cooperate on modest parcels of human rights education or awareness building. There have been some signs that the scope for such cooperation on issues such as disappearances and prison reform has increased. The EU has very consciously focused on increasing capacity for advocacy in respect of basic rights, and has not engaged in any systematic or concrete fashion with the broader and long-debated question of designing and embedding a comprehensive democratic alternative for Algerians beyond both the regime and the Islamists.

Tunisia. Prior to 2000, very little democracy and human rights work was undertaken in Tunisia. The very small number of projects that were feasible constituted an extremely 'soft' approach, designed around the Tunisian government's own priorities. 'Democracy' projects thus included: support for an employment agency; education on economic and social rights;

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[40] Haddadi S. (2002) 'Two Cheers for Whom? The European Union and Democratisation in Morocco', in Gillespie R. and Youngs R. (eds) *The European Union and Democracy Promotion: The Case of North Africa* (London, Frank Cass), p. 161

[41] Commission of the European Communities, *Algerie, op. Cit.*

and a project on the rights of Tunisian migrants working abroad. The 'economistic' route to political change has been particularly favoured in Tunisia as the latter has increasingly established itself as the Arab state where the economic reforms and partnership promoted by the EMP have been most far-reaching: a constant disincentive to employ conditionality against Tunisia has been that it continues to use economic aid more effectively than any other Mediterranean partner. Notably, Bin Ali has been far more willing to block and frustrate EU projects than to risk German displeasure by disrupting the operations of the Friedrich Ebert Siftung – although, the latter's focus has also been on social rights. Identified as a new target state in 2000, Tunisia has now been allocated a disproportionately large amount of human rights funding for 2002-4. Pursuant to this renewed focus on Tunisia, funding decisions have in this case become more politicised. Despite objections from the Tunisian government, the EU offered new funding for the Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme; when this group's activities were then constantly broken up by the authorities and licences delayed, the Commission did protest and insist that such obstacles to European-funded projects be removed. This pressure was still limited to demarches and diplomatic strictures, rather than any actual suspension even of individual packages of aid, but it was seen as significant that for first time Italy and France did consent to such pressure.

Syria Up to 2000, only four MEDA democracy projects were funded in Syria. These represented no more than tentative 'first step' projects: the collection of basic information on the political situation in Syria; women's economic empowerment; inter-religious dialogue. The very re-tightening of political space in Syria after 2000 continued to deprive the EU with what it judged to be promising local partners. Even fairly innocuous looking social development projects have been either blocked or diluted by Syrian authorities fearful of their potential political impact. More recently, the EU has focused on gaining some degree of foothold over reforms in Syria through cooperation on the design of new procurement rules and tax reforms.[42]

Jordan Despite the country's more far-reaching degree of political liberalisation, human rights projects in Jordan have been as narrowly focused as those undertaken in neighbouring states. Prior to 2000, there were only three MEDA democracy projects in Jordan that were not with women's groups. Support was forthcoming for the Housewives Committee Zarqa, the Arab Women's Cooperation Network, the Human Forum for Women's Rights, the Arab Women Organisation of Jordan, the Jordanian National Forum for Women and the Business and Professional Women's Club. These projects focused on rights enforcement through the creation of grass roots organisational forums. The other area of work in Jordan has been related specifically to the peace process, this including projects on children's rights and education for peace.

Egypt Only seven MEDA democracy projects were support in Egypt up to 2000, with no new initiatives agreed in the immediate aftermath of the new civic associations law agreed in 1999. Prisoners' and women's rights were the two issues addressed through EU backed initiatives. The Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights was subjected to increased harassment due to its receipts of European funding, and this effectively discouraged the EU from continuing to support this group. A small number of projects in Egypt have featured a slightly more political edge: support was forwarded to the Arab Centre for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession; and programmes of voter registration and election awareness campaigns were deemed fruitfully harnessed to the Supreme Court's growing activism in this area. Egypt was not identified as a target state in 2000. This offered grist to

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[42] *Agence Europe* 26 April 2000: 13.

the mill of those doubting that the EU was at all genuine in its stated desire to see Mubarak's power undermined. It also demonstrated the persistently 'messy' nature of EU policymaking, however: with the individual personnel covering Egypt keen to keep chipping away at the issue of political reform, 20 million euro of new civil society support was found from mainstream budgets to circumvent the country's exclusion from the EIDHR list of priorities. The socio-economic flavour of policy has been particularly evident in Egypt, the EU defining the aim of its human rights initiatives as 'to enhance the capacity of the NGO sector to contribute effectively to social development'. This has driven the funding of a new structured dialogue between the state and NGOs on social development. In this light, the Commission has recently committed itself to exert more conditionality specifically to ensure that the NGOs funded by the EU 'can operate without undue restriction'.[43]

5. Ways Forward

The foregoing account of European policy demonstrates that issues of democracy and human rights have gradually worked their way into a more comprehensive perspective on the challenges facing the region. At the same time, several elements of their elaboration call for sharper delineation, that can be expressed through a number of recommended changes to EU policies:-

Conditionality. The EU might most obviously be admonished for having eschewed any significant, concrete punitive conditionality in relation to democracy and human rights. Diplomatic pressure has been increased in relation to select human rights cases and a modest degree of 'rewards conditionality' has been evident in the distribution of European aid; but broader democratic regressions have not elicited substantive responses from the EU and no systematic correlation has emerged between aid receipts and political trends. It must be legitimate to caution that in the context of the Mediterranean region comprehensive and dramatic ostracism of offending regimes, even if it were judged by policy makers to be remotely feasible, would risk being highly counterproductive. For all the criticism of the EMP, the latter has succeeded in at least laying the foundations for a far broader and more institutionalised engagement than the EU has previously enjoyed with the Arab world. Democracy and human rights policy should indeed seek to harness, rather than obviate this. Such an approach need not preclude, however, a more effective and purposeful use of the linkages upon which the whole logic of the EMP is supposedly predicated as a means of putting some modest and narrowly focused pressure on southern Mediterranean regimes.

Such a reorientation would provide a necessary counterpart to very generally designed NGO initiatives, ensuring that EU policies are more tightly attuned to specific and distinctive political developments in each Mediterranean partner state. Mediterranean governments have come to perceive a greater need to legitimise their actions in terms of democracy, but they do not so far appear to have become 'entrapped' in any identifiable way by their own new rhetoric. It is in this sense that the EU needs to begin to ratchet up its pressure for democratic reforms. Choices should not be dichotomised between engagement and containment; rather, subtle forms of pressure, based on the cross-issue linkages facilitated by the EMP, should be elaborated such that the 'positive' logic of 'norms dissemination' and international regime building can actually proceed more fruitfully. Socialisation around democratic norms requires carefully calibrated coercion; this would avoid a rupturing of institutionalised dialogue, but also redress the notion that the latter can simply be left to gestate into a stable collective security regime.

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[43] Quotes from Commission *Egypt, op. cit*: 34-6.

Policy recommendations. New legislation promulgated by Mediterranean regimes restricting political space in particular areas should be met with action that is more determined yet also carefully delineated to counter the specific restriction in question. Specifically, this might, for instance, entail:

- increased support for a newly banned NGO;
- withdrawal of state capacity-building legal reform work in response to tightened control over the judiciary; and
- initiatives aimed to increase awareness of democratic norms for political parties prohibited on the a priori rejection of their compatibility with electoral process.

Democracy and Security. This in turn relates to the need for a more robust conceptualisation of how different forms and 'arenas' of political change might impact upon the security agenda. European policy has legitimately identified the potential for more open decision-making processes to stabilise the Mediterranean region, while acknowledging the need to avoid precipitate change. This gradualism has, however, drifted into a vague support for 'partial' political liberalisation that lacks any comprehensive or profound rationalisation of the different mechanics of political decision-making. It is towards such a limited end that the EU has most feasibly been able to work: encouraging pockets of civil society activism focused on basic human rights, pushing for areas of more autonomous economic activity. This offers the prospect of tempering radicalism, making it easier for European businesses to gain access to Mediterranean markets, while avoiding the kind of destabilising friction that would emerge from any more muscular attempts to impose overarching 'Western' political systems. It is at least arguable, however, that such partial reform efforts are amongst the most destabilizing and least sustainable forms of governance. More firmly embedding benefits flowing from the two areas of most notable EU work – the NGO sector and economic reform – requires in turn a focus on more political arenas.

Policy recommendations. Such a political-level focus might include:

- the elaboration of yardsticks to specify EU expectations relating to parliamentary reforms;
- a more forceful focus on strengthening civilian control of militaries, an absolute key to linking political reform to more peaceable state behaviour; and
- closer linkages between security policy planners and those working on different reform options on the ground at the micro level.

Democracy and Economic Development. Similarly, as in other areas of EU external relations, a strengthening of links between political and economic forums would benefit democracy promotion strategy. Apart from standard calls for reforms to EU commercial policy, it is of concern that democracy and human rights officers have little say in the type of civil society organisations supported under mainstream development initiatives. In some senses, European approaches to political reforms have been overly socio-economic; but, the bottom up social developmental approach has itself suffered from significant shortcomings. Many projects with a social development bent appear only tenuously 'political'; many others have been overtly politicised, with a focus on Western-style 'elite' human rights NGOs only weakly linked to any concrete social base. Rectification of the latter problem requires a further localisation of projects; and while there is evidence that policy has begun to move in this direction, the question of how to maximise the political potential of social development work is still vastly under-conceptualised.

Policy recommendations. Effecting this widely recognised need better to design civil society development around local needs might be assisted by:

- more flexibility than allowed for by the current funding of only two tiers of projects, namely micro-projects (below 5000 euros) and macro-project (above 300000 euros); a division that leaves many of precisely the kind of projects most needed stranded between categories; and
- enhanced support for the political role of economic/employers' organisations under MEDA funding, this an area where the EU could better harness change related to the prospective Euro-Mediterranean FTA to broaden political space.

Restructuring the EMP? The most commonly cited problem has, of course, been that by linking policy in other parts of the Mediterranean to Arab-Israeli relations, the EU has found it more difficult to gain the purchase necessary for a really significant stability-promoting strategy in the region. Many policy-makers have cautioned, however, that the alternative option of dividing up the Mediterranean basin within EU policy initiatives could cause tension between those inside the more preferential, fast-moving set of relations and those states excluded from this – mirroring fears that the two tier approach in Eastern Europe might have begun to do just this. Some form of balance between these two extremes might be possible, retaining an overarching regional framework while proposing sub-regional forums to cover specific issues, including democracy and human rights.

Policy recommendations. The option of scrapping the EMP would, at this stage, not be the most effective way of proceeding, but the EU should:

- exert greater pressure to prevent high politics contamination of low level civil society initiatives, by showing willing to exclude intransigents through a more flexible use of EMP resources
- use greater flexibility also to include other Arab states in MEDA funded civil society initiatives, in recognition of the fact that the 'Mediterranean' construct looks unduly arbitrary for many norm-building initiatives; and
- more actively encourage and facilitate initiatives from two or three sub-groups of Mediterranean partners, for instance from the Maghreb, where this would allow democracy promotion work more productively to proceed.

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