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A Political Agenda for Region-building?

The EMP and Democracy Promotion in North Africa

by

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Abstract

Richard Gillespie concentrates on the promotion of democracy as one of the instruments of Euro-Mediterranean region building in the framework of the EMP. In particular, this paper assesses the record of the EU's democracy promotion in North Africa. Gillespie emphasizes the obstacles, and the causes for hesitation within the EU to an effective promotion of democracy. He further examines the set-backs in light of post-Barcelona international events, such as the breakdown of the Middle East peace process, 9/11, the Iraq war, and the eastern enlargement of the EU. Gillespie argues that, in spite of constraints, the EMP could still prove to be a valuable framework for the promotion of democracy in the long run. This is especially the case if the EU will act as democracy promoter in a more energetic manner than hitherto, and if local developments in North Africa actually help place democracy more firmly on the political agenda.

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A Political Agenda for Region-building? The EMP and Democracy Promotion in North Africa

RICHARD GILLESPIE

A Mediterranean security community is unlikely to develop through Euro-Mediterranean initiatives specifically at the security level. The first ‘basket’ of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), embodying plans to establish a political and security partnership, has lacked concrete achievements, although a multilateral dialogue has been maintained since 1995. Even via more limited sub-regional overtures restricted to the western Mediterranean, a security community seems an unlikely prospect at the present time, with the Western Sahara conflict—pitting Morocco against Algeria—continuing to crystallize many of the obstacles [Gillespie, forthcoming]. The most tangible developments within the EMP so far have taken place within its second ‘basket’, though there has been less economic liberalization than originally hoped for and without the expected spill-over effects into the political domain [Dillman, 2002]. Meanwhile, lagging behind and concentrating on relatively modest projects, the political content of the Barcelona Process has been much criticized both North and South of the Mediterranean for being inconsistent or even marked by ‘neo-colonialism’. Yet it deserves consideration here, not least because, despite all its limitations and the obstacles it faces, the European Union (EU) has persisted with its political initiatives and they are now at least grudgingly accepted by several of the Mediterranean partners.

Since the late 1990s, the EU has placed democracy promotion on a firm legal basis. Another sign of progress is that today it is the European Commission, as well as the European Parliament, that is trying to make democracy promotion more effective in relation to the Mediterranean [Jünemann, 2002: 102]. Since the democratization scenario envisaged by the EMP relies to a considerable extent on the socialization of political, social and economic actors, it could be that in the coming years it will derive fresh energy from the Valencia Action Plan, adopted in 2002, which includes a major commitment to develop cultural dialogue within the third basket [Gillespie, 2002]. However, recent strategic European efforts to produce concrete programmatic outcomes reflected in

political reforms, to establish benchmarks for measuring the effectiveness of all democracy promotion efforts, and to adhere to timetables [Commission of the European Communities, 2003a: 12] may be setting artificial and even arbitrary standards of progress that the Barcelona project can meet only partially, at best, in the near future. It might be more realistic for the EU to recognize that support for democratization requires varying degrees of intensity and different policy instruments at different junctures, each with an appropriate level of ambition for the external promoters of democracy.

Prima facie, there is a certain plausibility to the argument that an effective international promotion of shared values may contribute to region-building, and may even be a viable form of region building itself, to the extent that the normative effects of the activity become translated into common practices and purposeful interaction between states. But one should not expect the evidence for the emergence of 'normative power' (see Adler and Crawford introduction, this volume) to appear in the form of gradual, cumulative increases in the acceptance of common principles, a steady growth of institutionalized meetings to discuss democracy issues or an increasing readiness to experiment with political reform. A process of externally-promoted region building implies a more complex and at times less tangible course of action than such a scenario suggests, involving periods when there is little evident sign of progress and perhaps even signs of regression. The implication of this observation is that any assessment of the democratizing potential of a young and ongoing process such as the EMP demands a degree of informed speculation as well as more firmly-grounded analysis of the empirical evidence thus far. Rather than look for a steady accumulation of evidence, then, a more realistic approach must focus on potential as well.

The argument developed here is that one must certainly acknowledge that concrete democratic advances have been absent from the Barcelona Process so far, and indeed that it has witnessed clear setbacks in this regard since 9/11 in countries such as Egypt. None the less, the EMP (in association with the European Neighbourhood Policy) could still prove to be a valuable framework through which to provide support for democracy, in the long run; especially if the EU as democracy promoter proves flexible enough to act in a more energetic manner than hitherto once local developments in North

African countries themselves actually place democracy more firmly onto the political agenda [Gillespie and Whitehead, 2002].

This chapter¹ will begin with an overview of pro-democracy activity within the EMP during its early years. What we need to assess here, given the Partnership's palpable shortcomings, is how sincere the democratic commitment has been at the level of the EU, its member states and their Mediterranean partners. Has the opposition of some policy actors and the hesitation of others effectively neutralized democracy promotion, leaving it languishing at a purely rhetorical level? Or does democracy promotion constitute a battleground where, despite contestation, promotion efforts may pay off in the long run, possibly through a process of democratic convergence or at least through the emergence of an embryonic pluralist security community, involving a 'compatibility of core values' (Adler and Crawford, this volume)? In the following section, we shall consider the impact of recent, post-Barcelona international events on EMP activity, in particular the deterioration of the situation in the Near East, 9/11 and western and Arab responses to it. How has the EMP sought to modify its democracy agenda in response to these existential challenges? And what implications do recent 'reinvigoration' efforts, in response to the EMP's shortcomings, hold specifically for the region-building perspective? The final section then will briefly consider how democracy promotion is likely to be affected by the Eastern enlargement of the European Union and the EU's current attempt to structure its relations with the 'wider Europe' on a more coherent and integrated basis. With encouragement from the editors to speculate about future trends, this will involve venturing into uncharted territory, though with some orientation provided by the evidence of the first eight years of the Barcelona Process and by the findings of social science research from the field of democratization studies in general. Here, we shall also engage with the debate on what might usefully be done in the future to overcome the obstacles to effective democracy promotion, in order to contribute to region building efforts and the eventual goal of establishing a security community in the Mediterranean.

A Balance Sheet of Democracy Promotion through the EMP

Although the EU is generally depicted as the power-horse of the EMP and its sole architect, such a characterization is somewhat misleading, implying as it does the design

of the project by a unitary actor. In fact democracy promotion focused on the Mediterranean has revealed divergence among European policy actors since the very start of the process and indeed there has been considerable doubt about the wisdom of its inclusion in the Barcelona project. Since the EU set out to build a partnership with countries mostly governed by authoritarian regimes, democracy was hardly a convenient basis for courtship. Such was the attitude of many of the Commission officials and member state representatives involved in the establishment of the Barcelona Process. Indeed, it was only because of the insistence of the European Parliament, whose own role in the EU was bound up with democracy promotion, that the MEDA Democracy programme was finally tagged on to the EMP; until then, the design of the Euro-Med project possessed no greater political ambition than did the preceding EC policy, the so-called Renovated Mediterranean Policy (RMP), although this had taken a step in the direction of decentralized co-operation focused on civil society [Bicchi, 2003: 205-7]. The new political emphasis of the Barcelona Process was greeted quite positively among the Nordic member states (at least within the narrow circles that were aware of this new Euro-Med initiative), but elicited more negative responses from the Mediterranean EU member states. The latter saw the encouragement of experimentation with democracy in Arab countries as a virtual recipe for destabilization, especially in view of the outbreak of conflict in Algeria [Gillespie, 1997]. Northern European member states meanwhile were more open to the idea of encouraging political reform and developing relations with moderate Islamists. Yet even in the North democracy promotion has been questioned. Moreover, political aid has had to compete with northern traditions of using foreign aid for poverty reduction purposes, while southern European countries have tended to employ it as an instrument to promote commercial co-operation [Youngs, 2001: 81, 84]. Since the prime concern of southern European countries in pushing for the EU to commit itself to a reinforced Mediterranean strategy was their own security, a bias towards political stability and the status quo was built into their own preferences for the design of the EMP.

Adding democracy promotion to the Barcelona package—although only as a very modest component of it²—was the price paid by its supporters for securing the acquiescence of a European Parliament that was now enjoying an enhanced external

relations role under the Treaty on European Union. The quid pro quo was justified by reference to at least two political arguments that may have swayed some of the doubters. First, there was a case for ‘standardization’ [Youngs, 2002: 41]: the EU simply would not be convincing as a global actor if it continued to selectively promote democracy in central and eastern European and the ACP (Africa-Pacific-Caribbean) countries, for example, while ignoring the same challenge in the Mediterranean, not only in practice but even at the level of formal declarations. Second, there was a strong body of academic opinion that held that stability—in the sense of an absence of armed conflict—would itself be best safeguarded by the spread of democratization around the Mediterranean, given that democratic countries tend not to resolve their disputes by means of war.

North African countries signed up to the Barcelona Declaration notwithstanding their evident distaste for its political content. Ironically, the only Arab state to express enthusiasm for democracy and human rights was Tunisia [Mac Liman, 1995: 20], a country noted for a huge gulf between a pro-Western official discourse and the actual praxis that featured in its domestic political arrangements, not to mention the disappointment of hopes of political liberalization under President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali. The other states that were given the opportunity to join (Morocco, Algeria and Egypt) had misgivings about the new political content of Euro-Mediterranean relations, although not to the extent of their reservations outweighing hopes of greater financial assistance and other economic benefits under the EMP. They could not for the most part afford to be seen to be openly rejecting democratic designs and they had reasonable expectations anyway that democracy promotion efforts could be neutralized: the new Partnership’s sponsorship of civil society projects was to take place ‘within the framework of national law’ [Jünemann, 2002: 88] and the Barcelona Declaration lacked the legal status of an international treaty.

By the late 1990s, however, it was evident that a certain amount of EMP democracy activity was in fact taking place and this created some of the difficulties that caused the negotiation of new EU association agreements with Egypt and Algeria to be extremely protracted [Youngs, 2002]. In contrast, the road of limited political reform taken by Morocco had by this time left that country’s authorities feeling rather more relaxed about the political dimension of Barcelona. Even in Morocco, however, where

the language of ‘democratization’ had gained currency in official circles, the model of transition was towards a more open, pluralist regime that, owing to the survival of major royal prerogatives and the exclusion of the radical wing of the Islamist movement (*Al-Adl wa Ihsan*), was substantially different to any variety of democracy recognized by Europeans. Indeed, the purpose of reform in Morocco thus far can be seen as aimed at boosting the monarchist system, while human rights improvements can be viewed as a means of co-opting opposition [Dillman, 2003: 187].

Morocco and Tunisia have proved since to be the countries of North Africa most ready to engage with EU officials in democracy and human rights dialogue within the EMP, but Tunisia in particular has not been keen to be mentored by Europeans in the way that many eastern European countries have been. A determination to perpetuate rather than transform regimes often lies behind the protective invocation of ‘sovereignty’ to resist unwanted political interference. Of course, the colonial past is still within living memory, a fact that further helps to explain a certain defensiveness on the part of North African political elites and a marked degree of political caution on the part of France, Spain and Italy. It is not at the elite level alone, however, that the weakness of democracy promotion finds its explanation: civil society activists in North Africa have not sought European collaboration to the extent that occurred in eastern Europe, often because of a widespread suspicion that EU democracy promotion has a subtext in the Mediterranean of undermining the Islamic identity of societies. Civil society here is not noted for widespread agitation for democratic reform,³ and activists sometimes criticize European democracies for being too ‘secular’ [Gillespie and Youngs, 2003]. It is one thing for an external body to promote democracy when dealing with an authoritarian regime that is trying to keep the lid on a vibrant pluralist society; and another to act when potentially influential sectors within the society, as well as regime elements, are themselves unenthusiastic about pluralism [Gillespie and Youngs, 2002a: 13].

Democracy as a concept has different connotations for government in Europe and in the Arab world. While the EU promotes democracy partly as a result of ‘identity-driven dynamics’, and associates democracy strongly with both conflict mitigation and economic modernization, North African governments have embraced democracy, when at all, in a more limited and selective instrumental fashion, seeking the international

favour that political liberalization promises but fearful that democratization would sooner or later mean regime change and their own demise. Given the quite limited North African identification with the European political agenda both at state and civil society levels, the *content* of democracy promotion, quite apart from its *modalities*, is a particularly difficult issue for the EMP. Both tend to reflect European designs and strategies, with some consideration being given to what the Partners will accept.

The content of democracy promotion has gone beyond a limited 'good governance' agenda but has not involved equally vigorous advocacy on behalf of *all* the elements of a European democracy. While the main emphasis has been on the reinforcement of civil society organizations, the EU so far has been content to work with the restricted range of associations granted legal status by officialdom, thus leaving the large body of Islamist opinion, including moderate conciliatory currents,⁴ largely excluded from the picture. Moreover, while European support for political reform has been quite compatible with improving the effectiveness of the existing North African state, there has been a marked absence of activity designed to promote effective electoral competition, despite the central place that elections occupy in any European or western democracy [Dillman, 2003, 188].⁵ Support for parliaments and political parties has also been negligible, though arguably with some justification given that these institutions are not strongly representative of the people in North Africa. Some impetus was given to inter-parliamentary co-operation at the Euro-Mediterranean regional level, however, at the Valencia Conference of the EMP in April 2002.

The modalities of democracy promotion, meanwhile, have been informed primarily by a 'bottom-up' strategy, designed to strengthen democratic capacity within Mediterranean Partner societies, both through direct assistance to civil society projects and through funding economic liberalization efforts, expected to have spill-over effects into the political sphere. The civil society groups that have benefited have tended to be secular human rights, women's and youth groups rather than overt pro-democracy associations, even where these exist. An alternative 'top-down' approach to democracy promotion, based on the use of diplomatic pressure and the application of 'conditionality' to economic relations between Europe and North Africa, has been largely rejected thus far, owing to the damage it would do to partnership building at the elite level.⁶ Actually,

there are indications from Morocco that the actual EU strategy there may in fact be closer to a mid-range position between a ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approach, since the appearance of European support for North African civil society has obscured a reality in which it was mainly projects organized by international NGOs or even government agencies that received support under the MEDA Democracy programme [Haddadi, 2002: 165].

The above discussion reveals a European predisposition to avoid confronting North African opponents of democratisation. More vigorous efforts are precluded by several factors: the cautious compromises resulting from the EU’s own disagreements over democracy promotion and how best to respond to security challenges; the primarily inter-governmental way in which the EMP operates; and the ability of Mediterranean Partners to exploit European divisions and the rhetoric of ‘partnership’ in order to see off European attempts to apply pressure. For observers seeking to detect a single European design, there seems to be ample evidence suggesting that Europe would be satisfied with ‘partial political liberalization rather than full democratization’ [Youngs, 2001: 91].

What have been the actual political consequences of the EMP? Is democracy really being promoted at the end of the day? At the level of regime structures, one cannot discern any democratic shift thus far that is attributable to the Barcelona Process. The more limited changes in Morocco have their origins in the latter years of the reign of Hassan II, pre-Barcelona, and their continuation under Mohamed VI continues to reflect a *sui generis* Moroccan transition, holding fast to the concept of ‘executive monarchy’ (interview in *Le Figaro*, 4 September 2001). Elsewhere in North Africa, one could point to cases of political ‘regression’ that have been scarcely condemned by the EU. Some observers have lamented the fact that, while the EU has failed to give Morocco significant incentives to proceed further with political reforms, the people of North Africa have witnessed the spectacle of Europe granting ‘backsliding’ Egypt some €351 million in aid over three years.⁷

A particular disappointment to certain pro-democracy NGOs in Morocco was the way in which their own possibilities of EU support were curbed as a result of MEDA Democracy ceasing to exist as an independent programme in 2001 and being fully subsumed in the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

Momentarily, at least, the European Commission seemed to be losing interest in investing democracy funding in countries with proven liberalization potential, in order to focus it more on countries such as Egypt and Algeria (the two North African countries currently prioritized by the EIDHR), whose main claims to attention were massive human rights violations. This discouraged Moroccan NGO activists who had gone to some pains to adapt to the demanding auditing requirements associated with EU funding, to no avail.⁸ The Moroccan case highlights the difficulty of applying even ‘positive conditionality’ as a means of promoting democracy: the country has certainly done relatively well out of MEDA funding in general, but this fact is open to differing interpretations as to what exactly Morocco has done to inspire EU confidence, or why it has been ‘rewarded’.

The overall impression of the effectiveness of democracy promotion through the EMP has thus been one suggesting major limitations, and there have been several apparent showcase illustrations of European impotence. These have been particularly striking in the case of Algeria during the 1990s [Roberts, 2002] and more recently in relation to Egypt. There, EU efforts to defend human rights in the midst of the widespread arrests and trials of Islamists after 9/11 were undermined by the introduction of a much more stringent Law of Associations, making it impossible for groups to engage in civil activity unless their registration requests were treated sympathetically by the Ministry of Social Affairs [Grünert, 2002: 139].

These cases show EU action to be often hamstrung by the special interests of individual member states such as France and Spain, or by the Union’s own respect for the rule of law, even when this is being politically manipulated by an authoritarian regime. However, the impediments to democracy promotion may diminish somewhat now that even the more ‘politically reluctant’ of the North Africa partners have finally signed new association agreements that include the now standard reference to respect for democracy which the EU insists upon. For whatever progress may be made at the elite level is most likely to come at the bilateral and sub-regional levels rather than at the level of the 27 (plus new EU members). The democracy clauses at least form a basis for political issues to be discussed regularly within Association committees and sub-committees once the new agreements enter into force. One must consider whether, once this stage has been reached by all the North African countries, the Barcelona Process may not begin to have

a greater, if more surreptitious effect on its participants, the effects of which might begin to transform attitudes and behaviour more significantly? Once association agreements have surpassed the hurdles of ratification, once association councils and committees start meeting routinely and a bilateral dialogue at the political (as well as other) levels becomes more fluid, the socialization potential of the Barcelona Process may be enhanced somewhat.

Of course, eventual cases of democratization reliant solely on the transformation of the existing political class should not be taken for granted. There is certainly some potential for spill-over from rhetoric to real change, as political elites and social actors become so entangled in a moral discourse that in the long run they cannot elude its practical implications [Kubicek, 2003a: 15]. Richard Youngs [2001: 92] considers that the discourse on democracy has led governments in Mediterranean countries already to 'perceive a greater need to legitimize their actions in terms of the idea or norm of democracy'. Yet, equally, future regime change in North Africa could involve other very different scenarios that are not led or controlled from above (though both EU and North African governments will try to avoid regime destabilization), or that involve some alliance between a reformist wing of the establishment and newly emergent elites, arising from sectors of civil society that are not in evidence at the present time. Certainly, in other parts of the world, including Spain, there have been successful cases of 'transition by transaction', involving the conversion of regime elements, especially when these see an opportunity to acquire greater political legitimacy and believe they can compete effectively under democratic conditions [Gunther, 1992].

It is still too early to discern with any real certainty whether the Barcelona Process is having a positive effect in terms of the socialization of participants, whether drawn from states or civil societies. Certainly for most Mediterranean Partners (excluding Syria and Lebanon), participation in EMP activity has become more regularized and instruction about the EMP has become an essential aspect of diplomatic training; but what is not altogether clear is whether the regular encounters of ministers and more particularly senior officials, as well as elite civil society actors, are beginning to produce a transmission of democratic values (as opposed to, hypothetically, a process of mutual challenges to one's own values). None the less, there is some suggestion that the

application of sub-regional principles to democracy promotion in the early years of the new century is beginning to generate a degree of new, although only loosely, democracy-related activity in some of the Mediterranean Partner countries (MPCs). Among 30 countries granted funding for projects to support democracy, good governance and the rule of law in September 2003, there were four MPCs—Israel, West Bank & Gaza, Tunisia and Turkey. While the Tunisian project aimed at improving access to justice for vulnerable groups, notably women in difficult situations by providing legal advice and judicial assistance (*Euromed Synopsis*, 4 September 2003), and thus lacked formal democratic significance, the fact that an authoritarian regime such as the Tunisian one is prepared to co-operate with the EU in such contexts at least implies that the door is open to dialogue around democracy-related issues (particularly substantive ones, relating to women's rights, as opposed to procedural ones). Other activities lying outside the democracy promotion framework may also be having a socialization effect with some democratizing potential, albeit on a decidedly modest scale: in 2003, for example, a Euromesco working group began to focus on democracy and human rights, with the aim of identifying elements for a common language.⁹

Given the broad focus of the EMP, it is inevitable that so long as the process survives (which should not be taken for granted), it will have socialization (though not necessarily democratization) effects. Along with a lot of forums in which the formal content, at least, is quite technical, the Barcelona Process has established large numbers of meetings, seminars, workshops and conferences at which people from politically different types of countries engage in debate and have their political assumptions challenged. And given the economic and organizational weight of the European component, one can assume that liberal democratic values receive more exposure than any others. The end result may not prove decisive for democratization in particular countries or in the Mediterranean 'region', but if it is at least having an impact at the individual level, one can regard the investment in democracy promotion as being modestly rewarded. At the end of the day, one is only looking for a *contribution* to democratization from the external element, to support processes of democratization that may take place sooner or later *within* North African countries.

Democracy Promotion under Challenge

Although Europeans often build the case for democratization around instrumental arguments about its security benefits, many policy makers around the Mediterranean, both European and non-European, perceive the idea of democratization as being almost antithetical to the pursuit of security. Rather than pursue a balance between political reform and security policies, these policy actors tend to see democracy and security as forming a zero-sum game. Within this context, 'securitization' has been in the ascendancy in recent years, justified by senior politicians and officials in terms of the increased threats to security brought by the failure of the Middle East peace process, 9/11 and the growth of tension that has accompanied the US-led 'war against terror'.

With the outbreak of the second Intifada, democracy promotion seemed to suffer a setback amid the general sense of malaise and crisis it injected into the EMP as a whole: while co-operation between Israelis and Arabs was ruled out for a period of years, Euro-Arab tension grew as well, owing to Arab perceptions of inadequate EU support for the Palestinians. In fact, the consequences of the flare-up of Israeli-Palestinian violence have arguably had positive as well as negative consequences for democracy-related activity within the Partnership. For one thing, the ensuing boycott of Euro-Mediterranean conferences by Syrian and Lebanon finally brought home to many Barcelona Process actors the fact that political progress within the EMP was impossible at '27' (EU of 15 + 12 MPCs) and that in the short- to medium-term at least there were better prospects if pursued by means of a more flexible 'sub-regional' approach. The fact that Syria, with its archetypal authoritarian regime, excluded itself from this sphere of EMP activity *without seeking to veto the sub-regional initiatives of others* was helpful in this regard. Equally, the international attention that the conflict brought to the Palestinian Authority increased the doubts about how effectively a relatively large proportion of EMP political aid had been used to date [Asseburg, 2003], and thus prompted EU consideration of how to get better value for money invested in democracy promotion.

These more 'positive' outcomes of the Middle East conflict for democracy promotion initiatives have affected European officials and diplomats more than their southern counterparts. For at the same time the difficult tasks of combining European opposition to Palestinian terrorist movements with condemnation of militaristic Israeli

actions, and of trying to develop coherent CFSP positions on the Middle East while seeking to work in partnership with Washington, have further fuelled Arab perceptions of an inconsistent, hypocritical EU, lacking credibility as a repository of democratic values. Today, perhaps more than ever, European arguments for democracy are not judged on their own merit but rather by reference to the stances of Europeans in relation to the Middle East conflict.

September 11 subsequently brought 'securitization' [Buzan et al., 1998; Jünemann, 2003b] forcibly to the fore, to such an extent that the democracy promotion potential of the Barcelona Process began to be written off altogether by some observers. Others pointed to a shift in the 'nexus between democratization and security', the latter coming out on top after 9/11 primarily because 'for the Europeans democratization is less a goal in itself than a means of attaining prioritized security goals' [Jünemann, 2003a: 7]. As interior ministers around the Mediterranean intensified their co-operation in the name of combating al-Qaeda, European reluctance to condemn human rights abuses and the undermining of political liberties in North Africa grew. The Egyptian government exploited the situation even to the extent of clamping down on EU-funded pro-democracy activity, knowing that there was little risk of European sanctions in response. To the extent that European and North African governments considered themselves targets of the same terrorist networks, any criticism of undemocratic regimes tended to disappear. For instance, when Spain and Morocco were simultaneously targeted in the Casablanca suicide bombings of May 2003, the immediate political analysis of Spanish intelligence chief Jorge Dezcallar was that for Spain any change of regime in Morocco would represent a change for the worse (*El País*, 20 May 2003).

None the less, while remaining characteristically cool on democracy promotion, Spain did take the initiative, when hosting the Valencia Conference, to establish a counterweight to post 9/11 securitization tendencies, through the promotion of intercultural dialogue as part of new plans for the expansion of the third 'basket'. Indirectly, the promise of a more developed programme of Barcelona activity in the field of cultural dialogue and co-operation promises to enhance opportunities for debate about democracy-related issues within the Partnership. It is because of this potential that Egypt initially opposed the idea of creating a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for dialogue

between cultures,¹⁰ while more generally those governments that were wary of the democratization agenda managed to ensure that the foundation would be kept under direct political control. This will be guaranteed by making the Euro-Mediterranean Committee, composed of senior officials from the EU and individual MPCs, the governing body of the new foundation, at least in the early years (*Euromed Report* 59, 28 May 2003: 16).

It is also possible that the challenge posed by Islamist terrorist networks could lead some North African leaders to reconsider favourably the introduction of liberalizing reforms, in order to confront their opponents at the political level as well as through their security forces. For instance, in Morocco such thinking is said to have been a factor in the decision of Mohamed VI to finally give the green light to reform of the family code, which has been strongly resisted by extreme Islamist sectors (*Financial Times*, 11 September 2003).

Clearly, the US-led war on Iraq is a further point of reference for consideration of the prospects of democracy promotion through the EMP. It was made relevant by Washington's announcement of a 'regime change' agenda for the Arab world, using forceful instruments up to and including military invasion and occupation in the case of countries accused of responsibility for international terrorism. Inevitably, this has fed Arab perceptions of democracy promotion being an exercise in external imposition, thus making it still harder to reconcile pro-democracy work with the concept of partnership. Yet it is possible that in the medium to long term, democracy promotion could derive some impetus from the outcome of the Iraq war. While the prospects of Iraq itself becoming a stable democracy may be slight,¹¹ the war at least revived debate on the question of democracy in Arab countries. The fact that France, Germany and several other EU member states were strongly critical of US policy on Iraq may, in spite of the supportive stances of Britain, Spain, Italy and Portugal (not to mention the 'New Europe'), help the EU to retain a degree of the moral authority that is essential, together with economic strength, for the Union to act as an effective international democracy promoter.

Amidst the growth of regional conflict, the second phase of the Barcelona Process (post-2000) cannot be said to have featured democracy promotion as a direct focus of the

various efforts to 'reinvigorate' the EMP; at most, one can point to the efforts within the European Commission to make existing EIDHR programmes more effective. Yet conflict has brought democracy back into consideration as a result of its perceived linkages with peace and because of, and in response to, the efforts by the Bush Administration to reorder the Middle East in a manner compatible with US hegemony. While the immediate effects of 9/11 seemed to include a free hand for American-approved authoritarian regimes to crush domestic opposition, the long-term effect may be to increase the pressure on them to initiate a political evolution acceptable to the United States, or alternatively pressure from below to distance state policy from US 'Greater Middle East' designs. Though there are evident dangers of 'empty shell democracies' resulting from US pressure, the introduction even of fairly superficial reforms could strengthen local political actors who wish to give real content to such reforms and who may derive a degree of protection from them.

Wider Europe

The eastern enlargement of the European Union promises to give fresh impetus to democracy promotion efforts *vis-à-vis* North Africa. While many expect the expansion of the EU to bring greater prioritization of relations with eastern as opposed to southern neighbours in the Union's external relations domain, it is likely that the new eastern European member states will be open to the idea that greater conditionality should be applied to European assistance for the southern Mediterranean states, especially if there are future proposals to increase the MEDA budget. On the one hand, the central and eastern European countries (CEECs) will lack the conservative instincts of 'front-line' southern European countries when contemplating security challenges emanating from North Africa; on the other hand, having worked hard to transform their own political systems in order to qualify for EU membership, they may well prove reluctant to endorse programmes of economic benefit to MPCs unless there is hard evidence that North African governments are making strenuous efforts to address the root causes of political instability. Of course, the CEECs will not possess the same institutional weight as some southern European countries, they cannot be expected to act as a coherent EU bloc (any more than the southern Europeans have) and for the most part they may show relatively

little interest in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Nevertheless, once they are members of the EU they are likely to take the attitude that there is no sense in being mere 'passengers' of the Barcelona Process, and may decide that democracy promotion in particular is an area of EU activity in which they have a rare opportunity to underline their own national achievements.

As peripheral states of the Union, the CEECs will be keen to exert some influence upon its evolving neighbourhood policy. Through concentrating their diplomatic effort here, they may be able to influence the extent to which the 'wider Europe' strategy will reward neighbours who are prepared to 'align' politically as well as economically with the EU. While North African states have been excluded from actual Union membership (regardless of whether Turkey is admitted), the concept of 'wider Europe'—still to be fully defined at the time of writing—will offer fresh incentives (in terms of market access and perhaps even some relaxation of EU visa regimes) to countries prepared to align their regulations and norms with those of the EU [Commission of the European Communities, 2003b]. In other words, new forms of positive conditionality, based on intergovernmental negotiation and reflected in bilateral action plans, may be injected into the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership as the Union attempts to introduce order and consistency into its relations with its near abroad. Insofar as the Mediterranean is concerned, the EMP will serve as a foundation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

At least in its early stages, the new Neighbourhood policy can be expected to have markedly differential effects. In the absence of a strong Maghrebi or North African regional bloc, some countries may obtain material benefits from a substantial increase in integration with Europe (so long as the policy is adequately funded) while others opt for more modest involvement or remain outside the new concentric circle(s) established around the EU. While sanctioning the principle of 'differentiation' in the EU's evolving relations with its neighbours, the European Commission trusts that the laggards and sceptics in Europe's vicinity will be drawn in as they see the benefits that 'pilot' countries such as Morocco may derive from total, enthusiastic commitment to the project.¹²

Yet, in establishing new categories of relationship with the EU, and hence new borders and peripheries with implications for cultural identity as well, the 'wider Europe'

neighbourhood policy could cut right through existing putative regions or sub-regions such as the Maghreb and North Africa. Certain countries may be drawn into a closer relationship with the EU, notwithstanding looser political requirements than those of membership, while others may fail to qualify for—or decide not to seek—a comparable place on the revised ‘pyramid of privilege’ (the metaphor traditionally used when classifying EU relations with third countries); in response, they may become more inward-looking and reliant on traditional sources of cohesion and identity, or may look for alternative international alignments. Although very much a special case, Egypt during the 1990s seemed to show as much interest in developing links with Asian countries as it did with embedding itself in the EMP [Selim, 1995].

The persisting doubts about the region-building potential of the Mediterranean countries could grow stronger if EU efforts to sponsor regionalism are subverted by the broader design for Europe’s overall neighbourhood: far more so than the Barcelona Process itself, the ‘wider Europe’ strategy could divide its southern neighbours into winners and losers. To avoid this outcome, the EU is being advised by some observers to start dealing with the Maghreb or North Africa as an EMP sub-group.¹³ This would be difficult to implement in practice, however: while repeated local efforts to coordinate on the basis of these geographical regions have failed over recent decades, what some see as a more promising attempt to forge a commercial sub-region, through the so-called ‘Agadir initiative’, cuts right across the Maghreb-Mashrek Mediterranean division—based as this initiative is on plans by Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan to create a free trade area.

It is difficult to evaluate the effects, if any, that the ENP will have on the domestic political situation of Mediterranean countries. According to optimistic scenarios traced by European officials, the new initiative may encourage the introduction of instrumental reforms by ‘reluctant democratizers’ (to use Paul Kubicek’s term) and could even strengthen the local appeal of pro-democracy political elements within North African countries. A less rosy scenario would be one in which North African perceptions of ‘increased dependency’ might be exploited politically by non-democratic nationalist or Islamist forces (though it would be wrong to assume that all Islamists are against the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership).¹⁴ One complication here is that the configuration of

political forces within North Africa is far from being shaped by the simple democratic/authoritarian dichotomy that existed in many of the late twentieth century cases of democratization in Latin America and southern and eastern Europe. The parties that compete in limited electoral contests in North Africa do not for the most part aspire to democratization and tend to be reliant for their institutional presence on direct negotiation with the ruler [Willis, 2002a, 2002b]. In such circumstances, a relatively modest increase in the permitted parameters of pluralist expression in the future might seem to indicate progress in terms of alignment with European political norms, while in fact regimes remained essentially unaccountable and unrepresentative. Europe might play a role, in other words, in (at best) promoting pluralism rather than democracy, without a clear perspective of democratization ensuing eventually without conflict. EU representatives often do justify broader elite participation to themselves in terms of pluralism being a significant step towards successful transitions to democracy at a later date. They often cite Spain as evidence, for one of the keys to the gradual and 'stable' nature of the internationally influential Spanish transition to democracy was the 'limited pluralism' that existed within the Franco regime from an early date [Linz, 1976]. Comparisons with the southern European experience (which embraced contrasts as well as similarities) are probably misplaced however: quite apart from different points of departure [Gillespie, 2001], the international context has been vastly transformed since the 1970s and the largely secular battles that led to democratization in Portugal, Greece and Spain lacked the religious fundamentalist component that currently commands extensive popular appeal in North Africa.¹⁵

Thus, while the neighbourhood strategy may strengthen political pluralism in some North African countries, EU democracy promotion is likely to continue on a low intensity basis, requiring a local catalyst or gradual elite transformation before more momentous changes come onto the agenda. While the new European initiative may give *some* fresh impetus to democracy promotion in specific countries, it could simultaneously have quite negative results in terms of the potential side-effects of such activity on collective or regional initiatives to establish a security community in the (western) Mediterranean.

Conclusion

Despite all the pitfalls, there is substantial evidence to suggest that there does need to be a political dimension to international region building in the Mediterranean. A strict concentration on economic and trade co-operation and other 'functional' forms of region building may be unsuccessful in the context of a politically and culturally diverse area such as the Mediterranean, even though its diversity is often cited precisely as a reason for adopting such an approach. Of course, the functionalist approach has its advocates, who generally point to the history of the EEC, emerging out of the European Coal and Steel Community.¹⁶ Yet the Mediterranean's own recent experience points to the risks associated with North-South co-operation if too much trust is placed in business links and joint infrastructure projects while political and cultural differences are ignored. Increased economic interdependence between Spain and Morocco, for instance, as developed during the 1980s and 1990s, was shown to be a completely inadequate safeguard against conflict at the time of the colonial-style clash over the minuscule Parsley island in July 2002 [Gillespie, 2000: 42-77; 2003].

Hitherto, democracy promotion and cross-cultural dialogue have been kept apart within the EMP, but practical linkages between the two are likely to grow. The cultural sphere, treated as if it were of minor importance at the Barcelona Conference in 1995, now appears much more highly politicized in the aftermath of 9/11, and the decision of the EMP's Valencia Conference to group to dialogue between cultures with a new justice and home affairs component in the third 'basket' promises to further ensure that political and cultural issues are dealt with in conjunction. In this revised framework, democracy promotion will seek to play a part in the region-building project, though in the foreseeable future this will be in the context of a variable geometry approach: some Mediterranean Partner countries will show an interest now in enhanced co-operation with the EU, seeking to maximize their chances of benefiting from the 'wider Europe' restructuring of relations, while other countries will opt for more limited involvement or will remain spectators, possibly until different regimes emerge within them. Democracy activity thus seems likely to continue, notwithstanding the question mark that hangs over exactly *which* region is being built, as the Euro-Mediterranean grouping faces changes in its composition and the EMP anticipates evolution and possible transformation.

The obstacles to effective democracy promotion within the EMP remain formidable. Yet the mere survival of the EMP over several years is now beginning to make the concept of political dialogue and a degree of co-operation in this domain more 'normal', and ongoing resistance in southern Europe and North Africa may be more difficult to sustain following the eastern enlargement. Central and eastern Europeans may object to aid for North Africa if political liberties continue to be curbed. EU leverage may grow as the 'Barcelona generation' association agreements actually become operational [Haddadi, 2003]. A potentially crucial role could be played by the European Commission, of gently exerting pressure on European policy makers to integrate democracy promotion in all aspects of EU and member state external relations. The Commission already deserves some credit for learning from the experience of early democracy promotion activity through the EMP and EIDHR, gradually reorienting it in order to address the specific challenges affecting individual countries; currently it is pressing for a deepening of political dialogue, extending it to 'specific operational issues' [Commission of the European Communities, 2003a: 11]. Equally, it is crucial for the effectiveness of democracy promotion that the endeavour goes beyond the elite level and engages broader sectors of the European and North African populations in discussion, projects and networks: progress in this regard may be facilitated by the expanding agenda of the third basket. The obstacles here are by no means exclusively in North Africa. One of the reasons for Spain's traditional conservatism over democracy promotion, besides the persisting influence of state-centred security concerns at government level, is the relative lack of involvement of Spanish NGOs in Morocco [Feliu, 2003].

In order to reinforce sub-state involvement, the European Commission has proposed that in future its delegations in partner countries organize regular workshops with civil society organizations [Commission of the European Communities, 2003a: 12]. However, this is in the framework of detailed national and regional strategies 'agreed with the national authorities'. Such activity may not find favour with most national authorities. On the other hand, past experience suggests that North African regimes are unlikely to present a united front on this issue. Indeed, the Commission proposal, if acted upon, may help to differentiate further the behaviour of North African governments in terms of their readiness or not to pursue a democracy agenda, albeit in a modest fashion.

The EU may be able to show appreciation here of any North African readiness to expand the political involvement of civil society. Certainly the National Action Plans, forming part of the ENP and based on negotiation with each neighbouring country, provide scope for projects aimed at political as well as other forms of alignment.

Meanwhile, negative conditionality should be used only exceptionally, at times of severe political regression. The aim here should be not only to attach significant costs to a major increase in repressive authoritarian behaviour, but also for the EU to reassure the populations of Mediterranean Partner countries that it is prepared to take a stand in defence of democratic values (if possible with a degree of EMP endorsement). It is likely that conditionality in general will gradually increase as the 'wider Europe' programme is developed, but this elite-focused approach will always need to be augmented by more 'ideational' efforts, 'based upon learning, consciousness raising, socialization, and the internalisation of democratic norms' [Kubicek, 2003: 6].

Some of the obstacles to democracy promotion derive from hesitations and resistance within Europe, where there is still very much the fear that Islamists may come to power in North Africa and pursue policies that are hostile towards Europe and/or remove existing liberties at home, to the extent that these are present in the first place. This fear is based on a stereotyping of Islamist (or even Islamic) movements, ignoring the fact that some Islamist forces (including a party that has proved to be the most popular urban force in Morocco in the local elections of September 2003) show much more liberal attitudes and behaviours than others, compatible with engagement in Euro-Mediterranean co-operation. These fears can best be allayed through 'dialogue between cultures', provided that this includes non-violent Islamists as well as more secular elements, and embraces civil society as well as political representatives. Meanwhile, the legitimate European concern for stability in the Mediterranean should be pursued in conjunction with democracy promotion, for beyond the knee-jerk temptation to crack down on social unrest, there has to be a recognition that 'sustainable stability' requires a comprehensive approach to the causes of instability [Jünemann, 2003a: 18]. This is not necessarily wishful thinking. While EU policy towards Algeria has been condemned by one observer for '[debasing] the very idea of democracy by pretending to promote it, and by affecting to recognize it in the "pluralist" masquerade which the army commanders

institutionalized in June 1997' [Roberts, 2002: 128], another commentator has detected a learning process that led to a modification of EU policy towards Algeria by the late 1990s, when a more open political system was being promoted in the search for, again, a *sustainable* solution to that country's conflict [Youngs, 2001: 94-114].

Spreading awareness of the political diversity within Islam is a major task for the planned Euro-Mediterranean Foundation. It is crucial, however, that the democracy promotion potential of this new initiative is maximized by extending dialogue beyond the institutional to the societal level—for example, through the involvement of North African migrant associations in EMP-sponsored cultural activities, such as meetings focused on democracy and human rights, cultural co-operation, racism and migration. Europeans, as well as North Africans, need to adopt a more inclusive approach to the EMP. In the context of democracy promotion, liberalism should be promoted to the extent of pursuing a joint commitment to effective pluralist structures, not as a preordained and comprehensive set of common values around which Euro-Mediterranean convergence must take place. In practical terms, this would involve a common search for types of political reform and institutional structures capable of embracing both religious and secular liberal values [Gillespie and Youngs, 2003: 7].

A final problem of democracy promotion as a means of pursuing the creation of a Mediterranean or western Mediterranean security community is that of prioritization. Despite the moves to standardize democracy promotion as a policy component in all areas of EU external relations, it remains only *one* component, often competing with other European interests and objectives for prioritization. As such, the 'double standards' that have long characterized this aspect of European foreign policy are likely to remain a feature, although perhaps in a more attenuated form if Commission efforts to 'mainstream' democracy promotion meet with some success. In other words, there will be a degree of selectivity involved in European democracy promotion activity for many years to come and this could have differential outcomes for the contiguous countries of North Africa, militating against their common involvement in the long-term development of a security community.

Endnotes

1. This chapter draws upon two collaborative research projects relating to the democracy promotion content of the EMP: first, a project funded by the European Commission as a MEDA-Democracy project (ref. 98MAG44B7050) on ‘The European Union and the Promotion of Democracy: The Case of North Africa’, directed by myself and Richard Youngs, and involving a series of four meetings of academics from European and North African countries, as well as fieldwork; and second, a project organized by Annette Jünemann on the basis of a conference on ‘The Mediterranean in the New Evolving International Order: Domestic, Regional and International Interests’, held at the University of Mainz in September 2002. Both projects have since resulted in edited volumes [Gillespie and Youngs (eds.), 2002b; Jünemann (ed.), 2003b].
2. Democracy promotion represented just half of one per cent of all European aid to the Mediterranean region in the late 1990s [Youngs, 2002: 55]; in Morocco it constituted just 0.3 per cent of the total amount of money received under the MEDA I programme [Haddadi, 2002: 161].
3. A major exception to this observation is that of Berber militancy in Kabylia.
4. Some of these currents are sufficiently conciliatory and pragmatic, in Morocco and Jordan, to contest only a limited proportion of seats in elections, in order to avoid creating a problem in their relations with the regime by actually running the risk of winning overall. See Willis [2004].
5. The idea of organizing election observation missions on a sustained basis, floated by the European Commission [Commission of the European Communities, 2003a: 12, 18], is difficult to see gaining the approval of an EU habituated to working in conjunction with national authorities in the partner countries. However, it might be worth the EU considering the creation of an electoral observatory, with a role of spreading good practice; this could exert light but sustained pressure for fair elections while evading the

possibility of regime vetoes and avoiding the impression given by observation missions of possible neo-colonialist behaviour.

6. On the different forms of conditionality, see Schmid [2003]. Under the new European Neighbourhood Policy, a new form of consensual conditionality is possible, whereby political reform based on agreed action plans may be rewarded by the EU.

7. Rouzbeh Pirouz and Mark Leonard, 'How to achieve regime change in the Mideast', *Financial Times*, 19 September 2003.

8. Such were the complaints made directly to Commission personnel by Moroccan NGO representatives during the seminar on 'The EU and Civil Society Development in North Africa', Tour Hassan Meridien, Rabat, 6 April 2002, forming part of the Gillespie-Youngs research project (see Note 1).

9. Reference is made here to a Euromesco working group on the 'Search for a Euro-Med Security Common Ground', coordinated jointly by Roberto Aliboni and Rachid Driss.

10. Personal interview with a senior southern European diplomat, December 2003.

11. One scenario that should at least be kept under consideration, none the less, is that a democratic Iraq emerges and becomes part of a reconfigured EMP. On this, see Neugart and Schumacher [forthcoming]. At the time of writing, it is too early to assess the significance for this discussion of the US 'Greater Middle East' initiative, launched by the Bush Administration in March 2004.

12. Personal interviews with members of the Wider Europe 'task force' (Helen Campbell, Luigi Narbone, Peter Ptassek), Brussels, January 2004.

13. For example, the recommendations made by Stephen Calleya and Mark Heller [2003] when presenting the findings of a Euromesco working group on ‘Sub-regional Co-operation within the EMP’ in August 2003.

14. A leading representative of *Al-Adl wa Ihsan* (Justice and Spirituality) interviewed by the author in Rabat in February 2004 in fact criticized the EMP first and foremost for not effectively promoting democracy and human rights in the Mediterranean.

15. ‘Promotion of democracy and Human Rights is complicated by the fact that religious extremism has emerged as a powerful political alternative’ [Commission of the European Communities, 2003a: 4].

16. Actually, the lessons to be drawn from the European experience may not be as clearly functionalist as this suggests, since much of the momentum for integration was generated through post-war political and security initiatives during the 1940s.

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