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Political Change in the Mediterranean – Impact on Euro-Mediterranean Relations

Bruno C. Reis

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Introduction

Political change of any significance within the Southern Mediterranean will necessarily have an impact on broader Euro-Mediterranean relations. The issue is usually considered in terms of the influence that Europe can, or should have, over Southern Mediterranean political and economic changes, namely towards greater openness. But this other side of the coin should also be underlined: Europe, and particularly Southern Europe, will most likely also be affected by any major political shifts amongst its Southern Mediterranean neighbours.

The Barcelona Declaration of 1995 implicitly assumed a convergence of objectives between seeking greater stability, prosperity, peace, as well as political and economic reform. However, this is not necessarily so, at least not in the short term. Democratisation and economic liberalisation may be conditions for more sustainable political systems in the long term; yet these processes can still result in economic difficulties, social turmoil, and even increased political violence in the short term.

Moreover, these difficulties as regards aims are compounded by significant difficulties regarding means. What is the effect of EU conditionality of trade and aid on the promotion of political reforms? Can the EU gain leverage without having a negative impact on ordinary people, by further impoverishing and isolating them, and thus undermining two key factors that might lead to sustained and positive political change? Some believe that it can. Others, however, then argue that political conditionality can be counterproductive in geo-politically important regions, where increased pressure on existing regimes may undermine European interests in an era of growing international competition, not least for resources, such as natural gas and oil. This, of course, opens up the larger debate on conditionality itself – starting with whether it should be positive or negative – and its linkage with political reforms, pointing to the even broader debate about democracy promotion by external actors. It is a topical issue in theory at least, even if in practice politics in the region seems to have moved somewhat beyond this, after the troubles faced while marching freedom into Iraq.[1]

In the end, all this relates to two crucial questions that sum up the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's political predicament. The first is: can there be a real partnership in Euro-Mediterranean relations without both shores of the Mediterranean sharing similar basic political values and systems, as well as interests? The second is: can there be such a partnership without one partner dictating (or at least perceived to be dictating) how all the others should be ruled, thus undoing the whole notion of joint ownership that a partnership seems to presuppose? While bearing these questions in mind as a guide for an ideal-type analysis, it should be noted at the outset that the term "partnership" tends to be used very flexibly and asymmetrically in international politics.

The Barcelona Declaration clearly stated the need for both shared values *and* joint ownership. At the same time, it signalled a joint Euro-Mediterranean compromise in the direction of a greater openness of markets, but also of political systems. Even if trade, as well as political openness, might initially be limited, at least both would be moving in the right direction. That was how things were presented at the time. However, its impact in terms of the theme of this paper – political reform in the Southern Mediterranean (we will not mention others) – seems to have been limited.

Moreover, the basic question regarding the legitimacy of external democracy promotion is a serious one. How can external actors who have an interest in any given region act in a way that is neither indifferent, nor one that constitutes interference in the internal affairs of other States? This is a question that makes all the more sense within the Euro-Mediterranean context, because in fact, both sovereign equality and non-intervention in the internal affairs of others are also among the principles included in the Barcelona Declaration of 1995. This point is important not only for these normative reasons, but also for practical political reasons. Any regime change is only likely to be sustainable, and hence effective, if it is felt to be legitimate – meaning, among other things, primarily devoted to the interests of its own people and not to foreign ones – by the majority of the population concerned.

This paper seeks to address some key concerns regarding political change in the Southern Mediterranean and their impact on Euro-Mediterranean relations by focusing on the question of perceptions, taking as its starting point a CESOP elite survey of experts and senior officials involved in Euro-Mediterranean relations. It will look at the possible differences of perception on these issues between the North and South of the Mediterranean. It will then seek to identify some of the key challenges of democratic transition and consolidation, and how these were addressed in Portugal, Spain and Turkey – Mediterranean countries that are now members of the EU, or then negotiating to become part of it, but which have recent or still on-going experiences of political reform, as well as democratic transition and con-

1 See footnote 41; for more specific troubles within the EMP area, see Dorothée Schmid & Fares Braizat, The Adaptation of EU and US Democracy Promotion Programmes to the Local Political Context in Jordan and Palestine and their Relevance to Grand Geopolitical Designs (s.l. : EuroMeSCo, 2006) EuroMeSCo Paper No. 50.

solidation, under conditions similar to those present in Southern Mediterranean countries. Lastly, this paper shall summarise the main elements of what is at stake within the realm of democratisation and political change in terms of Euro-Mediterranean relations, evaluate the potential implications of any differences in perceptions, and finally, conclude with some policy recommendations.

I. Political Change and Democracy in the Euro-Mediterranean Context: A Matter of Perception?

The following pages will briefly describe the key findings, as regards the question of political change and democratisation in the Euro-Mediterranean context, of an elite survey of decision-makers and academics involved in Euro-Mediterranean relations, which was organised by EuroMeSCo and carried out by CESOP, Lisbon between September and December 2007. This will be complemented with reference to other sources, particularly public opinion polls. But before we start, it is important to define some key concepts and allude to some crucial debates with which this paper is directly linked.

I.1. Analysing Democracy, Political Transitions and Public Perceptions

It is evidently difficult to define democracy, but this is not the only contested concept to used in this paper. The controversy surrounding definitions of democracy has become even more loaded with implications since democracy in its most basic sense has become the norm for legitimising political regimes: most polities across the globe now claim to rule in the name of the people. More recently, controversy has also brewed around the notion of democratic transitions. There is also some disagreement, even if less definitional and more relative to its relevance, surrounding the study of perceptions in international politics.

Etymologically, democracy refers to popular power, i.e. a power legitimised by reference to the people; but exactly in what manner this happens is not self-evident. Today, and notwithstanding a few exceptions – one often cited is the Islamic regime in Saudi Arabia, but even there we now find some forms of local voting – most political regimes claim the mantel of popular legitimacy, usually through the ballot box in some kind of elections and referendums.

Democracy, even in the absence of any other adjective, is however most commonly defined with reference to the liberal democracies of Western Europe and North America. This makes historical sense. They are the oldest, most resilient and successful model of a democratic legitimisation of power. They set the standard that lead to a definition of democracy as a liberal regime where not only is power legitimised by popular elections, but also limited by the rule of law. This is then further specified in terms of political science by characteristics such as: government accountability, regular free and fair elections accompanied by a peaceful handover of power to the opposition, and equal basic rights for all citizens independently of their status or group identity. Measured in relation to these standards, it is not surprising that in a number of recent reports Europe is indeed presented as the core of the democratic norm, while most Southern Mediterranean countries are not considered democratic, or are at most engaged in a process of political change that might or might not lead towards a transition to consolidated liberal democracies.[2] This Arab exception to the wave of democratisations seen in recent years is highlighted not solely by outside experts, but is also acknowledged and addressed by Arab experts, not least in terms of its impact, in the 2004 *Arab Human Development Report*.[3]

Transition is usually defined in political science as the period between the fall of authoritarian rule and the first democratic elections, which is then followed by a – very trying and variable – period of consolidation.[4] The transitional paradigm, however, may also be, and has in fact been, strongly criticised. Namely because it was argued that this is excessively close to an Hegelian or Whig notion of an inevitable course of history that necessarily leads towards democracy. This has triggered some heated debate, but one where what is being contested is less the need to take into account possible alternative courses, but rather the fact that this strict linear paradigm was ever really used in political science. The notion of both the complexity of the process and the uncertainty of outcomes is now, therefore, relatively consensual. Certainly the Maghreb and the Mashreq appear to feel the need to question the notion that all countries are in a transitional mode towards full liberal democracies.[5]

Doubts might be raised as to the actual relevance of public perceptions as a subject of policy analysis. However, there has been a growing awareness in the literature on international affairs of the importance of perceptions, ever since the pioneering study of Robert Jervis, whose basic claim still makes a powerful case for it: 'of course, perceptions [...] are not the only decision-making variables that are important', but if shared perceptions do not 'guarantee' the 'same response', the fact is that 'responses will often be the same' and the 'roots of many important disputes about policies lie in differing perceptions'.[6] Two recent and extensive review articles are representative of the current consensus. One points to and analyses the limitations and potentials of the 'globalisation of public opinion research'.[7] The other, highlights a widely shared consensus that 'foreign policy behaviour involves a complex interaction between public attitudes and elite behaviour that is directed both at domestic constituents and international audiences, we need to know more about the fundamental structure of this relationship.'[8] An attention to and understanding of this international and elite dimension is precisely what this report aims at.

2 «Map of Freedom», Freedom in the World 2007 Report. (Washington DC: Freedom House, 2007), in www.freedomhouse.org.
3 UNDP-Regional Bureau for Arab States, Arab Human Development Report : Towards Freedom in the Arab World. (New York : UNDP, 2005).
4 Among seminal references and recent reviews on this topic are Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead (eds.), Transitions from Authoritarian Rule, 4 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986); Juan J. Linz, and Alfred Stepan, Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins UP, 1996); David L. Epstein, et al., 'Democratic transitions', American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 50 No.3 (2006): 551-569; Barbara Geddes, 'What do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?', Annual Review of Political Science, Vol. 2 (1999): 115-144.
5 Thomas Carothers, 'The End of the Transition Paradigm', Journal of Democracy, Vol. 13, No. 1, (January 2002): pp. 5-21; and AA. VV., 'Debating the Transition Paradigm', Journal of Democracy, Vol.13, No. 3 (July 2002): 5-38.
6 Robert Jervis, Perceptions and Misperceptions in International Politics. (Princeton : Princeton UP, 1976): 31.
7 Anthony Heath et al., 'The Globalization of Public Opinion Research', Annual Review of Political Science, Vol.8 (2005): 297.
8 John Aldrich, et al., 'Foreign Policy and the Electoral Connection', Annual Review of Political Science. Vol. 9 (2006): 496.

The growing concern with perceptions has even been reflected in the work of authors claiming the mantel of Realism, the traditionally dominant school in international security that has tended to focus primarily on the systemic international level and to highlight the importance of objective material imbalances of power. Yet, more recently, self-described Realist authors like Stephen Walt – with his concept of a balance of threats, significantly developed in the context of an analysis of Middle Eastern alliance politics – have pointed strongly toward the importance in international politics of varying perceptions. In this case, he argues that the 'level of threat' is determined by other factors besides relative power capabilities, including 'geographic proximity' and 'perceived intentions'.[9]

The importance of perceptions in international politics is even more evident in the growing salience of Contructivism in the field. If 'anarchy is what states make of it', as a key author of this new intellectual trend argues, then the influence of perceptions – of cultural lenses conceived in terms of shared beliefs – is vital.[10]

In other words, attention to perceptions has become much more a part of "normal" political science – in the Kuhnian sense – within the global arena.[11] This is seen not only in the number of articles and studies that now adopt such an approach. But also in the growing number of surveys, elite and otherwise, that have been organised in recent years on foreign policy matters, and of which *Foreign Policy* magazine and the Pew Global Attitudes Forum offer good examples, with Gallup presenting a particularly ambitious example by trying to elaborate a representative survey of all Muslims in a gigantic survey aimed at answering what seemed an urgent question after 9/11 to many in the West: namely, what are Arabs and Muslims thinking?[12]

This is also probably the case because there are now more diverse and well developed tools for gathering and evaluating public perceptions, and there is also a growing interest in surveys of particular elites – thus addressing the perennial debate around the claim that public opinion has relatively soft perceptions regarding external politics and is thus easily marginalised by more powerful and knowledgeable elites. These concerns are found reflected in the focus of this paper, precisely an elite survey, and in the fact that this survey is then complemented by other sources that include, but not exclusively, public opinion polls.

I.2. Surveying Euro-Mediterranean Perceptions on Political Change

Definitional clarity does not necessarily solve the problem of different perceptions of democracy or of the need and nature of political change. This raises a central question for this paper. Do people in the EU and people in the Southern Mediterranean, including Israel and Turkey, have different perceptions on what democracy is and how to make it work, as well as on the desirability of political change and what shape it should assume?

What is particularly important from our point of view is to understand whether, at the elite level of those most engaged in Euro-Mediterranean relations, there exists a gap between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean countries in perceptions regarding political reform. Whether there is in fact a belief that Southern Mediterranean countries are already democratic regimes, therefore making any talk of democratic transition and consolidation seem redundant? Whether the EU has or not a role to play in moving Southern Mediterranean countries towards liberal democracy? If it does, what tools should the EU use in Mediterranean democracy promotion, namely in terms of conditionality and benchmarking? But also, what kind of local political actors would act as the main drivers of that change and with whom should the EU become engaged? And last but not least, to what degree is political change affected by a number of factors specific to the South and the Mediterranean context? In this next section we will analyse these questions in terms of the findings provided by the EuroMeSCo elite survey, before then turning to other surveys aimed at public opinion in the region and to the kind of answers they provide to these questions.

Is there a Mediterranean Democratisation Process?

Can the Mediterranean area be defined as a potential arena for democratisation? In terms of our survey, the answer to this question can be seen as either contradictory or nuanced. It is a 'yes', in the sense that most of the respondents believe that the Southern Mediterranean countries are in general not democratic, because they are either engaged in a process of unconsolidated political change or are dominated by authoritarian regimes. Yet the dominant answer in the survey is pessimistic when it comes to predictions regarding

9 Stephen Walt, The Origins of Alliances. (Ithaca : Cornell UP, 1987): 5.
10 Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It : The Social Construction of Power Politics', International Organization, Vol.46 No.2 (Spring 1992): 391-425. See also e.g. Peter Katzenstein (ed.), The Culture of National Security : Norms and Identity in World Politics. (New York : Columbia, 1996).
11 Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. (Chicago : Chicago UP, 1996): 23-33.
12 Cf. Pew Global http://pewglobal.org; and Foreign Policy http://www.foreignpolicy.com; John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think. (Washinton DC: Gallup Press, 2008).

democratisation, with most respondents not believing that political change is inevitable or will inevitably lead to liberal democracy. It is also a 'no' in the sense that by far the majority believe – reflecting a deep awareness of the diversity alluded to in the previous paragraph – that the Southern Mediterranean area is simply too politically diverse to allow any such prediction to be made. In a certain sense, this answer – that different countries are going through different political processes – is of course an easy way out. But it still makes a point, because there are indeed significant differences, according to a number of indicators, in the political developments of the Southern Mediterranean countries.

We are therefore once again confronted with the problematic nature of the 'Mediterranean' as a regional label. We are again reminded that this labelling exercise, although not necessarily wrong *a priori*, should certainly be questioned to some degree through a more in-depth analysis. At the same time, what cannot be doubted, and that is certainly relevant to the subject of this paper, is that by systematically adopting this regional Mediterranean label in its official policy documents, the EU is expressing a very real and very important generic concern regarding political developments across the whole Southern Mediterranean neighbourhood. The Union worries about the possible regional spill-over effect and the potentially detrimental impact on Euro-Mediterranean relations of political changes, especially sudden and unexpected ones, across the shore of the Mediterranean. Moreover, not only can it be argued that the potential impact of mutual influences should be factored into the balance at least within the two sub-regions of the Middle East/Mashreq and the Maghreb, but also that some of the challenges and problems facing any process of democratic transition and consolidation seem to be at least partly shared across the Mediterranean, for reasons made clear in the following section.

Actors and Factors in a Mediterranean Democratisation Process

What are the main movers and shapers of a democratisation process? This, as will be further elaborated when assessing at the implications of this paper, unleashes a very complex discussion. Still, there are at least some key actors and factors that figure pre-eminently in the literature on transition, such as reformist leaders emerging from within existing regimes, the military, opposition parties and other non-governmental organisations, levels of economic development, as well as the regional and external contexts.[13]

As regards all these questions, our elite survey was quite clearly sceptical of the role of reformist leaders emerging from within the existing regimes. This may be an indication of a generic scepticism towards the role of reformist elites in democratic transitions in general. Or – and this is perhaps the more likely answer given the importance of actors of this kind in other democratisation processes, as is well attested in the literature – it may indicate a peculiar scepticism about the likelihood that reformist leaders will emerge in the Southern Mediterranean countries committed to major changes in their political system.

No less interesting, and raising very similar questions, is the fact that this elite survey does not regard the role of the military as particularly relevant to the process of democratisation, and although some respondents in the South did raise the issue, it was clearly only considered a marginal one. Again, this is unlikely to indicate that their role in the general process of transitions is not deemed as important – soldiers returning to their barracks and an enhanced sense of apolitical professionalism are at the heart of security sector reform and are seen as salient in many studies of democratisation. This possibly reflects the fact that the military is already perceived as subordinate to the civil power, even if not necessarily a democratic one, and therefore that the Armed Forces are not considered a major political actor in their own right; or, quite simply, it may indicate a belief that the military is unlikely to support significant political change.

According to those surveyed, the determining factor for the future of democratisation seems to be the existence of strong reformist political parties. Respondents from the South in particular, lend greater importance to this factor than to the more generic strength of civil society. It is worth underlining that this is especially in tune with recent literature on the failings and possibly remedies of democracy promotion, namely with Thomas Carothers arguing for the need to confront this weakest link.[14]

Less important, but still deemed very relevant by a significant number of respondents, are the levels of economic development, i.e. further sustained economic growth. The latter has been seen as a major factor – in its own right, or then as a major contributor to democratic consolidation – in the discussion of processes of democratic transition and consolidation,

13 E.g. Barbara Geddes, 'What do we know about democratization after twenty years?', in Annual Review of Political Science, 2 (1999): 115-144.
14 Thomas Carothers, Confronting the Weakest Link : Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies. (Washington DC : CEIP, 2006).

but the role of political parties has been relatively neglected. These crucial points will require further analysis later in this paper.

A certain degree of economic prosperity is usually seen as important in providing some kind of golden cushion in order to soften the relative fall in power of the existing elites, while at the same time visibly satisfying the expectations of economic improvement for the population at large, thus further legitimising any concessions made during the transition and helping to consolidate the legitimacy and popularity of any new institutions. By lending some importance to economic factors, but not in an overwhelming way, this survey still seems to reflect the more or less consensual present-day nature of the criticism directed against modernization theory with its economic determinism of democratisation – again, a point to be explored further along.

What may perhaps come as a surprise for some, is the fact that in this survey respondents from the North and the South see cultural and religious factors as essentially irrelevant in determining political change. Those who advocate reading Euro-Mediterranean relations as a facet of the clash of civilizations in the Southern Mediterranean will surely be surprised. Or for those arguing for democratization in the global South and in the Islamic World in particular as running counter to different non-Western cultural traditions – Asian or Islamic values – that shield, quite legitimately same claim, certain regions, from what they see as a European and American neo-colonial impositions of a foreign political regime.[15]

Also approached with great scepticism is the role of foreign pressure in the process of political change. Here, it is significant that even if still quite pessimistic, respondents from the South tended to be more optimistic about this factor than those from the North. This may well reflect the great uncertainty around post-Iraq democracy promotion, which has led a major analyst to argue that it must be salvaged from the Bush Administration's misuse, not least by the US learning from the EU and allowing it to become more involved. It may, however, also signal a fatigue rooted in the apparent lack of major results achieved in this field within the Barcelona Process, which seemed to have as one of its major objectives, still reflecting the prevalent post-Cold War mood, an increase in both economic and political convergence between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

These results must nonetheless be complemented with other responses from our elite survey. It is believed that the political role of Islam is growing across the Southern Mediterranean region – a trend mostly perceived as negative, even if only by a relatively small margin, amongst those who do not believe that this will have any major impact (either positive or negative) on the prospects of democratisation. Very few see it as a positive development. Many respondents could therefore claim to consistently deny that religious factors are a major factor shaping the democratisation process in the Southern Mediterranean. While most respondents acknowledge that a politicisation of Islam is in evidence, a significant number do not see this as necessarily detrimental to the process of democratisation. There are indeed those amongst the literature claiming that Islamic movements can be, or have to some degree already become, proponents of democratic change.[16] But there is clearly also a significant number of respondents who despite not considering religion, or Islam *per se*, necessarily as an obstacle to democratisation, still believe that the specific shape assumed by the current politicisation of religion in the South, may have a detrimental impact on the polities of the South.

The Role of the EU

The survey attempted not to lead the respondents to consider the EU in exclusive terms, as usually happens when dealing with the theme of Euro-Mediterranean relations, but rather to try and place the external action of Europe in the Mediterranean within a wider context. Generically, it can be said that the respondents tend to see the role of external actors in democracy promotion in quite sceptical terms. This is hardly a surprising finding in the current context of world affairs, yet it is clear that most respondents do think that the EU should be involved in democracy promotion in the Southern Mediterranean – except for some respondents from the South, particularly decision-makers, who believe in the more traditional virtues of non-intervention in internal affairs. Also of relevance is the fact that most respondents believe that the EU should be engaged in democracy promotion by means of positive conditionality.

This partiality for positive conditionality may partly explain the apparent paradox of the negative evaluation attributed to the role of external actors and the eagerness to involve

15 A typical example of this discussion of Asian or Muslim versus Western values is Samuel Huntington et al., The Clash of Civilizations. The Debate. (New York: WW Norton/Foreign Affairs : 1996).
16 Michael Emerson and Richard Youngs, Political Islam and European Foreign Policy. Perspectives from Muslim Democrats of the Mediterranean. (Brussels: CEPS, 2007).

the EU. It reflects a prevailing sense – as is indeed made explicit in the survey – that little could be expected from EU promotion of good governance in the context of the EMP by the use negative conditionality. This is due to the EU's reluctance to resort to sanctions that might strain relations with existing regimes or undermine the living standards of the local population and its ability to interact with the outside world, as well as further increasing its dependence on the State, and that therefore actually have a high foreign policy cost while also undermining the chances for further democratisation. The isolation of Libya is sometimes cited as an example of this in the region, as is, of course, the impact on Iraq of sanctions and international isolation.

This new positive tool has been given the benefit of the doubt, and is deemed by many to have the potential to achieve better results. The wider trend in current analysis seems, therefore, to believe in the limited impact of external actors, even if for normative reasons the EU should intervene and the best available path is positive conditionality – a point further elaborated in the next chapter on the analytical and policy implications of this paper.

I.3. Other Polls and Surveys

What were then, the main conclusions of the most recent and most significant studies of public perceptions regarding the key themes dealt with in the survey? Namely: whether a democratisation process is in evidence across the Mediterranean? What are the main actors and factors conditioning democratisation, or the absence of it? And, what is the role of external western actors in the process?

As regards polls, one basic and common problem is that the questionnaire itself and the countries surveyed will not usually coincide with the questions and the regions of greatest concern. Nonetheless, they still manage to provide additional complementary information. A Zogby poll, for instance, found that democracy and Islam are considered far from incompatible by many in Arab countries. In the six Arab countries polled, majorities or pluralities believe that an Islamist government would respect democratic law. The sole exception is Lebanon, with its significant non-Muslim population; but the numbers do vary significantly, ranging from 36% in Jordan to 44% in Egypt and 46% in Morocco, and up to 70% in the UAE and 71% in Saudi Arabia. In all these countries, again with the exception of Lebanon, *Sharia* law is seen as one – but not the only – source of legislation, further indicating that democratisation is not necessarily seen as a first step towards westernisation[17].

A recent and exhaustive Gallup survey, which interviewed more than 50.000 people from across the Muslim World, shows that 'substantial majorities' in nearly all Muslim states surveyed – including 94% in Egypt – would direct political change by 'drafting a constitution' and 'would guarantee freedom of speech, defined as "allowing all citizens to express their opinion on the political, social, and economic issues of the day". And while therefore 'acknowledging and admiring many aspects of Western democracy, those surveyed do not favour a wholesale adoption of Western models of democracy. Many appear to want their own democratic model that incorporates *Sharia*, and not one that is simply dependent on Western values. Actually, few respondents associate "adopting Western values" with Muslim political and economic progress'[18].

The negative view held in most of the Arab world of the US intervention in Iraq – and that was once again confirmed in a recent poll clearly showing that a majority did not approve, ranging from 68% in Saudi Arabia up to 96% in Jordan, with Egypt polling 83% and Jordan 76% – most certainly will not contribute to the popularity of external intervention aimed at regime change. Yet there is also reason to believe, perhaps because some key European countries have loudly criticised such an approach, that there *is* differentiation in the Arab World's attitude regarding the West. The 2007 Gallup Poll on how 'Great Powers' were perceived in North Africa and the Middle East, revealed a marked contrast amongst public perception in the Arab World, attributing US and UK international leadership the lowest level of credibility, in comparison with more than double that for Germany and France and even better to Japan and China. This may merely reflect a temporary phenomenon and it is unclear how it would then translate to the complex reality of the EU's external action, but although not linearly read, it is still a relevant sign of resistance to westernisation, if not necessarily to democracy, particularly when it comes with a stick. The analysis here developed is thus certainly reinforced, but it is worth noting that in the same poll a regional median of 50% believed nothing could justify the conflict in Iraq, while only 8% thought it was legitimate[19].

Lastly, while we should not exaggerate or see as set in stone the mutual distrust evident between Europe and its Mediterranean Arab and Muslim neighbours, as well as the suspi-

17 Zogby Poll, Six Arab Nation Survey Report to the World Economic Forum & Arab Business Council. (s.l. Zogby International, 2005): 9.
18 John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, Who Speaks for Islam? (Washington : Gallup, 2008) cit. in http://www.gallup.com/poll/104731/Muslims-Want-Democracy-Theocracy.aspx [06.03.2008].
19 http://www.gallup.com/poll/102694/Mideast-North-Africa-Views-Powerful-Nations-Differ.aspx

cion of Muslims in the West and of Westerners in the Muslim World, the existence of this problem cannot be ignored. This, along with the other factors we have already alluded to, certainly help explain some of the complexities tied to Western European efforts to condition political change in the Southern Mediterranean. But to delve more deeply into this particular matter, we must first look at the state of the academic debate as regards the fundamental points associated with any process of political change, which are highlighted in our own elite survey, as well as in some of the other polls here mentioned.

II. Stakes and Opportunities in Promoting Democracy within the Euro-Mediterranean Area

What are the implications of these findings in terms of the stakes and opportunities for democracy promotion in the Euro-Mediterranean area? What is at stake in the realm of Euro-Mediterranean relations? In other words, how can these findings be related to a wider debate? It is essential to sketch answers to these questions before one can attempt to sum up the discussion with policy-oriented recommendations regarding the role of Europe, which will be presented in the last chapter of this paper.

II.1. Of Waves and Timings: Why is there no Mediterranean Wave of Democratisation?

Starting from the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, through to the official strategy papers for the region and the conclusions of the latest – November 2007 – Euro-Mediterranean Meeting, they leave no room for doubt that the EU's aim is to create a Mediterranean region of peace, prosperity and democracy. But is this any more than wishful thinking?

Looking at the current state of affairs, few would claim that a Mediterranean wave of democratisations is taking place. As our survey made clear, and as was confirmed by a variety of other sources, the Southern Mediterranean States, and even if we consider this in terms of the two arguably more coherent sub-units of the Maghreb and the Mashreq respectively, seem to be pursuing significantly different political paths. These range from the replacement of Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad by his son Bashir, to the re-election of President Mubarak in Egypt, to the referendum allowing President bin Ali of Tunisia to dispute the presidential election for a fourth term, to the holding of pluralistic parliamentary elections in Morocco, Algeria, Jordan and Palestine with more or less limited impact on the decision-making centres of power. There is then also Israel, with its consolidated democratic system, but challenged by a problematic relationship with its own non-Jewish citizens and an internationally contested occupation of the Palestinian territory. Last but not least, there is Turkey, which seems to be the most recent but isolated example of a relatively successful – certainly in terms of electoral mobilisation – Mediterranean transition towards democracy; yet, as recent events have showed, one that is still at the consolidation stage.

Democratisation processes have emerged in waves. This is a concept that was popularised by Samuel Huntington, with his notion of an Ibero-American and Catholic Third Wave of Democratisation that started with Portugal in 1974 before then moving on to Spain and other countries[20]. These waves of democratisation reflect the importance of similarity of circumstances, but also of external factors, which have also been explored in recent works, particularly by Lawrence Whitehead and Jon Pevehouse, who explored the so-called 'contagion effect' or 'legitimation effect' – pressure and support in the shape of either control, or more likely, of conditionality – making reference in both cases to the EU as a especially active democracy promoter, even if not specifically in the Mediterranean context[21].

Why then is a democratic wave not surfacing in the Southern Mediterranean today? Or is this the wrong question to ask, questioning instead why democracy should be expected to blossom everywhere, and therefore suggesting that political structures and political change should be developed in the Arab Southern Mediterranean countries in their own terms[22]. Intellectually, this is all very well of course, but such a radical change of views would have major implications for any advancement toward a Euro-Mediterranean community of States.

Moreover, and before looking at some of the potential blockages in terms of key actors and factors at play in the region today, maybe it would prove useful to briefly go through those that in the past shaped the successful Mediterranean democratisations of Portugal and Spain, and that are presently operating in Turkey[23]. One shared trait is the absence of any major episode of violence, even in the case of the Portuguese revolution, and taking into account Spain and Turkey's ongoing problems with terrorism. Another important common feature, again even in the Portuguese case, was the fact that the institutions of the new democratic regime resulted, in part, from a negotiated transition. True, in Portugal (unlike in Spain or Turkey) there was a revolutionary demise of the top elements of the former political elite, and even some degree of loss of State control, especially in the first half of 1975, with mass mobilisations, street demonstrations and widespread strikes. Only one key element of the old elite remained a decisive player in the process of Portuguese democratisation – the Army[24]. The Armed Forces also played a crucial role in the Turkish case and in the Spanish transition, even if it was less visible in the latter case due to the mediating role of the King[25].

In all three cases, however, certain elements of the existing elite retained some power during part of the transitional period – the Armed Forces, through a Revolutionary Council in Portugal and a National Security Council in Turkey, and in the Spanish case, the Monarchy,

20 Samuel Huntington, The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).
21 Jon Pevehouse, Democracy from Above? Regional Organizations and Democratization. (New York: Cambridge University Press. 2005); Laurence Whitehead (ed.), The International Dimensions of Democratization. Europe and the Americas, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
22 Lisa Anderson, 'Searching Where the Light Shines: Studying Democratization in the Middle East', Annual Review of Political Science, Vol. 9 (2006): 208-210.
23 For a much more developed and nuanced argument see Alexandra B. Brito, Political Liberalisation and Transition to Democracy: Lessons from the Mediterranean and Beyond: Morocco, Turkey, Spain and Portugal. (s.l.: EuroMeSCo, 2006), EuroMeSCo Paper No.58.
24 For the Portuguese transition in English see Douglas Porch, The Portuguese Armed Forces and the Revolution. (London : Croom Helm, 1977); Kenneth Maxwell, The Making of Portuguese Democracy. (Cambridge : CUP, 1995); A. Costa Pinto, The Salazar Dictatorship and European Fascism : Problems of Interpretation. (New York : Columbia UP, 1995). For a wider view, including the Portuguese and Spanish case see Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins UP, 1996). For a more specific but important point see: Eduardo Soler y Lecha et al., Drawing Lessons From Turkey's and Spain's Security Sector Reforms for the Mediterranean. (s.l.: EuroMeSCo, 2006), EuroMeSCo Paper No.52.
25 For Turkey see Sylvia Kedourie (ed.), Turkey Before and After Ataturk: Internal and External Affairs. (London : Frank Cass, 1999). For Spain and the particularly important role of the king see Paul Preston, Juan Carlos: Steering Spain from Dictatorship to Democracy. (London : Harper Perennial, 2005).

in close association with the Army. This was the result of negotiations between existing and dissident elites. Portugal had two MFA-Parties Pacts in 1975, while Spain had the famous Moncloa Pact between the Opposition Parties and the Government. No such explicit pact was achieved in Turkey – although for a while there seemed to be a tacit understanding between the AKP and the Army, namely regarding the secular profile of the President and the role of the National Security Council – and this absence perhaps partly explains the country's current political uncertainties.

The military played a major role in all three countries, as did the Monarchy in the Spanish case, and even – if less visibly and to a lesser degree – the Presidency in the Portuguese case. In all three cases some non-democratic institutions, primarily the Army and the King, retained a degree of control over the political process for some time. In the Portuguese case, this consensual state of affairs was an explicitly temporary device. Although no rigid time-frame was established, the mandatory number of years before the Constitution could be revised and the two thirds majority required for such a revision, as well as the prospect of EU membership, naturally sorted this out. In the Spanish case, the role of the King was permanent, yet substantially limited in terms of executive powers, if not necessarily in informal authority and influence, from very early on. No such explicit mechanisms exist in Turkey to limit the role of the military or the role and profile of the head of State, and the recent political clash between the military and the dominant party over the presidential election reflect this.

Two key points to emerge from these cases are worth highlighting. One is that whatever the precise model followed, the problem remains how to ensure that democracy is not the electoral road to absolute power, thus avoiding an internal security dilemma that could lead to political violence and even civil war. This type of guarantee is particularly important given that it is often argued, not least by the incumbent regiments determined to remain in power, that Islamist mass movements in the Southern Mediterranean are in favour of political change but are not democratic. They are for one man, one vote, once. And yet in these three cases of Mediterranean democratisation – those of Portugal, Spain and Turkey – it is also obvious that with the right checks and balances, a liberal democratic system can be erected by non-democratic political actors. This option often represents the least bad solution and is one that all can agree upon in that it at least offers minimal guarantees to all.

The second crucial feature of these three cases was the EU's role in encouraging and consolidating regime change. It deterred reversion by stressing the high costs of any such action in terms of funding and also the possibility of future membership. It offered financial and commercial incentives that helped legitimise the new regime by enabling it to deliver not only greater freedom, but also greater prosperity. It made existing elites more willing to compromise because any turbulence or uncertainty of regime change could be seen as a relatively short-term period en route to the Western norm. If the EU was apparently willing, why then was it now unable to advance democratisation as effectively in the Southern Mediterranean?

II.2. Possible Actors and Factors in a Mediterranean Democratisation Process.

In his famous book *The Third Wave,* Huntington famously stated that 'democracies are created not by causes, but by causers'. Transition is indeed often seen primarily as an elite choice. Subsequent consolidation is also frequently portrayed as driven by elite pacts and consensus[26]. As Schmitter further elaborates, there is no case of transition where the incumbent regime is not in some way already undermined or fractured. This, however, points to wider factors, to the underlying causes conditioning actors – a point that not even Huntington would contest. Yet the focused nature of much of the literature on leaders, and also on the risks of democratisation in the Southern Mediterranean, is to be expected.

Why is the type of interaction between different actors and factors that leads to democratisation not at play in the Southern Mediterranean today? This fact has led some to advocate pacts as the way out of this Arab predicament – a path that also poses serious problems, particularly when the pact strategy is then qualified by those with the need to exclude Islamists from any such arrangement [27]. After all, democracy can hardly develop in 'Arab societies without the participation of movements that command wide popular support', as is the case of at least some Islamist movements. Their participation offers the possibility of normalising the Islamists, transforming them into political actors able and willing to play according to the liberal democratic rules of gradualism, moderation and alternation in power[28]. On the other hand, their exclusion – and for that matter, the adoption of any kind of exclusivist claim against Islam in the public sphere – while justifiable by the need to keep religion out of politics and to prevent any one organisation from gaining monopoly

26 Samuel Huntington, The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century. (Norman : University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); the most lengthy in-depth discussion is undoubtably in Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, & Laurence Whitehead (eds.), Transitions from Authoritarian Rule, 4 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986).
27 Steven A. Cook, 'Getting to Arab Democracy : The Promise of Pacts', JoD, Vol. 17 No.1 (Jan. 2007): 63-74.
28 Amr Hamzawy, The Key to Arab Reform: Moderate Islamists. (Washington DC : CEIP, 2005), CEIP Policy Brief No. 40.

over Islamic politics, even if it could be made to work, might still weaken the chances of democratic reform and increase the likelihood of violent radicalisation amongst some more impatient members of those excluded movements. A fundamental lesson to emerge from transition studies is in fact that democracies are not only established by democrats – the Communists in Portugal or Spain being a case in point. Islamists, who are often capable of mobilising mass popular support, are key actors *if* they can be co-opted.

This is, therefore, a basic bottom line, both in terms of the specific question of Islamism and the wider question of political parties. To decree that the Islamic and Arab World is incompatible with democracy and economic growth would be to make the major mistake of falling into the fallacy of essentialism. There are non-Arab Islamic countries that are struggling democracies, such as Indonesia or Turkey. Acknowledgement of the challenges – economic, social, and institutional – faced along the path of change in the Arab Middle East is elementary and has been expressed before, for instance in the Arab Development Report[29]. Such a realisation must however be complemented by the crucial observation that a liberal democracy or market economy is also not natural to Europe or traditional. The continent had to confront problems and oppositions very similar to the ones now faced in other parts of the world. In the cases of Portugal and Spain, for a long time considered the more economically-backward members of Europe, this should be particularly obvious, especially since the essentialist arguments about Mediterranean Catholic Europe's intrinsic inability to move toward democracy, put forward only three or four decades ago, are very similar to those being used today as regards the Mediterranean Muslim countries.

This is not to say that in the future the Southern Mediterranean will necessarily follow the same kind of relatively bloodless and negotiated transition. Still, the comparison seems useful and the possibility of Arab democratisation through pact-making deserves to be considered, even if for a number of reasons it may prove difficult[30]. This relates, first of all, to the importance of the security apparatus and notions of national security and sovereignty in what are post-colonial and, in some cases, also recently formed States that have often been subject to informal Western imperial control. It makes, for instance, the foreign pressure not to mention Westernisation, which represented such a powerful source of legitimacy in the democratisations of Portugal and Spain, much more problematic in the context of the Southern Mediterranean. Reflecting this, and informed by the recent large-scale Gallup poll of the Muslim world, Esposito and Mogahed conclude that: 'actually, few respondents associate "adopting Western values" with Muslim political and economic progress'[31].

There is then also the extreme importance of patronage and personal connections, as opposed to institutional links, as well as the central role played by the State as provider of power and resources to the elite and even to the middle class. This, however, is a problem familiar in Southern Europe and it may – if certain pacts are achieved – work in favour of the democratisation process, even if perhaps it fails to develop very strong institutions or political parties. Parties have, in fact, been generally identified as a weak link in the analysis of democratisation and the practice of democracy promotion[32].

Due to these difficulties, and partly based on the Turkish experience, some have advocated for a sort of partial democratisation that leaves key "sovereign" areas of power out of the electoral contest, which would be open only to everyday governance for a relatively prolonged period of time. However, this proposal for creating the conditions needed to stimulate a Mediterranean wave of democratisation, and which recognises that Southern Mediterranean States are very much internally security-oriented and determined to maintain control and prevent a security dilemma from spiralling out of hand, raises further problems.

The first and most obvious one is how widespread would this democratisation be and for how long would it be limited to certain areas? If no deadline is set, how then can one distinguish it from a façade democracy? These two key questions are of course linked to a crucial third one: will people view this exercise as a valid form of political legitimisation, or will they come to regard it as merely an empty exercise in the formalities of democracy, lacking the core that should lead to the demobilisation of voters, and hence stimulating a more acute crisis of legitimacy in the medium to long term? Some have indeed pointed to the pluralistic nature and fairness of results, but also the very low voter turnout, of the recent elections in Algeria and Morocco as evidence that the threats linked to disaffection and disillusionment are already causing an impact.

There is also the question of how to address possible, and even probable, clashes between the elected majority and the permanent State apparatus? This is a problem that was recently posed in a dramatic fashion in Turkey, and one that might well recur in key controversial

29 UNDP-Regional Bureau for Arab States, Arab Human Development Report : Towards Freedom in the Arab World. (New York : UNDP, 2005).
30 Karen Kramer, 'Arab Political Pacts : An Unlikely Scenario', Journal of Democracy, Vol. 17 No.4 (2007): 160-165.
31 John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, 'Do Muslims Want Democracy and Theocracy?', in http://www.gallup.com (10.03.2008).
32 An important exception, and an important reference for this analysis is Thomas Carothers. Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies (Washington DC : CEIP, 2006).

areas of this type of regime, such as budget and foreign policy, making them chronically unstable. More importantly, is this not simply a way of delaying the impending crisis? Certain fundamental questions are unavoidable, especially if a slow rate of economic growth relative to demographic growth is threatening the future prosperity of at least the poorest and least commodity-endowed of Arab States.

A more vital objection to this exercise regards authoritarian leaders' poor record of institutional reform. This has become a central theme in the latest round of discussions about the importance of sequencing political changes – and different levels of development – in democratisation, which gets to the heart of the current debate on democracy promotion and the role of political parties in this process.

II.3. Between Democracy Promotion and Chaos

For Europe, 'the dream of pluralism and open public spheres goes hand in hand with the risk of authoritarian backlash and radical Islamist insurgencies.'[33] Recent research on democratisation has focused very markedly on a key dilemma characterising European democracy promotion efforts: although the ultimate aim is to promote peace, stability and good relations, this may be incompatible with the advancement of democracy because of the risk that the latter will rather lead to violent chaos and the institution of a new authoritarian regime.

Snyder and Mansfield in particular have argued that while there may be no precise sequencing in democratisation and democracy promotion, there are major risks involved in precipitating democratisation within an institutional vacuum – Iraq being a prime example of this. It may lead to a sectarian crystallisation of political allegiances and to violent confrontation given that in such a context, if there exist no clear rules governing the public space, no neutral arbitrers, and no experience of non-violent confrontation, an internal security dilemma becomes rooted very quickly, with each different political party or faction fearing that if they do not arm themselves with a militia, others will, leaving them not only powerless, but also vulnerable. The argument, which is fully developed in Snyder and Mansfield's book *Electing to Fight*, revolves around the notion of democratic peace and encourages a re-thinking of present policies of democracy promotion. In their view, 'countries taking early steps from authoritarian rule towards electoral politics are especially prone to civil and international war, violent revolutions and sectarian bloodshed' – a point they try to demonstrate through a number of tests, which though unlikely to put an end to the debate, manage to provide at least some vindication to their claim[34]. This leads the authors to caution that while there may be no one-size-fits-all sequence in the democratisation process, the precipitation of democratisation can potentially lead to violence. In addition, the physical and institutional destruction, as well as the political traumas and myths caused by civil war, may in fact make the prospect of democracy an even more distant one[35]. This could be seen as a more elaborate variant of the argument made by a number of authors, from Huntington's initial claim in 1968 that the 'most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government, but their degree of government', to that more recently argued by Muhammad Ayhoob, Fareed Zakaria and Francis Fukuyama, to the effect that liberal democracy may be at loggerheads with state-building and that the latter must necessarily take precedence in the Third World[36].

This position has however met with some criticism. In a recent number of the *Journal of Democracy*, for instance, Thomas Carothers argued against what he sees as a sequencing fallacy that echoes the old prejudices of modernisation theory. He claims that to delay pressure towards democratisation, while waiting for the proper sequence to emerge, endogenously ignores the difficulty authoritarian regimes have historically shown in moving from a monopoly over power towards its institutionalisation. Fragile democracies may actually be better prepared to make this crucial and always difficult step, because 'governments in the developing world have a terrible record as builders of competent, impartial institutions [...] going beyond establishing a monopoly of force to creating effective institutions'[37]. Sheri Berman goes even further, pointing out that transitions within power always imply paying a certain price, even in apparently very successful and peaceful contexts like Spain, and that there is thus no point in trying to escape the payment of costs expressed in the form of instability and even violence. States can, at most, hope to control these costs, which may actually be easier to do if political change is not blocked for too long[38].

Notwithstanding the divergence of views, it is note-worthy that all the authors mentioned, including Carothers and Berman, argue for modesty in the expectations regarding the impact of foreign intervention in democratisation. Any process of power transition is bound to be difficult and fraught with dangers. Foreigners can only have a limited impact and,

33 Amr Hamzawy Understanding Arab Political Reality: One Lens is not Enough.
34 Edward D. Mansfield & Jack Snyder, Electing to Fight : Why Emerging Democracies Go to War. (Cambridge MA : 2007).
35 Edward D. Mansfield & Jack Snyder, 'The Sequencing "Falacy"', Journal of Democracy, Vol. 18 No.3 (2007): 5-9.
36 Samuel Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Mohammed Ayoob, Third World Security Dilemma: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International Conflict. (Boulder : Lynne Ryner, 1995); Francis Fukuyama and Michael McFaul, 'Should Democracy be Promoted or Demoted?', The Washington Quarterly, Vol. 31 No.1 (2007): 23-45; Fareed Zakaria, The Future of Freedom : Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad (2003)
37Thomas Carothers, ´How Democracies Emerge : The Sequencing Fallacy', Journal of Democracy, Vol. 18 (2007): 12-27.
38 Sheri Berman, ´How Democracies Emerge : Lessons from Europe', Journal of Democracy, Vol. 18 (2007): 28-41.

especially if they become too visible – with the extreme case being foreign military occupation – this intervention may very well be counter-productive. Externally-driven democracy promotion and foreign benchmarking has a disappointingly minor impact on political conflicts perceived as vital by local players: no amount of exogenous pressure or incentives can convince them to abandon a position they see as crucial for their own political survival. It is relatively easy to impose strong leaders/collaborators with support from abroad, even if then it is often less easy to sustain them in power, as the history of the relationship between the West and the Middle East also shows. But it is certainly much harder to build democratic and accountable institutions, free and fair elections, political pluralism, and a real alternation in power. Over-ambition can do more harm than good. Many times, the normal strategy is to deliberately set weak benchmarking levels so as to reaffirm the democratic norm without then being forced to enforce it rigorously[39].

This is nonetheless not the same as saying that foreign democracy promotion, and more specifically the role of regional organisations, is irrelevant. As, for instance, Jon Pevehouse showed in a recent book, the EU has been particularly important and effective as an organisation pressing for democratisation[40]. What is however clear, is that this kind of mechanism works in the medium to long term, even if more in consolidating, rather than initiating democratisation, and having greater impact in certain regions, namely Central and Eastern Europe, over others, such as the Mediterranean. Underlying conditions, local actors, as well as dominant regional trends are all crucial factors, the question being to what extent and in what kind of mix.

When Carothers argues for the need to salvage democracy promotion from the sequencing fallacy and from the more radical remedies of the Bush Administration, he suggests a focus on supporting the gradual processes of change as a good medium road. The key issue here is trying to change the cost/benefit calculations – negotiating between the rising cost of repression and the acceptable cost/risk of toleration/negotiation/transition. This appears to create an important scope for third parties avoiding the internal security dilemma, particularly as regards the EU's democratisation method specifically commended by Carothers. Does this represent a revenge of the EU method of gradual democratisation, positive conditionality and long term engagement?

As such, is the EU perhaps what remains amiss to jump-start a democratic wave in the Southern Mediterranean? Is Europe not sufficiently present in the Southern Mediterranean, in contrast to the influence it operated in the democratisation processes of Portugal, Spain and Turkey, or even Central Europe? This might be the case, and it may continue to be in the future since promises of partnership and of a free trade area are not enough to encourage a risky substantial regime-change, even with the added incentives of positive conditionality. Therefore, the current difficulties may merely reveal that there is no peace of mind, nor any pacification of relations in an attempt to build a community based upon a model of democratic peace that is rejected by non-democratic elites. After all, Portugal and Spain had a realistic perspective grounded in short-term membership and significant funding, while full EU membership is the aim now driving many of the political changes being implemented in Turkey. Finally, in all these cases, Europeanisation and westernisation were not deemed problematic: democracy might well be a Western imposition, but those countries concerned wanted to be accepted as part of the West. This is a tenuous, and perhaps even inapplicable, argument in the case of the Middle East. The route to democratic legitimacy must be much more obviously local and not externally led.

39 AA. VV., Benchmarking Human Rights and Democratic Development within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (s.l. : EuroMeSCo, 2007) EuroMeSCo Annual Report 3.
40 Jon C. Pevehouse, Democracy from Above. Regional Organizations and Democratization. (Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 2005).

III. Conclusions and Recommendations.

What Role and What Policy for Europe?

These are hard times for democracy promotion, even if evidently more so for the US than for the EU[41]. Yet Europe can hardly ignore political trends and remain aloof from the problems of its Southern Mediterranean neighbours. This of course raises the question of how far this preoccupation will then translate into some kind of European "imposition". Nonetheless, to argue that this would necessarily be the case ignores the fact that the need for reform and progress has been acknowledged (in various shapes and forms) by many in the South, and not least by the current leaders of most Mediterranean countries, due to a desire for closer relations with the EU.

The Mediterranean, the Middle Sea, and the Middle East are not the Middle of Nowhere for Europe. Even if we accept the arguments presented by Edward Luttwak in his deliberately provocative article – and some even regarding US interests contest – Europe does not share the luxury available to a distant America of ignoring the Mediterranean, all the more so if, as he predicts, the area becomes increasingly poor and backward[42]. Because Europe shares the same shores as its Southern Mediterranean neighbours, their problems, especially if serious, will most certainly eventually reach it. The ultimate European nightmare would see the cutting off of vital trade routes, particularly those supplying energy (oil/gas), accompanied by massive waves of refugees escaping from troubles across the sea – "boatpeople" who cannot be simply turned away, as happens with illegal migrants.

The EU's predicament when dealing with choices concerning political reform in the Southern Mediterranean are, on the one hand, highlighted by the importance of shared norms, principles and values in building stronger links between the North and South of the Mediterranean, which would effectively advance democracy promotion. On the other hand, and as was recently highlighted in a study on security communities, reliable expectations – based on internal stability and predictability in external behaviour – are essential in developing stable security relations and communities. As the author puts it, serious unrest and internal violence generate 'uncertainty and tension among states, inhibiting trust and a sense of collective identity' so that the 'benchmark of a security community – dependable expectations of peaceful change – should apply as much within states' as, more obviously, 'between them'.[43]

Hence, the core aim of the Barcelona Declaration – namely 'setting up an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity' – is likely to stand as the ultimate benchmark in evaluating EU-Mediterranean relations, whether or not within the EMP framework. The trouble is that many doubt whether the precondition put forward for this, of 'strengthening democracy and human rights', is actually compatible in the short term with the stated aim. Certain policy recommendations targeting EU-Mediterranean relations in terms of political reforms seem nonetheless to make particular sense at this moment in time, taking into account the current state of analysis and the concerns expressed in a number of surveys.

The good news is that some of the recommendations and criticisms contained in both the survey and the subsequent recent analysis have already been incorporated into EU policy. Two such examples are the need for greater differentiation between significantly different countries, which is being to some extent achieved through the new European Neighbourhood Policy. The other, is the advantage of pursuing positive conditionality, particularly in an area so sensitive to post-imperial pressurising by former colonial powers.

41 Thomas Carothers, ´The Blacklash against Democracy Promotion´, Foreign Affairs, Vol. 85 No.56 (2006): 55-68.
42 Edward Luttwak, 'The Middle of No Where', Prospect, No. 134 (2007) in www.prospect-magazine.co.uk [30.05.2007]. For a critique a from someone also with conservative credential see Niall Ferguson, Ferguson, Niall (2007), 'Yes, the Mideast matters', LA Times, 18.06.2007 in www.latimes.com [20.06.2007].
43 Laurie Nathan, 'Domestic Instability and Security Communities', The European Journal of International Relations, Vol. 12 No. 2 (June 2006): 275-299.

Recommendations

1. Be mindful of ownership and be aware of the past.

The promotion of democracy is always about developing the capacities required for sustainable and legitimate self-government. Concerns about how efforts to aid political change are going to be perceived are particularly important in a region such as the Mediterranean, with its recent past of informal imperialism. Therefore, European efforts in this potentially polemical field should be discreet, if not so much so as to be liable to accusations of clandestine interference; and if possible, these efforts should be directed, and also perceived to be directed, towards local empowerment.

2. Take care not to associate too closely with US-led democracy promotion.

No matter what the intrinsic merits or good intentions of American programs, and despite the likely convergence in the ultimate aims of promoting political change in the region, for the time being, and as American academics readily admit, US democracy promotion has been tainted by the Iraq war and by the shock and awe of sudden regime change. There is no reason why the EU should not informally coordinate efforts with the US, but at the same time, no real benefits – in terms of the Southern Mediterranean public perception of EU efforts – could result from a formal public association between European and American initiatives.

3. *Do not expect democratisation to defeat terrorism, poverty or any other serious problems.*

Authoritarianism and misery breeds resentment and sometimes produces violent opposition. Yet strongmen may also provide prosperity and implement quite effective repressive remedies, at least in the short to medium term. Extreme poverty instils such urgent basic needs that it often prevents the development of any kind of significant political activism. Moreover, it is always extremely difficult, and very often impossible (except in the case of wider political movements with armed-wings), to move violent groups – once they crystallise and begin to define themselves based on a willingness to use violence – back towards ordinary politics. More pluralistic politics tends to drain strength from violent movements in the long term, but it does not ensure their disappearance. Liberal democracy should be seen as a motivating goal, in conformity with EU principles and in accordance with its own objective to become closer to its Southern Mediterranean partners, and not as an automatic fix for all the problems plaguing the region. Yet having said this, even though democracy does not solve all problems, the EU should not be deterred from promoting it alongside more specific policies aimed at other problems.

4. *Support institutional capacity-building in these societies, with a focus on «party building».*

A strong and active civil society is not in itself enough to advance democratisation, as both some of the most interesting analytical literature and the EuroMeSCo elite survey reveal. What is lacking in the South is precisely solid, diverse and empowered plural actors who can enhance voters' power of influence by offering a sustained choice of policy alternatives. This is the consequence of a political field gripped by the *status quo* and dominated by the Islamists, which are often the only organised opposition with any roots, despite their semi-clandestine character. Indirect aid is probably one way forward. European parties should be encouraged to provide support to existing or potential Mediterranean counterparts. This seems a possibility worth exploring, not least in light of the positive experience in this respect in the cases of Spain and Portugal. Any EU involvement in this field would evidently have to remain strictly impartial, providing equal amounts of help in terms of neutral organisational capacity-building to any and all parties – government supporters and opposition, Islamists and Secularists alike – conditional only on their firm commitment to non-violence, the electoral process and the respect for basic political rights.

5. Be Credible.

There are dangers involved in maintaining the *status quo*, as well as in supporting political change. By remaining aloof, the EU risks consolidating a perception of complicity with repressive regimes and their double standards and double talk, thus undermining any claim it may have to the role as a normative power in global affairs. Moreover, such an attitude might also have hidden costs in terms of an objectively- calculated evaluation of interests. Historically-speaking, delayed, frozen or half-hearted reforms have often led to more radical revolutions and/or to the spread of political violence. On the other hand, democratic transition is an uncertain business that has at times unquestionably led away from the intended electoral politics towards violent sectarian confrontation. The virtuousness of intentions is no guarantee of an equally virtuous final product. The EU should not promise others, or even itself, more than it can deliver. Moreover, conditionality can be applied to parties in opposition, as well as to those in power, but it must be coherent with the wider aims of the EU and to some degree reward those who are willing to move away from violence and enter the political process.

6. Be attentive to endogenous processes and support these.

A third party can prove very important in transition and consolidation processes, much more so than in initiating change, and often it remains relatively invisible in terms of public perceptions. A third party can, namely, offer assurances against the internal security dilemma and help cushion the relative demise of the ruling elite. This in turn depends upon sustained multiple engagements that allow for accurate analysis and safe bets, and which offer enticing prizes. Again, the case of Western European intervention – the scope of which is only now beginning to become more clarified – in the Portuguese and Spanish democratisation processes can serve as examples of good practice, remembering, however, that in both cases some degree of Westernisation was not unwelcome.

7. Be Realistic.

This point is applicable to all previous six. It means having realistic expectations about the difficulty and risks associated with democratic transition and consolidation, establishing realistic aims, and finally, developing a realistic assessments of the situation. A number of implications are here encompassed. The latter point in particular has been the object of a previous EuroMeSCo report on benchmarking[44]. This is an important condition to ensuring that exaggerated expectations do not lead to excessive intervention and later, following their more or less inevitable demise, to excessive disengagement.

44 See footnote 39.

Previous EuroMeSCo Publications

Lena Kolarska-Bobińska, Magdalena Mughrabi, *New EU Member States' Policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: the Case of Poland,* EuroMeSCo Paper 69, June 2008.

Roberto Aliboni, Ahmed Driss, Tobias Schumacher, Alfred Tovias, *Putting the Mediterranean Union in Perspective*, EuroMeSCo Paper 68, June 2008.

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Amr Elshobaki, Khaled Hroub, Daniela Pioppi, Nathalie Tocci, *Domestic Change and Conflict in the Mediterranean: The Cases of Hamas and Hezbollah,* EuroMeSCo Paper 65, January 2008.

Amr Elshobaki, Khaled Hroub, Daniela Pioppi, Nathalie Tocci, *Domestic Change and Conflict in the Mediterranean: The Cases of Hamas and Hezbollah*, EuroMeSCo Paper 64, January 2008.

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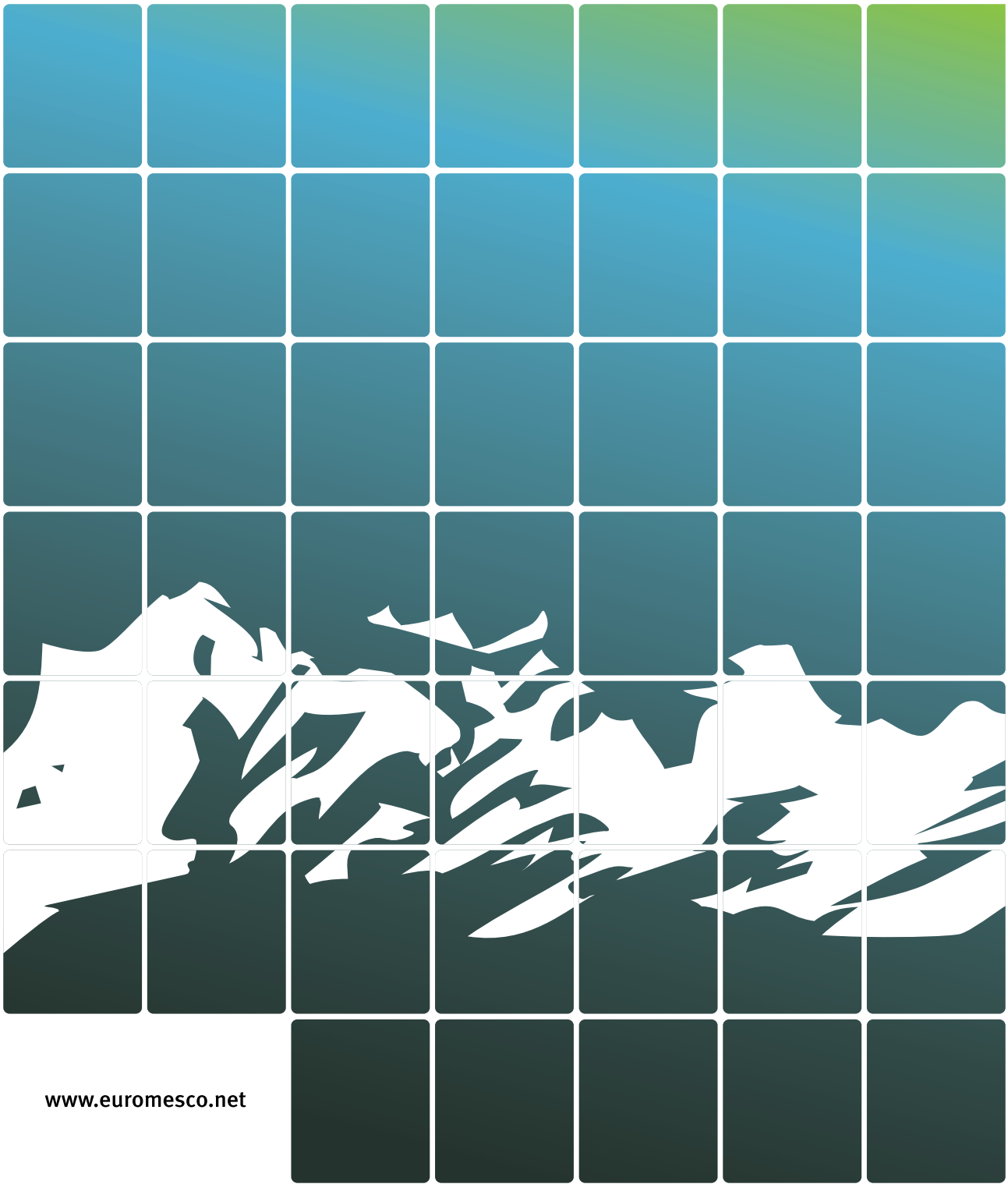

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