Promoting democracy in the Middle East and North Africa region

Developing a European Union stragegy

Cristina Barrios

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PhD student in International Relations at the London School of Economics (LSE), currently working on democracy promotion in foreign policy. Barrios completed undergraduate studies in Languages and Political Science at the Universities of Granada (Spain), Regensburg (Germany), and California at Berkeley (USA). After a traineeship in the Council of Europe, she went to the University of Paris VIII (France), where she earned her graduate diploma (D.E.A.) in *Construction Européenne*. Most recently, she was a Graduate Assistant at The Carter Center in Atlanta and attended international meetings in the European Union. As a trainee at Notre Europe, she elaborated this paper under the supervision of M. de Largentaye."

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Foreword

In this paper Cristina Barrios sets out to look at what a more determined European effort to support North African and Middle Eastern agendas for promoting democracy could look like. In the wake of the US-led invasion of Iraq to promote democracy through regime change, of the radical overhaul of traditional American alliances in the region advocated by some of the most vocal members of the Bush administration in the name of democracy, and of Al Qaida's determination to demonstrate to the world, but especially to the Muslim world, that democracy is a false concept, the subject is highly topical.

In the past decades we have witnessed how Latin American and Asian countries, not to mention Central and Eastern Europe and even countries of the former Soviet Union, have increasingly turned to democratic forms of government, and to the rule of law, both as ends in themselves and as a means to provide the stable institutional environment needed to promote strong and sustained economic growth. The North Africa and Middle East region, however, has been markedly out of step, with little or no progress being registered. In Algeria an electoral process was interrupted in 1991 when it appeared that a party with fundamentalist views would win. In Tunisia basic freedoms and the rule of law have been curtailed and are now far from what they were under President Bourguiba. Turkey, in its bid to join the European Union, has been taking steps to refurbish its institutional framework, but to do so, it has had to dismantle the military structure established by Mustapha Kemal to guard against the risk of a democratically supported drift back to a theocratic form of government. Some think that as a consequence the secular nature of the Turkish Republic may be in jeopardy.

The European Union has been steadfastly reinforcing its links with the region following the signature in Barcelona in 1995 of the Euro Mediterranean partnership. A common strategy for the Mediterranean was adopted in June 2000 and a strategic partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East in June 2004. North Africa and the Middle East appear prominently in the EU's new Neighbourhood policy and were not forgotten in the EU's security strategy of December 2003. Yet it appears that the issue of democracy in the partner countries, while certainly drawing much attention, has not been the central concern that it might have been. Why this is so, and why this should change, is Ms.Barrios's subject matter. Drawing on extensive research, and on the work of such experts as Ghassan Salame and Olivier Roy. she vigourously endorses the idea that democracy is indeed a universal value. She finds that the teaching of Islam, and the interpretation of the Charia, need not conflict with this value even on issues like gender equality. In the course of her presentation she discusses the meaning of democracy for Europeans, going

out of her way to show that it is not just about holding free and fair elections though that aspect is of course essential. She analyses the differences between human rights promotion programmes and democracy promotion programmes, and does not evade the issue of conditionality, tricky as it is because of the risk of having the population suffer for the sins of its leaders. She comes out strongly in favour of an independent European democracy promotion programme with some pieces of practical advice, focusing on criticism of fragmentation and of a general lack of consistency, that certainly appear to be worth pondering.

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) and its Member States are the main source of funds for political aid worldwide, their contribution adding up to euro 800 million per year in the late 1990s. Numerous declarations, initiatives, and agreements also witness Europe's diplomatic engagement to favour democracy. However, democracy promotion remains a highly devalued tool because of the inconsistency of policies, the hypocrisy of some plans, the rhetoric of many others, and the limited effectiveness of most of them.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is an illustration of resistance to the global wave of democratization of the past decades, even if the countries' undemocratic nature and its causes are complex and diverse. This region, key to geopolitical interests throughout the 20th century, becomes, ever more clearly, a privileged scene of EU's external relations, drawn by recent events (such as those related to international terrorism, or the evolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict) and global trends (such as oil dependence, capital flows, or security alliances).

The European policy-maker may wonder why, and how, democracy promotion can contribute to the overall EU relations with the MENA region. More pragmatic concerns may include the main difficulties that the EU faces, and the nature and amelioration of current plans. I address these questions in this paper, to conclude that the European Union should develop and implement a democracy promotion strategy as part of its approach to the MENA region, addressing the core difficulties in an original way, and improving the efficiency of its plans.

The initial section of this paper argues the relevance of a democracy promotion strategy for the European Union, in the light of different issues that are pressing in the economic or security fields. It also overviews the Middle East and North Africa as an undemocratic region, and describes some limited regionalisation efforts. Then, a survey of ongoing international initiatives for political reform shows that the European Union (with the Barcelona Process) and the United States (most recently, with the Greater Middle East Initiative) are the main promoters of democratization in the region. In the current state of affairs, democracy promotion is an unavoidable question on the international agenda that the EU must consciously tackle.

The second part studies some specific difficulties of democracy promotion in the MENA region, focusing on key transition questions in the political arena (the undemocratic state structures and elites), and on the perception of democracy promotion as an imposition of Western values and foreign control. The European Union should bring the issues of state-building and democratization of the political actors to the centre of democracy promotion, as well as stand up for the universality of democracy, bringing forward positive suggestions regarding the compatibility of Islam and democracy.

Finally, the third, more normative, part of this paper presents some suggestions to improve the EU democracy promotion strategy. The EU should review its currently diffuse but sizeable programmes, and focus on a genuine democracy promotion policy under the CFSP pillar,

translating honourable intentions into effective action, and reinforcing its external capabilities. For this, the EU must overcome institutional fragmentation at the levels of policy making and implementation, as democracy promotion involves foreign policy action, a common Security Strategy, as well as trade and development cooperation policies, and aid programmes. Regarding the framework for democracy promotion, the EU should benefit from existing structures and push for more political dialogue in its bilateral and interregional relations. On a programmatic level, the EU must continue targeting medium- and long-term objectives with complementary bottom-up and top-down approaches, working with the recipients in the development and implementation of projects, and avoiding duplication and incoherence. Regarding transatlantic cooperation, I argue that, although the EU must indeed follow up on American and international initiatives (especially the *Broader Middle East Initiative*), and can co-opt the United States in its effort to recreate a more positive image of international action in the MENA region, it should maintain its independent strategy, thus increasing the chances of success for its democratization activities, and asserting its international role as a united actor.

 The EU should promote democracy because of the European belief in the inherent benefits of democratization for the people of any country, based on well established and defended values, and it should seek democracy as a constructive end. In addition, democracy promotion is in the EU's interest, because of the connection of democratic governance with other aspects of international relations (security, economy, culture), and the spillover benefits that can derive from democratic principles and rule. Promoting democracy would also reinforce European external action by providing a common ground and valuable means to assert its role in world politics and advance its long-term objectives.

The European Union must renew its politics towards the Middle East and North Africa region, defining goals and means. After uncertain policies, much "walking around with clumsy feet", and the ambiguous roles played by some Member States, the region offers, here and today, the opportunity for the EU to pursue a common foreign policy. Its position and strategy could thus stand up independently from the United States', that has conducted a strong policy of clear goals and diversified means having a major influence in the region, but also facing many complications and limited success.

What is the "Middle East and North Africa", then? The fact that we do not have a clear picture of its essence or extension demonstrates the need to address this topic and its role in international relations. The broadest visions, such as the American *Greater Middle East* project, include Mauritania, Iran, Afghanistan and even Pakistan. The EU *Mediterranean* policies refer to some Maghreb and Middle Eastern countries, and the *Neighbourhood* policies to a large EU-surrounding region, but clearly leave out the Arabian peninsula and countries in the Asian continent. This paper accounts for this contentious situation, maintaining an open definition of the MENA region. Though I mainly address the promotion of democracy in the Arab world, some of my observations include references to Israel, Turkey, other Muslim countries, etc.

This paper is written for an audience from the European Union taking a first, but careful, look at the topic of promoting democracy in the Middle East and North Africa. I have addressed what in my view are core issues regarding the region, but I have not detailed the content of

potential programmes, nor entered into any country-specific details. It is my opinion that democracy promotion is crucial in an ever more globalised world, and that international actors such as the EU have the power to trigger and influence reform, and this is the basic idea behind this study. This paper thus focuses on the EU's potential, limited role, but not on transition in the Middle East and North Africa countries itself, as I mostly agree that democratic transition and consolidation remain largely domestic issues in their details, and ownership is essential for success. Some arguments are also, unfortunately, only sketched and summarized for many interesting issues, which would be worth developing, due to space constraints and to the limited focus of this paper[1].

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1 For instance, the case of Turkey, as an already democratic MENA country, and/or as a potential democratization lever on the EU side, has been left aside, as a rather complex and open issue. Turkey's transition history seems too peculiar and may only offer limited contributions as a model for the MENA region; its geostrategic position in the MENA is singular, and its potential role in the Union are, at this point, difficult to foresee. Nevertheless, a comparative study of transition paths for Muslim countries, and a thorough consideration of Turkey's potential in the MENA as EU Member State would constitute interesting additional research points complementing this study. Steven Everts comments on this in La Turquie est un atout pour l'Europe, mais pas un modele pour le Moyen-Orient, Le Monde, 17 December 2004.

I – An unavoidable question on the EU's current international agenda

In this section, I briefly outline how democratization is actually related to diverse security, economic and cultural questions, such as economic development or the regulation of immigration. Democracy promotion presents a potential contribution in all these different fields.

The Middle East and North Africa region is key to the EU's external affairs because it is a direct neighbour of the EU but also because of its geostrategic importance regarding, for instance, Islamist terrorism and the oil trade. Further below, I describe the diversity within the MENA region and some of the internal troubles as a key starting point to refine some of the EU policies. MENA's own development as a "region" is not clear-cut, although some regionalisation initiatives have been undertaken. New regional projects might see the light soon, and in any case, international actors such as the EU or the United States often keep a regional view in mind when dealing with the Middle East and North Africa. These will be recalled here to complete this brief overview of the reasons why making democracy promotion in the Middle East and North Africa is an indispensable question in current-day international relations.

ISSUES AT STAKE

As German Vice-chancellor Joschka Fischer recently acknowledged, "security and economic interests will further interrelate and become key in EU politics in the 21st century", and "[Europe] must give answers to the challenges in the Middle East and North Africa, which must be the focus of our attention"[2]. As I argue here, promoting democracy is necessary for a successful EU strategy of economic partnership with the region, and of increased security in the EU-MENA area. An improvement in the democratic situation of the European Union's partners in the MENA region would ease international relations, relax domestic tensions and create a better, more reliable cooperation environment. In this section, I outline some arguments in favour of democracy promotion regarding different international questions at stake.

Relations between the European Union and the MENA region already take place in some of these fields (trade, security cooperation, cultural exchanges), including some incentives for political reform. However, an overall plan of democracy promotion is missing. In the light of its importance, I suggest that democracy promotion become a distinct aspect of the overall EU

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[2] *Britain, Germany, Europe –Challenges of the 21st Century,* Lecture at the London School of Economics,19 October, 2004.

policy towards the MENA region, with overarching objectives, as a complement to other policies.

SECURITY

The most popular security argument to promote democracy is based on the *democratic peace theory*, which claims that "democracies don't fight each other", mainly because of institutional constraints and because the populations tend to prevent and "punish" governments resorting to violence and extremism using democratic means[3]. This means that democracy promotion could prevent conflicts in the medium and long term, and should thus be included in a security strategy.

More pragmatically, the Middle East and North Africa region is directly linked to one of the main international security concerns nowadays: the Islamist terrorist threat[4]. The undemocratic, incumbent governments in the Arab world are, for the most part, also endangered by extremism and terrorism, and are thus interested in alliances to fight it. As a result, in dealing with the threat, the international community has hesitated between continuing friendly and cooperative relations with undemocratic regimes, and clearly urging for democracy, often leading to inconsistent positions and contradictory policies[5]. However, there are reasons to argue that terrorism developed under, in spite of, and even because of, that undemocratic system and rule, as opposition groups, which are neither co-opted nor allowed to participate in public life, may resort to hostile resistance and violent means. The incumbent elites sometimes seek to solve the Islamist problem by importing extremism into their discourse and/or policies[6]. For these reasons, changing our friendly attitude towards undemocratic regimes and promoting democracy can help to deal with the roots of terrorism and forge a lasting solution.

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3 That is, "violent" governments will be voted out. Writings on the importance of democracy for international peace can be traced back to Kant's perpetual peace among republics, but the thesis came back with strength in post-Cold War political science literature, and was especially present in Clinton's foreign policy discourse. Empirical research has also supported this thesis in view of the lack of armed conflict among democratic countries in history. However, the theory is not so robust, since the real causes and explanations of the correlation are not self-evident.

4 The European Council agreed on a European Security Strategy in December 2003. It identified five key threats to Europe: terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, failing states, and organized crime.

5 For instance, the United States exerts light democratic reform pressure on Saudi Arabia, while other regimes have suffered harder measures (such as Hussein's Iraq or Castro's Cuba). The subsequent problems of inconsistency, double standards, and covert goals of democracy promotion remain one of the policy's downsides and source of illegitimacy.

6 The links are complex, here, if we think, for instance, of the very different cases of terrorist groups and their relations with the regime in place (Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, or Algeria, or other cases where Islamist extremism has played a role, such as Egypt). The cases show different links of causality, responses, and resulting events, while maintaining or achieving a grip on power usually remains the priority for all sides.

The EU seems to be aware of these links and of the appropriateness of promoting democracy in the MENA region. When describing the EU Security Strategy in 2003, High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana mentioned the need for a panoply of tools ("political, diplomatic, humanitarian, economic and financial, police and military instruments"), among which was, more specifically "the promotion of an arc of well-governed states in our neighbourhood"[7]. The "arc in our neighbourhood" certainly included the Arab world, and though "well-governed" was not clearly spelled out as "democratic", terms such as "governance" and "rule of law" did appear in the speech as relevant to security. An independent democracy promotion strategy could usefully detail goals and means in this field.

ECONOMIC QUESTIONS

Promoting democracy is linked to various EU economic interests, including a maximization of its development aid, and potential trade and investment benefits in the MENA region.

The relationship between economic development and democracy has been thoroughly researched, and while most experts admit that they are related, the direction of the causality and the results of the studies are inconclusive[8]. However, during the 1990s and up to the present, political aspects have been included in most international development plans, and the claim that democracy and an improved economic situation are mutually reinforcing has gained weight[9]. Following on this broad concept of development, UNDP's Arab Human Development Reports identify a number of deficiencies in the MENA countries, ranging from low education levels and gender discrimination to a poor economic situation (little redistribution, reduced GDP, inflation, unemployment, etc.), and urge a number of political reforms[10]. Since the EU is investing dearly in the economic development of the MENA region with substantial programmes and funds, promoting democracy can be considered a complement to these efforts to achieve better economic results[11]. The market economy model has inspired the economic reforms for development and trade worldwide, but extreme liberalisation measures

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7 Javier Solana, Speech on The EU Security Strategy implications for Europe's role in a changing world, Berlin, 12 November 2003.

8 Case-studies show contradictory evidence. For instance, some dictatorships perform well economically, such as Chile during Pinochet's later years, or nowadays China, but many Eastern European democratization cases have, on the contrary, been accompanied by a rather worsening socio-economic situation (in spite of relatively good macroeconomic figures). In several works (published during the 1980s), Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze showed how famines were avoided in relatively free environments, while they took place in less free, but economically similar, places.

9 Notably on the basis of work such as Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom, 1999, and Joseph Stiglitz's Globalization and its discontents, 2002. The United Nations has "renewed" its concepts, too, as UNDP's "Human Development" or the "Millennium Development Goals" show.

10 See Arab Human Development Reports, published by UNDP in 2002, 2003 (2004 forthcoming).

11 In the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, MEDA grants are accompanied by European Investment Bank lending: for 2000-2006/7. MEDA is endowed with euro 5,600 million, and the Bank will lend about euro 6,400 million. For an interesting study of the relationship between development aid and democratization, see Carlos Santiso, Improving the Governance of European Foreign Aid, Development Cooperation as an Element of Foreign Policy, Centre for European Policy Studies, Working Document 189, October 2002.

have sometimes had a high social cost. For these reasons, economic reform must be enclosed in a larger framework.

The MENA region has also been an increasingly important trade partner and investment zone for the EU: total trade has almost doubled from 1995 to 2002, and even though only 2% of European Foreign Direct Investment was directed to the Mediterranean partners in 2000, it meant a significant boost for this long-time neglected region. Democratization measures can benefit the international market economy through increased stability, reduced corruption, rule of law, etc., as trade and investment becomes safer and allows better output. In theory, an improved situation will also increase consumers' needs, leading to greater exchanges. Western awareness of these democracy-led benefits has translated into increasing demands for and measures of good governance and economic reform, but not necessarily political changes, because these may lead to instability.

Indeed, strictly political measures have been avoided, and EU democratic conditionality has been weak towards the MENA countries: the *democracy clauses* of the Association Agreements, for instance, have not been enforced. The normalisation of economic relations and some improvements have actually given non-democratic incumbents credit and further means of staying in power –a strategy that is now decades old. This deadlock is nevertheless negative for the EU, because it makes democratization harder, and prevents the benefits of an accountable, greater exchange. That is why democracy promotion means should be updated in a new strategy.

IMMIGRATION

Closely linked to the desperate economic situation for many in the Middle East and North Africa region, and to the need for additional labour in some fields in European countries, the phenomenon of immigration has been present and rising during recent decades. As the possibilities for legal EU immigration have been increasingly limited (basically to family reunification or previously agreed work/study permits), illegal immigration is currently an important issue on the agenda. In addition, as immigrants coming from the MENA region settle in Europe in the long term, the link already existing between the EU and their countries of origin becomes stronger, and reinforces EU positioning supporting democratic advances.

An improvement in the economic situation (somewhat related to democratization, as mentioned above) would be a first step towards the reduction of migration flows. Other, more direct effects of MENA democratization would include increased cooperation in the fight against illegal immigration by curbing corruption in the bureaucracies, and reducing human rights violations and people traffickers' power and impunity. More democratic MENA countries would also imply greater respect for migrant citizens' rights (repatriation, housing, work), and avoid discrimination against their minorities, who often seek asylum in Europe. As this remains an area of controversial, undefined and, sometimes, contradictory measures within the EU,

democracy promotion strategy can set some common ground for immigration policies towards the region[12].

At the same time, a significant number of immigrants coming from the MENA region are already in the EU, which implies new questions regarding national and European identities, public spaces, etc. The integration and full political participation of these "new minorities" is an internal challenge for European democracies. Regarding European external policies, as this population is strongly sensitive to the events and development of their countries of origin[13], these become an additional, stronger focus for European politics. As Europe becomes increasingly and more directly involved, the EU indifference towards exclusive security and economic interest in the MENA region must evolve towards closer links and a more meaningful relationship with these neighbours, especially calling for their democratization.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, IDENTITY AND THE "CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS"

Hostile theories arguing a *clash of civilisations* (Samuel Huntington, 1993), and giving rise to enmities among peoples that seem historical, intrinsic, and largely unavoidable abound in current international affairs. Democracy is a way to overcome this hostile atmosphere, increase empathy and encourage a cooperative environment to work out the real causes and solutions of conflicts. The EU, following its tradition of peaceful multilateralism and international cooperation, should emphasize this "plus" of democracy in its promotion strategy.

World beliefs, customs, and life styles are still very diverse, but in the future will cultures co-exist, merge, or confront each other? In a world where globalisation means ever tighter economic links and easier communications, the question remains open as to whether and how the peoples and cultures of the world are approaching and (re)defining themselves. The pessimistic *Clash of Civilisations'* thesis has been strongly criticized in Europe (especially considering that its dividing line cuts across the continent in the Balkans), but Europe itself is struggling with questions of national and European identity. Cultural definitions are forged through a complex mix of tradition and evolution, international sharing, and exchange, and these dynamics are accompanied by a principled respect for diversity. The notion of civilisation or culture has been subject to very diverse interpretations through history, and its constituent elements and its limits remain debatable at international, national, and subnational levels.

As European experience proves, democracy can provide a common background for coexistence and a non-confrontational evolution of identity and cultural issues. Democratic systems in the present, though subject to criticism, have shown the practical possibilities of successful

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12 I have found the Euractiv dossier on Immigration (available at http://www.euractiv.com) offers a useful and well-documented overview covering background, current discussions and challenges for the EU. Immigration's links with religion, public policy, media reaction, public opinion etc. and the role that democracy could play, though interestingly related, unfortunately go beyond the scope of this study.

13 For instance, European Arab populations care strongly about the democratization processes in their countries of origin, or tend to identify with the Palestinian cause in the Middle East conflict. Within their possibilities, they are likely to influence political representatives and public opinion.

political organization for different cultures and also for multi-cultural spaces (especially when combining majority rule with individual and minority rights). Since democracy can also be a means of defending certain universal human rights[14], its adequate promotion can be beneficial not only to avoid a clash but also to strengthen international cooperation. In addition, democracy should be detached from the "Western character" sometimes resented by democracy promotion recipients, and instead offer a standardized basic system of accountable rule and protection of the citizen, allowing for different cultural adaptations and evolutions.

THE MENA REGION ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

The Middle East and North Africa is a very diverse environment. National traditions, the countries' history, ethnic groups, languages (or dialects), religions (also different practices within Islam), etc. make this a culturally very rich, but complex, region. While we can speak of commonalities and of occasional regional feeling, particularly in forms like the Muslim community (*ummah*) and the Arab nation (always more of an ideology than a project) these generalisations cannot hide the particularities within the region[15]. For this reason, one of the duties of scholars and policy-makers working on this area is to firstly acquaint themselves with the diversity within the Arab-Islamic world, understand the different references made to by "Arab" and "Muslim", not to be confused, and then advance adequate programmes[16].

The following table overviews the ethnic and religious diversity in the MENA region, as well as Freedom House's scores of religious freedom in the country (based on their own rather strict standards and measuring).

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14 For instance, Universal declaration of human rights' article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status ; and article 21: Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

15 How should we refer to the region: "Arab-Islamic region", "the Arab world", "the Muslim world"? While demonstration effects (imitation of a neighbour process or policy) and spillover effects (indirect influences of events and evolutions in a neighbour country) regarding political reform can sometimes affect the region, empathy remains limited and evolutions divergent in the different Arab countries.

16 As Olivier Roy suggests, differentiating Muslim religion from Arab culture could allow, in a country like France, policies addressing language, arts while avoiding religion (see "La "question islamique", encore et encore" in Le Monde, 5 January 2005).

COUNTRY	Religious freedom (Freedom House)	Significant ethnic/religious minorities
Afghanistan	Not Free	Tajik (27%), other (27%)
Algeria	Not Free	Kabylie Berbers
Egypt	Partly Free	Coptic Christian and other non-Muslim (6%)
Iraq	Not Free	Kurdish (15-20%), Turkoman, Assyrian or other (5%)
Iran	Not Free	Azeri (24%), other, including Arab (24%)
Israel	Not Free	"non-Jewish" (19%)
Jordan	Partly Free	Circassian, Armenian (2%); Christian (6%)
Kuwait	Partly Free	Non-Kuwaiti Arab (35%), other (20%)m Non Muslim (15%)
Lebanon	Partly Free	Armenian /other (5%); Christian (39%), other (1.6%)
Libya	Not Free	Non Berber/Arab (3%); non Sunni-Muslim (3%)
Mauritania	Not Free	Maur-Black (40%), Maur (30%), Black (30%)
Morocco	Partly Free Not Free for Western Sahara	Arab/Berber (97%); Christian (1%), Jewish (0.2%)
Oman	Not Free	South Asian, African (?); Non-Ibadhi Muslim (25%)
Pakistan	Not Free	Complex ethnic composition Chi'a Muslim (20%), Christian and other (3%)
Palestinian Authority Administ. Territories	Partly Free	[Data not available]
Qatar	Not Free	Pakistani (18%), Indian (18%), Iranian / other (24%)
Saudi Arabia	Not Free	Afro-Asian (10%)
Syria	Partly Free	Kurds, Armenian and other (10%)
Tunisia	Not Free	Christian (1%), Jewish (1%)
Turkey	Partly Free	Kurdish (20%) Non-Muslim (0.2%)
United Arab Emirates	Not Free	Non-Emirati Arab and Iranian (23%), South Asian / others (50%)
Yemen	Not Free	Few non-Arab; few non-Muslim

Freedom House's raw scores on religious reedom [Free- Partly Free- Not Free] and rough data on ethnic and religious minorities in MENA countries. Sources: Freedom House; MideastWeb; CIA World Factbook.

In the MENA region, ethnic or religious minorities often suffer from legal or de facto discrimination in some countries: Palestinians in Israel, Kurds in Turkey, Syria or Iraq, Asian workers in the Arabian Peninsula, etc. This is a strong challenge for many of these countries' democratization process. Islam plays a major role in the official state life of many of these countries (Saudi Arabia is the clear example, but also Algeria, for instance, has recognized Sunni Islam as the state religion). In Israel, the Basic Law refers to a "Jewish and democratic State" and, though Judaism has not been proclaimed the official religion yet, there are Jewish influences in legal and governmental practice[17]. Afghanistan, an example of a country at a transitional stage, has included in its 2004 constitution that "no law is to be contrary to Islam". Democracy should guarantee freedom, as a principle, but the practical way this can be done in MENA countries as they democratize is likely not to resemble Western secular structures.

International conflicts within the region are an additional source of tension, having been present historically and/or having intensified during recent decades. Apart from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, other disputes remain unresolved: the status and evolution of Western Sahara (principally concerning Morocco and Algeria), the dormant dispute over land between Algeria and Libya, the Syria-Lebanon conflict, the tense relations of Iran with the Arab countries, etc. Life within some countries is also far from peaceful, and while "state of emergency" (as in Egypt) and "continual upheaval" (as in Israel and the Palestinian territories) may be too extreme, peace-making and social stability are a necessary precondition when it comes to potential democratization and region-building efforts.

REGIONALISATION EFFORTS AND POSSIBILITIES

Nowadays, the world seems increasingly regionalised, with initiatives such as the EU, but also ASEAN, Mercosur, NAFTA, or the African Union; a similar pattern may also develop for the MENA region. However, while regional perspectives could be contemplated on the basis of geography (Mediterranean), religion (Islam), ethnicity (Arab), or language (Arabic), the weakness of an economic common ground, normally the basis of regional movements, perhaps explains the slow pace of integration in the MENA region.

The region is not, however, totally foreign to cooperation. One attempt to move towards economic integration was the Arab Maghreb Union, established in 1989 by Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya. Thus far, old or new tensions have prevailed over cooperation, and the lack of a clear political will has made this framework little more than an empty shell. Nevertheless, a number of trade and liberalisation agreements, sometimes overlapping one another, exist[18], such as the Agadir initiative (a free trade agreement including Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia that recently entered into effect). The Arab Cooperation Council was created in 1989 as well; it included Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen, but, again, did not really crystallise. The Arab League, though older and more present in the international

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17 Source: Professor Shimon Shetreet on Freedom of Religion in Israel, Durban Conference 2001.

18 For "official" Arab Maghreb Union information, see http://www.maghrebarabe.org. For further information on economic links, see OECD, Towards Arab and Euro-Med regional integration, 2001.

environment, is mainly a political organization, and has also met only limited success on the economic integration and general agreement fronts.

A wide range of possibilities for MENA regional integration seems at hand, and for most countries it would be a highly desirable option. The key is overcoming internal MENA disputes and political unwillingness, and focusing on fostering common economic interests.

In the meantime, the international environment seems to favour regionalisation, and international actors are tending to regionalise their perspectives. One could argue, indeed, that the regionalisation of the Middle East or of the whole MENA, and sometimes beyond, has sometimes been explored most significantly from an international perspective. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, for instance, could be interpreted as a European effort to deal with the whole region as a partner[19], and the same goes for the recent American initiatives. The reason behind this "regional view" is that, without a doubt, most experts and policy-makers have identified the MENA region as crucial in geopolitical terms.

ONGOING INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES AND DEMOCRATIC REFORM

An initiative from the Bush administration promoting reform in the *Greater Middle East* (stretching from Mauritania to Pakistan) brought the question of international democracy promotion into the spotlight over the past year. However, international programmes fostering economic and political change have been implemented in the region throughout the 1990s and continue to the present. The main European programme is the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Barcelona Process), but the Mediterranean has also been addressed within the new framework of the European Union Neighbourhood policy and its country-specific National Indicative Programmes. There has also been a limited Cooperation Agreement between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council since 1989.

The United States has also been present in the "Middle East and Asia" area via development programmes mainly designed and funded by USAID (oriented by the Department of State), and numerous trade agreements (always more economic than politically oriented)[20]. The controversial Greater Middle East Initiative has strongly gained the attention of the international media and governments. It has been key on the international agenda last summer, in the European Council, the Arab League Summit in Tunis, the G8 Summit, and the USA-EU Summit. This background of international activity in the region is described in more detail here.

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19 Region-building has been identified as part of the normative power exerted by the EU by Emanuel Adler and Beberly Crawford, Normative Power: the European Practice of Region Building and the Case of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), (to be published in 2005).

20According to Amy Hawthorne, the US has spent more than $300 million in democracy aid in the region. See Democracy Deficit –US Democracy Promotion Efforts in the Arab World, The Brookings Institution, forthcoming 2005. Initiatives for economic reform based on international trade have been numerous through the nineties: US-North Africa Economic Partnership, US-Egypt Partnership for Economic Growth, etc.

THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP (BARCELONA PROCESS)

The 1995 Barcelona Conference of the EU Member States and their 12 partners of the Middle East and North Africa region (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, West Bank and Gaza - the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Cyprus and Malta[21]) established a framework for cooperation between the regions. It identified economic, political, and cultural objectives in different "baskets", notably targeting the creation of a free trade area. It foresaw significant financial support with MEDA as its main instrument[22], plus support from the European Investment Bank.

The framework launched two levels of cooperation: regional and bilateral, with a pragmatic emphasis on the bilateral level. A Mediterranean strategy was proposed, and bilateral Association Agreements were subsequently signed with most partners (negotiations with Syria are pending). The Barcelona Process has stressed the importance of cooperation and partnership; however, in practice, the EU has much more input on the drafting of the agreements, the approval of the projects, and the evaluation and continuation of the process.

Currently, the 10 Euro-Mediterranean Partners are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. Libya has observer status since 1999.

The results of the Barcelona Process have been judged, overall, to be unsatisfactory. In the economic field, intraregional exchanges remain limited (5% of total exchanges in 2000), and it was not possible to deliver all the economic aid available, which shows some structural failures. Socio-political activities have been limited to diplomats and administrative staff

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21 The inclusion of Israel and the Arab countries in a common framework is an original and remarkable aspect of the Barcelona Process, though also, sometimes, a source of friction. Cyprus and Malta are now EU Member States. Turkey is a candidate state and thus benefits from different sources of aid, but still participates in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. Libya currently has observer status at certain meetings.

22 Roughly, euro 3.4 million/ 4.6 billion for 1995-1999, euro 5.3 billion for 2000-2006.

training, environmental protection programmes, cultural initiatives, and forums bringing young people and some civil society actors together[23].

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership had emphasized significant political reform, defining human rights and democratic *conditionality clauses* in the Association Agreements, and, in an effort to circumvent governments and bureaucracies, projects to be led by civil society groups. However, political objectives have been sadly neglected. The implementation of conditionality is avoided for diplomatic or other (economic) reasons, and the civil society development strategy does not seem very effective. Aware of this, the EU has been making an effort to realistically assess the Barcelona Process, solve its inadequacies, and improve the strategy. This could be a chance to push democracy promotion further up the agenda.

In spite of its limitations, the Barcelona Process framework and this history of cooperation, as well as the EU's interest and investment in the Mediterranean region's reform and development, need to be acknowledged and can serve as a basis for future engagements. Many recalled the value of these European advances when the American *Greater Middle East Initiative* appeared as "the ultimate plan".
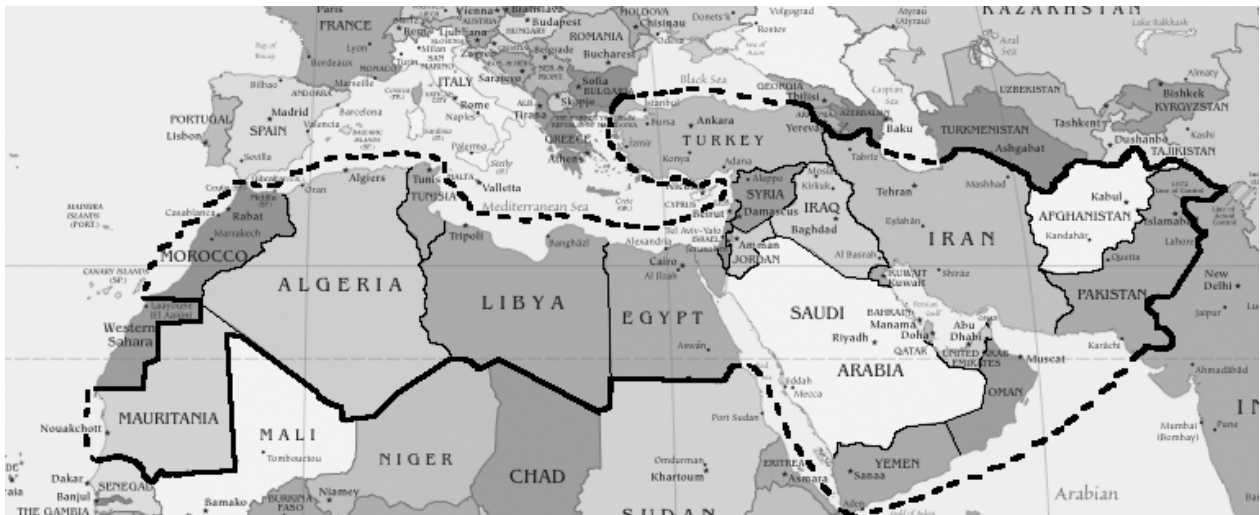
THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE

The Greater Middle East Initiative was never properly launched, but President Bush and other members of his Administration alluded to a plan for reform in the region since the beginning of 2004[24]. By mid-February, a "draft" of a Greater Middle East Initiative, which would in theory be discussed at the summer G8 Summit, reached the media "informally"[25].

That document made reference to the UNDP Arab Human Development Report and included mainly economic reforms. The political measures to foster democracy were mentioned in bulk, and though awkwardly specific, they were vague in content. These included "leadership academies", "legal advice centres", "discovery schools", and textbook translations, but also assisting in elections, encouraging parliamentary exchanges or developing media, and civil society organizations.

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23 For an account of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership accomplishments, see European Commission, The Barcelona Process, 2001 Review, 2002.

24 For example, during January 2004, Senator Lugar gave a discourse on A new partnership for the Greater Middle East: combating terrorism, building peace, and Vice-president Cheney mentioned the plan in the World Economic Forum in Davos.

25 The Lebanon-based news site Dar al Hayat published the draft on 13 February. The English translation is available at http://english.daralhayat.com/Spec/02-2004/Article-20040213-ac40bdaf-c0a8-01ed-004e-5e7ac897d678/story.html.

According to most accounts, the *Greater Middle East* plan includes 23 countries (the inclusion of Sudan is not clear, but Mauritania is usually included.)

The initiative was discredited as being unilateral, not taking into consideration "the interested parties" nor other Western or international allies. It was considered too limited (ignoring, for instance, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or prescribing a development bank and an "Economic Opportunity Forum" to facilitate World Trade Organization accession) and at the same time too generalising. Geographically, it referred to the countries of the Arab world, plus Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, and Israel, going beyond a Mediterranean approach or an Arab approach or a Muslim approach, just seeming to be framed to meet the overall American interests in the region and some convenient geostrategic objectives[26].

THE BROADER MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA INITIATIVE – A NEW BENCHMARK?

International plans for the promotion of democracy in the MENA region continue to this day somewhat vague and ever-changing, but their importance on the international agenda is to be confirmed during this second Bush administration.

After the 2004 G8 Summit in Georgia (USA), which was boycotted by some Arab leaders (notably the Egyptian and Tunisian ones) but attended by others, the Greater Middle East Initiative changed to the more cooperative *Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa*. Apart from timely expressing support for the recently appointed Iraqi interim government, this time the new document made up for

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26 For an overview of the criticisms made to the Greater Middle East Initiative, see Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers, The GMEI: Off to a False Start, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Brief, 29 March, 2004; numerous articles in Al-Ahram Online during February and March 2004 (for example, Nader Fergany, "Critique of the Middle East Project" on 19 February); Zbigniew Brzezinski, "How Not to Spread Democracy", International Herald Tribune (NYT), 9 March, 2004; Gilbert Achcar, "Le nouveau masque de la politique américaine au Proche-Orient", Le Monde Diplomatique, April 2004, Nicole Gnesotto, "A quoi sert le "Grand Moyen-Orient"", Le Figaro,10 February, 2004.

some of the omissions, mentioning past cooperation efforts aimed at reform (i.e. the Barcelona Process), and the importance of the Peace Process. It also avoided intrusively direct policy goals, outlining some specific measures in an adjacent *G8 Plan of Support for Reform* that would be inaugurated with a "Forum for the Future".

After these changes, the EU supported this G8 initiative in the end[27]. Italy had offered to host the "Forum for the Future", but it eventually took place in Morocco (Rabat) on 11-12 December, and was attended by representatives of 28 countries (mainly from the G8 and MENA region, but also an EU delegation). There, some new mechanisms were pushed forward (notably plans on microfinance, entrepreneurship, and investment), together with democracy assistance activities within a framework of "Dialogue", such as electoral assistance, and projects to improve women's education and civil society's role. The *Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) Initiative*, though still mainly economic, seems thus a new benchmark for international democracy promotion in the region. However, the key goals continue to be to reduce the reluctance of Arab partners to democratize, and ameliorate the tense international atmosphere created by the Iraqi conflict and the uncertain future for the Palestinian territories.

In the light of the limited success of this initiative[28], the EU should rethink its overall strategy (especially the balance between economic and political reform, and the means to achieve them) and build up its leading role for future venues. This pattern confirms US leadership of international plans in the region, with reluctant alignment by the EU. The EU, whose input in the development of projects is rather limited, often helps to pay the bill. In 2005, Great Britain will host the G8 Summit (that includes the Middle East on the programme), and will have a chance to make some advances. The EU, with a renewed Commission that maintains relations with the MENA countries high on the international agenda, and Javier Solana's team's policy-making giving continuity to medium-term CFSP plans, could also take the chance to produce independent initiatives, insisting on specific democracy promotion (and not only economic and security) goals and means.

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27 On 18 June, the European Council endorsed the G8 Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

28 Even the press coverage of the event was rather limited. For an example of the generalised unenthusiastic tone, see Ignacio Cembrero, "Arabes y europeos edulcoran el plan de Bush para promover la democracia", El Pais, December 11, 2005.

II–Difficulties in promoting democracy in the Middle East and North Africa region

In spite of the differences between peoples, countries and history in the Middle East and North Africa, the region presents some common difficulties for democracy promoters. In this section, I discuss, firstly, the MENA countries' undemocratic state structures and incumbent elites. This question refers to general democratic organization and functioning, which are partly an academic concern, but need to be addressed when designing an EU democracy promotion strategy. Secondly, I examine the way that democracy promotion can be perceived as a foreign, Western imposition, and the arguments on Islam's compatibility with democracy. This abstract question involves the transnationality of values and, more specifically, the universality of democracy, which require a defined position on the EU's side. The EU faces these challenges at the heart of democracy promotion in the MENA region, but, thus far, it has not given a clear answer to them. In this respect, I argue the need to focus on the democratization of state structures and political elites, and to overcome the wary concerns on the place of Islam in politics working on original, endogenous approaches.

More specific questions regarding the actual transition processes to be undertaken by each of the countries are not addressed here. Though the difficulties will be rather country-specific, the EU can draw some useful knowledge from previous transition cases and the vast regime-change literature developed in political science.

UNDEMOCRATIC STATE STRUCTURES AND POLITICAL ACTORS

The democratization wave that started in the 1970s in Southern Europe and continued to spread worldwide, especially after the end of the Cold War, seems to have found a focus of resistance in the Arab world, where democratic changes and demands have been limited. The adoption of democracy in the region remains a generalised challenge, as shown, for instance, by one of the most widely used democracy indices, Freedom House's yearly Survey.

COUNTRY (included in the "Greater Middle East")	Political rights	Civil liberties	"Freedom" rating, 2004
Afghanistan	6	6	Not Free
Algeria	6	5	Not Free
Egypt	6	6	Not Free
Iraq	7	5	Not Free (5-4 Partly Free for Kurdistan)
Iran	6	6	Not Free
Israel	1	3	Free
Jordan	5	5	Partly Free
Kuwait	4	5	Partly Free
Lebanon	6	5	Not Free
Libya	7	7	Not Free
Mauritania	6	5	Not Free
Morocco	5	5	Partly Free (7-6 Not Free for Western Sahara)
Oman	6	5	Not Free
Pakistan	6	5	Not Free (7-5 Not Free for Kashmir)
Palestinian Authority administered Territ.	5	6	Not Free
Qatar	6	6	Not Free
Saudi Arabia	7	7	Not Free
Syria	7	7	Not Free
Tunisia	6	5	Not Free
Turkey	3	4	Partly Free
United Arab Emirates	6	6	Not Free
Yemen	5	5	Partly Free

Freedom House's "Freedom in the World" Survey results for 2004 [Scale: 1 =Free, 7=Not free]

In any case, we should consider these "levels of democratic performance", often found in the media or policy-making documents, very carefully, because they are partly a matter of interpretation (for instance, the index *Polity IV* classifies the countries differently[29]). Also, in this case, Freedom House's Survey does not offer useful clues on the problems, nor guidelines for policy-making in the region. Indeed, Ghassan Salamé suggests that this Arab-Islamic "exceptionalism to democratization" is not uniform, and that its presence is as complex as its causes[30].

However, I point out here two political deficiencies generalised in the MENA region: the lack of accountable and efficient state structures, and the lack of political actors' determined democratic will. These elements are indispensable for the setting and functioning of democracy, a necessary support to the allegiance of the people (the source of democratic legitimacy). As a complement to solving these systemic problems, democracy promotion programmes should then seek to strengthen civil society and political conscience, as well as sustain economic development.

THE CRISIS OF THE STATE

The importance of local and regional democracy notwithstanding, democracy is pragmatically linked to the state as a basic framework for political organization and performance. In many MENA countries, the state is weak or malfunctioning, and thus democratization lacks "a skeleton" upon which to develop and function.

According to Bertrand Badie, the flaw within these states is intrinsic, in the sense that they were "imported states", where neither horizontal bonds existed in society, nor did a clear social contract (in Rousseau's terms) between the people and the system[31]. The process of state-formation, having its origin at the end of colonialism for most of the countries, needs to evolve today towards the establishment of a convenient structure for democracy, overcoming the country-specific difficulties. Luciani argues that one of the causes of this crisis is that states in the region do not depend on the people's tax revenues, that is, the economic (fiscal) foundation of the state is flawed. This would explain why oil states, owing their income to

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29 The data seem to coincide in "clear cases", such as Saudi Arabia and Syria. However, for instance, according to Freedom House (2001-2) Jordan and Morocco are "partly free" but in Polity IV (2002), both countries are classified as autocracies: Jordan gets –2, Morocco –6 (on a +10 to –10 scale). Polity IV is elaborated by an inter-university consortium and, evaluating many more variables with a careful operationalisation, it is a much respected tool in scholarly work (available at http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/polity/).

30 Ghassan Salamé, Democracy without Democrats, 1994, Introduction.

31 Bertrand Badie, L'Etat importé, 1992. Badie acknowledges the universality of the state, but at the same time asserts that it is a Western model, imported following different strategies, and with more or less success, as a means to modernization.

external actors, are not accountable to the people: governments thus don't democratize, and they avoid revolt with some minimum distribution and services[32].

The crisis is also visible in aspects of what has been called "failed" states. These are states that do not and/or cannot fulfil their role of controlling the territory, in the Weberian sense of "having a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force", nor in organizing basic health and education services, nor responding, in general, to its population's basic demands. Other actors are increasingly entering the scenario and accomplishing these tasks, such as mosques and NGOs for education and poverty relief, or warlords for security, but these are not democratic by nature nor do they represent democratic links. The bond between the state and the population, and the potential democratic link, is thus further weakened.

Paradoxically, democracy promotion has rather ignored or got around the state, precisely because of the state's malfunctioning status described above, and because of its limited role in the market economic model often coupled with democracy promotion. Only "good governance" measures, designed to fight corruption and establish minimum accountability, have targeted some structural changes, mainly in the economic field. This way, while trying to avoid undemocratic incumbents and the authoritarian control of all spheres, foreign democracy promotion has further weakened the state.

I do not intend to disregard here the importance of transnational factors or globalisation, or the limitations that the state increasingly faces in international relations. However, as many field experts acknowledge, I argue the pragmatic importance of the state for democratization, as it is the backbone to grant fair political representation, balance of powers, and rule of law in many democratic countries. For these reasons, democracy promotion in the MENA region needs to be linked to state-building, fostering the national allegiances between the people and the political system. This can be the way to bring into the picture human rights and social liberties, solve minority problems (ethnic, religious, linguistic, etc.) and channel parallel pan-Arab initiatives (cultural, religious, etc., but independent from the state's political framework), among others. I think that addressing the crisis of the state in the MENA region in order to favour a state-targeted democracy promotion strategy is, thus, the more convenient option. While historical development and the current state of affairs imply a range of difficulties to overcome the fragility of the state and design and implement its democratization, these should be built in the EU democracy promotion strategy.

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32 Giacomo Luciani, "The Oil Rent, the Fiscal Crisis of the State, and Democratization", in Salamé (1994). Luciani researches some interesting links between fiscal policies and democratization possibilities, for instance, the way authoritarian government is perpetuated through deficits and debt, and argues for a widening of the fiscal basis of the state as a means to democratize (not in a mechanical way, however).

Traditionally, transition studies have recognized the importance of domestic elites in triggering and consolidating democratization[33]. Though many other arguments such as the role of mass movements, economic development, international factors, etc. have also made their way into the explanations of democratization, the transformation or renewal of political elites is still considered key to the transition process. In the Middle East and North Africa region, as Ghassan Salamé has thoroughly researched, the lack of democratic elites is indeed one of the main problems for democratization[34]. This fact is explained by the repression of reformists (individuals, parties, media), but also by the collusion of other sectors with the non-democratic government, such as the private-sector bourgeoisie, or the military (often having a grip on power).

In addition, a common problem is that incumbent political elites are undemocratic, but so are (often) the main opposition groups, particularly in the form of Islamist extremism. In international democracy promotion, the dilemma is then whether to back undemocratic, but friendly, elites, rather than co-opt an undemocratic, "more dangerous" opposition. This argument (notably backed by the Algerian electoral experience of 1991, and regaining attention with the September 11 attacks) has frequently been used to avoid, for instance, fostering competitive elections. The plans have rather been to "recycle" the incumbent elites, that would eventually open-up the political space and democratize.

In this sense, liberalised autocracies, lacking true democrats, allow more pluralism, as Daniel Brumberg describes, "in a way to meet the opponents' minimal expectations for political openness and participation, but prevent them from undermining the regime's ultimate control". His assessment of openness in different countries is summarized in the following diagram.
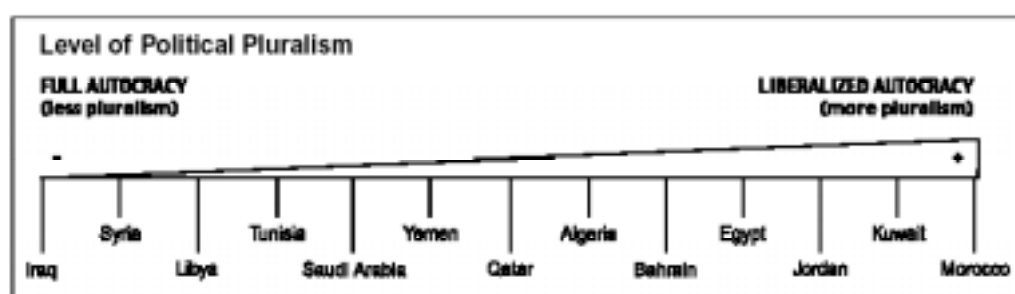
Level of political pluralism in different Arab countries. Source: Daniel Brumberg, *Liberalisation versus Democracy*, 2003 (p. 6).

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33 See the classic studies by G. O'Donnell, P. Schmitter, and L. Whitehead, Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy, 1986, and J. Linz and A. Stepan, Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation,1996 (both Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

34 Ghassan Salamé,1994.

Eventually, elites might choose to democratize, with occasional reforms, as a means to survive. However, if they can survive by other means (ambiguous discourse, resort to religious legitimacy, paternalistic distribution policies, repression of the opposition, etc.) and democracy is nobody's goal, there is no reason to think that it will automatically blossom or develop deep roots. For that reason, in coherent international democracy promotion, the democratization of the elites should not be an option. Democratic agents are needed to sustain the system, most visibly in the form of political parties, and of institutions backing the checks and balances between legal, judicial and governmental issues. The EU should consider this clearly when designing its democracy promotion strategy, avoiding "treacherous" partners and supporting democratic tendencies, and backing not only electoral processes or other occasional events, but medium and long-term projects fostering the adoption of democratic rules and functioning by the political actors. Special care should be taken to avoid the "democratist populism", a fashionable trend in many MENA countries[35], but, on the other hand, acknowledge and bring into play past democratic experiences and ideas originated in the Arab region[36].

THE IMPOSITION OF WESTERN VALUES AND FOREIGN CONTROL

Another generalised difficulty in promoting democracy is that it may be perceived as a pragmatic intrusion in internal matters, supported by the imposition of a foreign ideology that will be feared as antagonistic to the local principles and values. This apprehension is especially present in the MENA region in relation with the Islamic religion traditions and practices, that play a main role in most of these societies. The EU must have a clear standpoint regarding the universality of democracy, and must integrate the fact that Islam is a major feature in MENA countries that needs to be addressed in democratization plans.

UNIVERSALITY OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy has its roots in classical European history, and the most apparent references to it are in its Western manifestations. However, when promoting democracy internationally, we allegedly back its universality as a political system. This claim needs to be genuine, and a true conviction, in order to avoid an interventionist attitude and, most importantly, to grant the ownership that can legitimize and strengthen democracy.

For some the universality of democracy can still be contested on cultural or economic grounds. For instance, as Confucianism or, broadly, "Asian values", set obedience to hierarchy above other social organizational principles, there would be no call for a democratic society. Former Singaporean president Lee Kwan Yew focused on development and in some way

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35 Azid Al-Azmeh, "Populism Contra Democracy: recent democratist discourse in the Arab world" , in Salamé (1994), p. 112-129.

36An interesting account of historic trends and events with examples of different countries is found in Albert Hourani, "Epilogue: Past and Future" in Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939, Cambridge University Press, 1983 (1962), p. 341-373.

disregarded democracy alleging that "the one-man-one-vote system is extremely hazardous to run anywhere in the underdeveloped and undereducated world"[37]. In the Arab world, intellectual and pragmatic opposition to democracy has also existed, but it has been declining, as described further below.

Indeed, a much greater number of studies have explored and argued in favour of the democratic possibilities of non-Western cultures. Renowned scholar Larry Diamond, for instance, supports it as "the best of evils" to which there is no real alternative[38]. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has been one of the major defendants of democracy as a universal value. He has argued that democracy has become a "normal" form of government to which any nation is entitled, and has described the global virtues of political freedom, focusing on the usefulness of democracy to channel people's wishes, and to enhance constructive discussion and learning[39].

One of the problems, but also one of the solutions, regarding "universal democracy" is the question of defining democracy. Democracy is an *ideal* set of characteristics, mostly philosophical and subjective, and thus it is problematic to claim that democracy is "universal" when we cannot delimit what it actually is. However, democracy is also a *pragmatic* way of organizing and ruling a country, so there are specific features to it. In order to tackle these difficulties, scholars studying the definition and measurement of democracy disaggregate the concept into different "essential components": these can range from simple elections (sufficiently "free and fair") and civil liberties, to a number of socio-economic rights, an active civil society, etc.[40]. A definition thus includes different criteria, but these are not inherently "Western". For instance, if we agree on some basic components of democracy, such as "free and fair elections, civil and political rights, rule of law", it would be easier to make a universal claim. In this sense, there is a broad consensus on democracy being "more than just elections"[41], and including, for instance for European citizens, social and economic rights. The definition of democracy for its promotion must thus be specified, but not on cultural grounds.

That democracy is perceived solely as a Western idea and design, when the West exercises such enormous global power, tends to give the idea that democracy is part of its exporting and/or imposing a strategy on others. This fact is further aggravated when democracy is part of a condescending discourse, contradictory measures, or hostile policies. Democracy can in this case be negatively identified with other Western-interventionist factors in the Middle East and North Africa region, for instance colonialism/neo-colonialism, the Israeli-Palestinian

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37 Cited in Alex Josey, Lee Kwan Yew, the Struggle for Singapore, London: Angus & Robertson, 1974, p. 232-235. The opposite view is presented by J. Bauer, D. Bell (Ed.), The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

38 "There is no model of governance with any broad normative appeal or legitimacy in the world other than democracy" in "Universal Democracy", in Policy Review Online, August 2003.

39 Amartya Sen, "Democracy as a Universal Value" in Journal of Democracy 10: 3, 1999, p. 4, p. 8.

40 Gerardo Munk and Jay Verkuilen, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy –Evaluating Alternative Indices" in Comparative Political Studies, vol. 35: 1, February 2002, p. 5-34.

41 Fareed Zakaria has called elections-only regimes "illiberal democracies", other terms used are "liberal autocracy" and "electoral democracy".

conflict, and, most recently, the 2003 intervention in Iraq. This perception justifies then why democracy may be neglected and even rejected on a "conflict of civilisations" basis or as an overt excuse for intervention.

The difficulty of promoting democracy when it is felt as a compulsory foreign set of values or as an excuse to gain political control over third countries is obvious. What is even more striking is that this aspect continues to be ignored or underestimated in democracy promotion strategies, while it is a clear difficulty, and especially so in the Middle East and North Africa region. The EU should thus defend the universality of democracy with a definition open to all peoples and cultures free from Western superiority tones, and with a democracy promotion strategy that, though not clashing with its own interests, is also for the sake of the recipients.

ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

The argument about the universality of democracy goes, in this region, hand in hand with the debate regarding the compatibility of Islam and democracy, probably one of the currently most researched topics.

A popular, majority religion (Islam) and a political system (democracy) are both overarching public issues. Some scholars have rather categorically identified Islam's inability to adapt to modern times [e.g. Bernard Lewis], or have viewed Muslim societies as unable to surmount crises and having "a complex" vis-à-vis the democratic West [e.g. Samuel Huntington][42]. However, the arguments purporting Islam to be an intrinsic difficulty for democracy remain questionable in the light of very diverse evidence and interpretations.

For instance, about fifty different countries are somehow "Muslim in character", and the differences among them are notorious. A classical example is that of Turkey, a Muslim country that has, for most observers, consolidated a democratic model before many countries of Christian tradition, albeit in a rather confrontational way. Indonesia (the country with the largest Muslim population) and India offer additional examples of Muslims living in democracy.

Regarding Islam itself, if we approach religion as a social phenomenon embedded in time and space, and subject to historical influences from thinkers (secular and religious), power-holders, collective movements, etc., a more enriching and useful debate as to the democratic prospects in these countries is possible. An opposite tendency claims that there is "an essence of Islam, a single Islamic pattern" (undemocratic), likely to lead to absolutist claims and conclusions. This tendency is nowadays found among Islamist fundamentalists, but is actually similar to that of some Western scholars, or uninformed public opinions, and is at the base of many judgements against the democratic potential of Islam. However, most scholars agree that there is no automatic contradiction between Islam and democracy[43]. For instance, Filali-Ansary

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42 Cited in A. Ehteshami,"Islam, Muslim Polities and Democracy" in Democratization, 11:4, 2004, p. 90-110.

43 This is the widespread view in most international publications and discussions, as special issues of Journal of Democracy, 14:2, 2003, Democrazization 9:1, 2002; or the Conference Development, Democracy and the Islamic World, at University of California, Irvine, 2003, show.

recalls the currents of reform of Islamic thought since the 1920s[44]. He draws on the seminal work of Ali Abderraziq, describes "enlightened" thought as a conception of Islam within its historicity, and tries to reconcile religious heritage and tradition with a modern philosophical approach.

A frequent argument against the democratic compatibility of Islam is that the Koran claims that "sovereignty lies with God" (and not with the people) and thus Muslim societies will be theocratic, and religion-led. However, the complementarity of "reason and religion" has been evoked in Muslim thought since Averroës (1126-98), and the distinction between politics and religion has intermittently occurred, too. Additionally, a number of specific characteristics of Islam are often mentioned as hindering democracy, such as the adoption of Sharia (Islamic law), discrimination against women, etc. From our European point of view, in 2005, it is hard to overlook the role of Sharia, human rights violations, or gender discrimination in a democratic society. However, some of these facts are not exclusively linked to religion, but to tradition, and are rooted in economic discrimination or are the result of differing perceptions of social roles[45].

Undeniably, in Muslim societies, some conceptual questions and legal implementations need to be worked out in order to build up democracy, but if there is room for revision and adaptation, a constructive process is possible. An example of a constructive assessment of political Islam is Malek Chebel's proposal to newly interpret the sacred texts, confirm the superiority of reason, leave djihad behind, modernize civil law, revise the role of women, etc. to reach an original form of democracy[46]. The compatibility of Islam and democracy clearly depends on a reasonable interest in, and commitment to, this political system, and I believe we can expect some creative developments in the right contexts. As some (limited) democratization measures already indicate in Jordan or Morocco, religious precepts can be in harmony with democratic principles. The democratization of societal principles can be a catalyst for stable changes, a process that will necessarily have to be domestic, embedded in each country and supported by its people.

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44 Abdou Filali-Ansary, "What is Liberal Islam?…" in Journal of Democracy, 14: 2, April 2003, p.26-28. A classic reference is Albert Hourani, Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939, (1962). I have also found more recent accounts and interesting country-studies on this topic in the journal Arab Studies Quarterly.

45 For instance, gender gaps in education are also blatant in non-Muslim countries in South East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Central America (Source: UNESCO, Rapport mondial sur l'éducation 2000: le droit à l'éducation pour tous, tout au long de la vie, Paris, 2001).

46 Malek Chebel, Manifeste pour un islam des lumières —27 propositions pour reformer l'islam, Paris: Hachette, 2004.

Some studies have, maybe surprisingly, indicated that Islam can, on the contrary, aid democracy as a basis for social ties, solidarity, fighting corruption and poverty, etc. Some concepts have even been judged as to be encouraging debate, plural decision-making, and justice[47].

In addition, when looking at Western societies, we find similar "undemocratic" principles in the Christian churches, and a similar history of conflict between religion and politics. Nevertheless the relationship has evolved through confrontation and diverse experiences in different countries, and it is doubtful that we could now explain our overcoming of witch-burning and tyranny by a unique "cultural predisposition" for democracy[48]. The relationship between secularism and democracy is not straightforward, either. Currently, differences still remain between, for instance, the enforcement of the French Republican principle of *laïcité* and the common presence of religious references in American politics, elections, or even its money (i.e. "In God we Trust"[49]). The complexity of this topic should help avoid simplistic opinions and a priori judgements regarding Islam and the Middle East and North Africa region.

The fact is, though, that tendencies of traditionalist and extremist Islam are gaining ground and weight on the current political stage, and this is a problem affecting both the national arenas and international relations. They present Islam as a strong, single element of *otherness* vis-à-vis the West, with a strong role in identity-building[50]. However, according to Filali-Ansary, "expressions of identity should be local, geographical, and cultural" and not just religious. Confrontational definitions of identity are a potential source of conflict affecting domestic and international coexistence, leading, for instance, to Jewish Moroccan citizens or Muslim French citizens (will they have to choose, or to be more one than the other?) justifying a clash of civilisations materialised in wars or terrorism. Islamist terrorism can be understood as an instrumentalisation of Islam, as it authoritatively advocates an extreme materialisation of its tenets, keeping political objectives in mind. However, when reacting to Islamism, incumbents in the different countries of the Middle East and North Africa region are often ambiguous

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47 Ehtesham mentions shura [mutual consultation], ijtihad [a process of making a legal decision by an independent interpretation of the sources of law], ijma [an encouragement of consensus decision-making, referring to the consensus of the umma,]. See also Mark Tessler, "Islam and democracy in the Middle East: the impact of religious orientations on attitudes toward democracy in four Arab countries", in Comparative Politics 34, April 2002, 337-354.

48 S. Ibrahim, "Reviving Middle Eastern Liberalism", Journal of Democracy, 14: 4, October 2003: "The difficulties [of Islamic societies to be democratic] are well known and undeniable. But they can all be overcome. In previous decades, authoritative voices said that Germany, Japan, Slavic countries, and even Catholic societies would never, could never, be democratic", Rein Taagepera, Prospects of Democracy in Islamic Countries, UC Irvine 2003: "in 1928, democracy looked like a peculiarity of Protestant Culture, finding little fertile ground in Catholic lands".

49 The USA Department of the Treasury describes the history of this religious reference in American money (going back to the 1860s) at http://www.treas.gov/education/fact-sheets/currency/in-god-we-trust.html.

50 Olivier Roy makes an interesting, original analysis on this topic in Globalized Islam –the search for a new ummah, London: Hurst, 2004.

regarding the role that religion should play in the country's political life, instrumentalising Islam as well[51].

To summarize, Islam by itself cannot be considered a negative determinant, and, most likely, religion is not the main impediment to create a democratic political space in the Middle East and North Africa region. However, while somewhat independent of Islam, the current state of affairs hints that democratization may originate in, be partly defined by, or influenced by the particular beliefs in these societies. Here, the EU should make objective, informed judgments, and remain open to different experiences and projects, "alternative democratic development" that may include references to religion.

Democracy promotion strategies must take into consideration the diversity and facts of Islam itself and its interpretations over time, leaving room for this additional element in the MENA countries. In this sense, the EU must pay special attention to the moderate and modernizing discourses on democracy by experts of Islam and MENA history and politics, encouraging and supporting internal evaluations and initiatives[52], and alienating extremism.

The EU should then overcome its reluctance to interact with religious players in democracy promotion, including in the democratization process all wilful actors, both secular and religious (especially when these can provide channels for information and mobilisation of the people). Overall, the EU must accept its "limited" influence to define the role of the different groups in society (associations, parties, etc.), their impact in political trends, the materialization of democratic principles in specific bodies and/or laws (including, especially, the role of religious and political institutions), etc. that will in the end, most likely, not be so limited.

In general, EU democracy promotion in the MENA region should leave aside its wary neutrality on religious issues, which may be perceived as disrespectful, arrogant, and imposing. At the same time, the EU must seek to respect fundamental democratic principles and back a strong notion of democracy, gradually pushing for a prevailing protection of liberties and rights, while remaining flexible in the specific rules and guidelines. The EU-MENA relationship will, this way, be brought into greater balance, and democracy promotion will be perceived as a common good objective instead of a Western imposition.

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51 While terrorists usually claim that "Islam is the objective", in some cases we can interpret that Islam is being instrumentalised, for example regarding the evolution of the Palestinian Hamas, or, more ambiguously, radical religious opposition groups within Algerian or Egyptian politics.

52 The PNUD Arab Human Development reports are an instance of this, as described in the introduction.

III – IMPROVING THE EUROPEAN UNION'S STRATEGY

The EU has played a historic role as an external "democratizing force" for its surrounding neighbours. The European Communities were an important incentive in Southern Europe (Spain, Portugal, and Greece), but the EU was, and continues to be, an even more powerful lever in the Central and Eastern European transitions. By most accounts in these cases, including Turkey, the goal of EU membership was "the carrot" that made democratization progress[53]. Even if "enlargement" has been especially successful, it is not the only democracy promotion activity led by the EU. Through the 1990s, democratic claims have been increasingly central to EU external discourse, and action has included a rise in conditionality (present in most new trade and development agreements or updates), and initiatives. Nowadays, the European Union and its Member States play a leading role in international democracy promotion. Adding up the funds they devote to democracy assistance, Europe comes out as the main donor, with a contribution largely surpassing that of the United States[54]. However, democracy promotion has not been planned, developed, nor implemented consistently regarding countries that could not potentially be Member States, such as the MENA region. Improving the strategy is, thus, necessary.

In the past, democracy promotion has often been linked to aid and economic development policies, notably by conditionality. The use of conditionality in aid has often been criticized: suspending aid destined to a people because the regime does not democratize means to punish even more the dominated population. Conditionality's effectiveness is also put into doubt, as the democratic clauses in trade agreements or binding declarations have often been neglected with impunity (tarnishing the EU's reputation). In addition to conditionality, there have been funds and projects directly devoted to democratization. This democracy assistance has been irregular, and it was often presented and managed together with human rights projects[55]. Projects have been extraordinarily diverse, including gender issues, political party /local NGO development, micro-credit, legal reform, election observation, etc. They also differed widely in budget, duration, implementation agents and means, and evaluation. This diversity is, in part, a strength of European democracy promotion, showing a widespread

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53 The case of Turkey can be included in this account to a certain extent: it has a unique history of early transition, featuring national leader Ataturk, institutionalised secularism, and the preeminent military's singular role. However, the EU has played a clear role in recent years, as the country has made democratization moves following clear EU directions (for instance, regarding the protection of the Kurdish minority's rights).

54 The EU and Member States allocated 46% of the world's development assistance in 2000. Source: OECD, Development Aid Committee, Development Cooperation Report 2001. For specific figures on democracy assistance, see Gordon Crawford "European Union Development Co-operation and the Promotion of Democracy" in Peter Burnell, Democracy Assistance: International Co-operation for democratization, London: Frank Cass, 2000.

55 Human rights are universal and have a defined legal status in international law, allowing, for instance, for intervention. Democracy, though of course related to human rights (which are basically a condition for it to exist), does not have this status. This is the most powerful reason to accurately separate human rights from international democracy promotion, so that action can be maximized in both fields within their scopes.

concern and interest in the topic throughout European society and politics. However, developing a more consistent strategy would help avoid some of the contradictions found in policies and in the field, and tackle democratization goals more efficiently.

Political actors in the European Union are increasingly becoming aware of the relevance of democracy promotion and the need to improve the EU approach. The conference *Enhancing the European Profile in Democracy Assistance,* organized by an alliance of European political party-organizations in The Hague on 5-7 July, 2004, gathered a number of renowned scholars, as well as high-level politicians and practitioners in various organizations. The final statement presented to the Dutch EU Presidency attempted to summarize the characteristics of the EU profile, recognized its value, and made some recommendations to the EU institutions and concerned agencies[56].

After presenting the arguments for EU democracy promotion and examining some difficulties pertaining to the Middle East and North Africa region, in this section, I suggest three goals which the EU should concentrate on in order to improve its strategy: actually defining and developing a strategy, overcoming fragmentation, and encouraging dynamic continuity while innovating. These objectives may seem too general, but they constitute the necessary framework for a deep renewal of democracy promotion policy-making, leading then to new detailed projects in the field.

FROM RHETORIC TO PRAGMATISM

The EU's originality as a "new generation", powerful institution gathering democratic countries puts it in an ideal position to promote democracy. This supposes an enhancement of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), where democracy promotion can be applied coherently as a "soft-power" tool. In addition, democracy promotion should evolve from the rhetoric of declarations without instruments, and the conditionality clauses that are not resorted to, to a more pragmatic strategy with stated principles and overall guidelines.

A FIELD FOR COMMON INTERNATIONAL ACTION AND A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Though euro-scepticism regarding foreign policy is still great and the evolution of CFSP is strongly influenced by events and trends, the vision of a strong EU on the international stage is attracting an increasing number of politicians and, probably even more, European public opinion. In any case, there have been some advances in European Union CFSP, which seem to have happened on a "topic by topic" basis (some recent examples are the boosted information exchange to fight the terrorist menace, and the initiatives to create EU military reaction forces). While having a centralised foreign policy plan or independent decision-making still

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56 The Hague Statement on Enhancing the European Profile in Democracy Assistance, July 2004 is available at http://www.democracyagenda.org. The additional conference papers provide useful insights on the difficulties and prospects of EU democracy promotion.

seems unrealistic, the EU and Member States can advance with reinforced joint actions abroad, even if they are limited in scope and number. Democracy promotion, a "soft power" instrument, should become one of the aspects of European external policy[57].

The importance of "soft power" measures (broadly speaking, diplomatic rather than coercive) should not be underestimated. Soft power is not a substitute for armed power, but a completely different tool in external relations with unique value-added. As European common defence policies are hard to develop, CFSP is more likely to progress with "soft power" measures, even though they also imply that Member States overcome controversy and accept a degree of compromise. Democracy promotion is an objective worth developing for several reasons: it can help build a European identity around a central theme, democracy, which is at the core of common values, and it can thus help reinforce CFSP and a unified image of Europe, something much needed at home and abroad. It can also strengthen the importance of a tool that most European countries, having democracy assistance activities of their own, consider valuable. Most importantly, it can make a tool, the efficiency of which is often in doubt, more useful and effective through collective action, with coordinated schemes and unified funds.

While ex-colonialist countries are reticent and are only cautiously welcomed in the region, democracy promotion activities can have more credibility if they come from the EU. The EU has shown it can take an independent position in the Middle East conflict, particularly by defending the creation of a Palestinian state and supporting the Palestinian Authority. This way, it has gained sympathy in the region, predisposing it for further cooperation, in spite of its marginal role and limited success in the conflict resolution. In addition, since the EU is the region's main trade partner and is investing heavily in its development, the complementary action of democracy promotion is more than justified. These factors present a window of opportunity for the EU to promote democracy in the Middle East and North Africa region as part of an enhanced CFSP.

DEFINING PRINCIPLES AND MEANS

In spite of the EU's internal democratic deficit, democracy is clearly an EU value, primarily shown in the strict democratic criteria for membership that candidates such as Spain and Portugal, then Central and Eastern European countries, or currently Turkey have become familiar with. After the end of the Cold War, the EU joined an international "democracy euphoria", stressing human rights, the rule of law and democratic institutions in its development cooperation. Currently, the projected Constitution clearly highlights democracy as a principle (Article 2) and an objective (Article 3) of the EU.

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57 In general, European democracy promotion is rather oriented toward diplomatic measures. In my opinion, acknowledging the utility of soft-power measures, European democracy promotion should steer clear of hostile, interventionist projects and continue to develop a wide range of cooperative programs. Robert Kagan interpreted these differences as American power and European weakness in a recent publication.

Building on this base, the EU should openly define its conception of democracy promotion, regarding both the "components" of democracy that it wants to impulse, and the mechanisms that it wants to base its strategy upon. This will be the way to translate into specific, original means what seems a sincere and genuine discourse. As mentioned above, the EU has agreed that elections are only one aspect of democracy, and its programmes thus include a wider range of political and legal reform. The EU should retain the European tradition of socio-economic rights as a means to reduce inequality, especially because democracy and the market economy system are often promoted side by side, and strong liberal economic reforms tend to come at a high social cost. The EU should also encourage efforts to build up political conscience and participation, as well as social stability, to accompany the consolidation of democracy.

However, the EU should also remain open to the concerns regarding democratic transition in the different recipient countries. In the MENA region, as described in section 2, the difficulties faced because of the history, culture, religion, minorities, etc. should be tackled with flexibility on the design of institutions and laws, and considerable input from the country and experts.

Regarding democracy promotion mechanisms, Richard Youngs has described the EU's approach as stressing "partnership" rather than one-way proposals, bottom-up plans with civil society and NGOs, using very limited political conditionality, and maintaining a development-based logic[58]. The EU is strongly encouraged to stick to the cooperative approach, and complement its bottom-up approach with programmes involving governmental actors and institutions, and the political opposition. Especially, the EU should reconcile its development-oriented work with the security strategy that has called for the promotion of good governance in a CFSP frame. The EU must translate the heartfelt issue of democracy promotion into an earnest endeavour, develop a pragmatic approach overarching different fields, and thus achieve greater success while creating more solid ground for EU international action.

OVERCOMING FRAGMENTATION

The fragmentation of European democracy promotion is evident at the level of both policy-making and implementation. Democracy promotion is caught between integrated EU action (for development cooperation plans) and simple common policies (under the CFSP framework). The Commission, different Directorates General within it, and EuropeAid Cooperation Office (a department of the Commission), together with the Member States, as well as other international cooperation frameworks (under the G8, UN or other umbrellas) all

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58 Richard Youngs, Democracy promotion: the case of EU strategy, CEPS Working document No. 167, October 2001. Reporting and evaluating European democracy promotion is a complicated task, as the number of participating NGOs, political parties, foundations, governmental bodies, etc. is high, from EU and Member States, and development programs, defence of human rights, election observation, civil society building etc. are often mixed. Over the last 10-15 years, democratization activities has been significant and diverse, but follow-up has been very limited.

manage democracy promotion activities. This division and overlap mean that policy responsibilities are blurred, often inconsistent, and less effective. Thus, optimizing the EU democracy promotion strategy requires the end of the fragmentation currently found in the field, or at the very least, a better organization.

A COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY (CFSP) STRATEGY

Democracy promotion is based on two different EU pillars: the European Communities, and the Common Foreign and Security Policy. On the one hand, under Title XX (Development Cooperation) of the Treaty of the European Community, we find in Article 177:

"Community policy in the sphere of development cooperation, which shall be complementary to the policies pursued by the Member States, shall [...]: contribute to the general objective of developing and consolidating democracy and the rule of law, and to that of respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms".

On the other hand, the Maastricht Treaty (Treaty of the European Union), Title V, Article J.1, reads:

"The objectives of the common foreign and security policy shall be [...] to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms".

This reiteration could be interpreted as the confirmation of the importance of democracy promotion for the EU, but it is actually a source of fragmented functioning due to the different rules, working methods, and legal instruments relating to the two pillars.

Overall, the CFSP pillar activity has included significant declarations on the importance of democracy (by the European Council), and common strategies and resolutions[59]. However, most democracy promotion instruments have thus far been placed under the trade and development framework: clauses in cooperation agreements, aid allocation, funding of programmes, etc. Democracy promotion has thus been affiliated to other purposes and means, and thus many times disregarded or underestimated. This may also have have been due to the fact that EU external action is stronger when undertaken by the EC (for instance, trade relations or World Trade Organization negotiations) than Common Foreign and Security Policy, held to be more declaratory in nature.

However, undertaking democracy promotion, especially in the Middle East and North Africa region, pertains to foreign policy broadly. In addition, there, economic advances in EU-MENA relations have not led to political reform. Democracy promotion should thus clearly be framed as a CFSP principle and interest, fostering EU external action other than economic.

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59 See, for example, European Council, Common strategy on the Mediterranean Region adopted by the European Council at Santa Maria da Feira in June 2000, OJ L 183 of 22 July 2000, 2000/458/CFSP.

When EU Member States showed their division over the Iraqi conflict, this meant, for some, a *coup de grâce* for the CFSP. However, High Representative Javier Solana re-established some common ground soon afterwards, and the EU has been playing an important role in the reconstruction phase[60]. The EU had distanced itself from promoting democracy by forceful means in Iraq, but it currently finances humanitarian and political assistance (governance, civil society) generously. Also, it will likely play a more direct role in designing and implementing specific projects on democratization soon. This way, democracy promotion has brought together EU CFSP action after an internal crisis over military intervention and support to the United States. In this example, without questioning the United States' leadership, I think that EU Member States' political leaders will increasingly recognize the pertinence of a stronger Europe in international relations, an alternative to compliance and to "jumping on the bandwagon", and thus find the political will to develop the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

OVERCOMING INSTITUTIONAL DIVISIONS

The first important division regarding European democracy promotion is that between the Member States and the European Union. Though part of Member States' democracy promotion funds are increasingly channelled through EU projects for countries like Greece, main donors such as the Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany and France maintain their national structures and their different ways of functioning. Though not easy because of the strong different traditions, co-operation is urgent in order to avoid duplication or contradictions, and, indeed, to maximize results. The EU should provide the framework to organize this co-operation.

Within the EU, democracy promotion clearly illustrates the institutional division between the Council, the main body responsible for policies, and the Commission, which is partly responsible for their drafting and mostly for their implementation. In addition, as an issue currently overarching development and external relations, it is also divided between two different Directorate Generals (DGs). Within the DGs, democracy promotion is again divided among different offices because it has different geographical applications, but it has, at the same time, a single overarching policy goal. One example of this is the MEDA programme, the main financial instrument for the Barcelona Process: Council regulations make up its legal base, and it is implemented by the European Commission, with DG External Relations taking responsibility for policy and the separate EuropeAid Cooperation Office in charge of the projects. EuropeAid is part of the EC, but it is supervised by members of different DGs:

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60 The EC contribution to Iraq in 2003/4, including humanitarian aid, amounted to euro 305 million, and the priorities described in its program are: restoring public services, boosting employment; strengthening governance, civil society and human rights. The funds will be distributed largely through the International Reconstruction Fund Facility (UN/World Bank managed). Source: EC Press Release The EU, the Mediterranean and the Middle East –a longstanding partnership, MEMO/04/151, 16 June 2004. For a recent policy paper on Europe and Iraq, see Richard Youngs, Europa e Iraq: hacia una politica mas constructiva?, Foreign Policy Centre/ FRIDA, November 2004.

External Relations, Development, Enlargement, and Economic Affairs[61]. EuropeAid is itself organized mainly on a geographical basis (splitting the MENA region), though its Directorate F manages several horizontal issues, democracy activities among them. If, following up on the MEDA example, we add in the structure of the partner state, and of the organizations that will eventually implement the democracy promotion plans and funds, the network is even more complicated![62]

The simplification of bureaucracy on the EU's side is essential to increase democracy promotion projects, their coherence and efficiency. Some initiatives have been taken to bring the democracy promotion actors together to discuss difficulties and prospects, such as the Democracy Agenda Conference in The Hague in the summer of 2004 mentioned above. EuropeAid's structures and functioning are currently under review, and hopefully the resulting arrangements will improve the current situation. The creation of the EU Ministry of Foreign Affairs, foreseen in the Constitution, may help in the coordination of policies and somehow centralise this structure, and, in general, EU external relations. One option would be that democracy promotion becomes an independent "field of interest" in CFSP able to reach to different DGs and oversee programmes, at least establishing the priorities, developing new instruments, and coordinating action.

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61 Source: http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/general/mission_fonc_en.htm. I confirmed my impressions about the ongoing self-evaluation and changing structure of EuropeAid in several informal conversations with EuropeAid officials during a meeting on Election Observation Principles and Guidelines held in Brussels on 30 September, 2004.

62 For a description of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership complex functioning, see D. Schmid, Les institutions européennes dans le fonctionnement du PEM: de la repartition des competences à la gestion dynamique du quotidien, EuroMeSCo paper no. 36, October 2004.

KEEPING THE FRAMEWORK SIMPLE

The launching of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), also known as "Wider Europe", in March 2003, further complicates the EU's democracy promotion strategy with a new geographic approach. This additional framework brings the Mediterranean countries of the Barcelona Process together with Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Russia (which is also covered by a different bilateral framework). Potentially, it would also include, at least, Belarus and Libya.
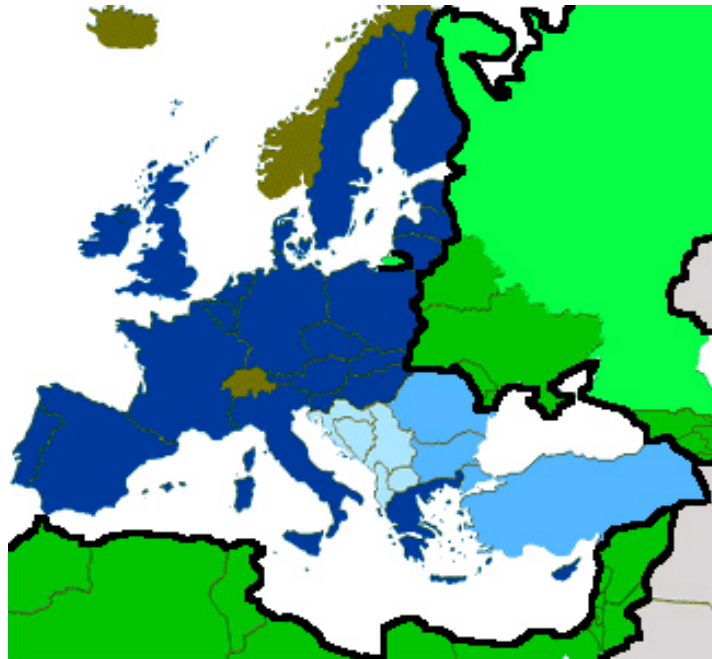
European Union Neighbourhood Policy: in addition to the MENA region, it includes Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. Source: http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/overview_en.htm

The European Neighbourhood Policy proposes the allocation of assistance for "political, security, economic, and cultural co-operation", acknowledging a link with the new EU security strategy. While recognizing the validity of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership framework, ENP foresees additional instruments, including thematic papers, cross-border programmes, and annual action programmes, and these shall substitute other existing programmes around 2007[63]. While these plans demonstrate the importance of democracy promotion and interest in the neighbouring countries (defined as a "renewed view" after the 2004 enlargement), the multiplication of frameworks is not helping to enhance EU

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63 Source: http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/index_en.htm; European Commission, Proposal for a Regulation of the EP and of the Council laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, Brussels, 29 September, 2004 COM(2004) 628 final 2004/0219 (COD).

coherence in external affairs. Democracy promotion is once again blurred among other objectives and general means.

For the MENA region, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Barcelona Process), an existing framework with a broad agenda, should be boosted through the strengthening of democracy promotion. Indeed, two of its three baskets, the "political and security partnership" and the "partnership in social, cultural, and human affairs" are underused and vague. Because of these "baskets", the Barcelona Process has often been compared to the Helsinki (CSCE) framework. In that case, reformists from Eastern European countries found a forum where their voice could be heard, and human rights issues (such as family-reunion, or free-speech claims) or cultural initiatives led, broadly speaking, to political reform. The EU should similarly exploit the potential value of this Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, and, winning over the reluctant partner states, foster political reform.

The EU relationship with the oil-exporting countries in the Arab world is distinct, and oil trade is itself a different major geopolitical issue with its own dynamics and its own difficulties. Thus far, democracy promotion has been plainly absent in this relationship, as the Co-operation Agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council is only economically oriented, and bilateral relations have hardly ever included dialogue on political issues. However, current security concerns justify reinforcing the political dialogue under such a structure, or on a bilateral basis.

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

While broad knowledge of the background and the region are useful to develop a strategy, the particularities of the different countries should be at the centre of the actual democracy promotion programmes. These need to be created anew for most countries, or further developed in, for instance, Jordan or Morocco, taking advantage of the endogenous advances there.

The bilateral Association Agreements signed with most Mediterranean partners include some political conditionality, but the EU hardly ever implements any legal provisions (limitation of aid, sanctions, discontinuation of relations, etc.). It should be firmer in pursuing democratization objectives, but avoid victimizing the populations instead of the powerful elites. The European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), described below, is an example of a country-approach, including Algeria, Israel, West Bank/ Gaza, Tunisia, and, lately, Iraq. Some Indicative Plans, basis for the application of the European Neighbourhood Policy, have already been drafted in 2004 for some MENA countries, including Country Reports for the Palestinian Authority of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. The EU started to work with Yemen on political aspects in 1998, and it is trying to strengthen political dialogue and reforms. In a

similar bilateral way, it should bring democracy promotion into the discussion with other countries[64].

DEFINING THE PROGRAMME

In recent years, the EU has been adding initiatives and activities, which shows that democracy promotion is scattered and improvised. One significant instance is the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), suggested by the European Parliament, and created by Council Regulations 975/1999 and 976/1999 (acknowledging the link with CFSP). EIDHR is a small, independent programme specially aimed at NGOs. It enables action even in cases where the country government opposes the project[65], but this provision has (again) never been used, and the programme has a *de facto* focus on human rights. Programmatic incoherence is perpetuated because the EU fails to separate democracy promotion from the related but different economic development and human rights, and the structures and projects remain mixed.

This programme should be simple but complete, focusing on political aspects, and considering overall objectives in the legislative, executive and judicial spheres of a democratic system. However, when it comes to specific projects, such as drafting a constitution, creating political parties, training judges, teaching electoral campaigning, or developing women or youth associations, the national background and input must be emphasized, with special care so as not to import models that would be out of place.

The EU should also make democracy promotion more substantial and dynamic in the field. Thus far, the programmes, rather than responding to local demands, have been suggested by the democracy promoter and are often implemented by alien NGOs or groups out of control. In the MENA region, religious (Muslim) partners in the field have been disregarded, despite the fact that they play an undeniable role in grass-roots public life and social work.

A broad democracy promotion strategy should define general goals, beware of economic reform, and acknowledge the connection with security strategies (though thus far the "war on terror" has focused on democracy promotion inconsistently [66]). But it must then define its own political objectives, diversify its means, adapt to different scenarios. Independent assessment would afterwards evaluate the strategy's successes and failures.

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64 The EU and Iran established a non-contractual Human Rights Dialogue, and agreed to open negotiations on some limited political issues (but mainly drawing on trade and cooperation agreements) in 2002. The conflictive Iranian nuclear program has nevertheless restricted progress.

65 Source: http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/eidhr/eidhr_en.htm. This is a significant difference and strength of the program.

66 Thomas Carothers calls for more consistency on the American side in "Promoting Democracy and Fighting Terror" in *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2003, since the democratization of Iraq "deserved a war", but Saudi Arabia is an important partner in the "fight on terror". European countries have not been more consistent, with limited interventions (notably Afghanistan) and many non-interventions (notably Tunisia).

While some are advocating a transatlantic partnership for democracy promotion in the MENA region[67], I think that cooperation is positive and should be enhanced, but the American and European projects should remain separate. The strongest reason to pursue distinct plans is that, in view of the low popularity that the United States currently has in the region, democracy promotion is identified as an imposition. The US-led intervention in Iraq, drawing on regime change and democratization arguments, has delegitimized democracy promotion as intrusive, unilateralist, violent, and, thus far at least, unsuccessful. Now, the US has to rebuild its image in the Middle East and North Africa and partly review its own strategy for Bush's second term[68]. Europe can contribute by building up a multilateral image, and reinvigorate transatlantic relations, by selectively co-opting the US within a cooperative framework. However, the EU should take its own opportunities, and the principles, design, means, and application of its strategy should be European[69].

As this paper argues, promoting democracy in the MENA region could be a significant test for an independent European approach. In addition, Europe could develop its own initiative in order to build up European teamwork, and, as a result, reinforce the EU's capacity for external action.

The *Broader Middle East Initiative* is becoming more inclusive, but it can still be perceived as a foreign project of the powerful, in particular of the US and the G8[70]. After the turmoil at its outset and its limited reform, this project should be handled carefully, and, as much as possible, steered towards further internationalisation and Arab ownership. The UNDP Arab Human

Development Reports were perceived as a constructive critique of the region's problems and challenges partly because of the UN global framework and the inclusion of Arab expertise and

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[67] Steven Everts, *Difficult but necessary: a transatlantic strategy for the Greater Middle East*, Centre for European Reform, 2003, Urban Ahlin (et al.), *Democracy and Human Development in the Broader Middle East: A transatlantic strategy for partnership*, 2004.

68 The democratization of the Middle East has been stated as a clear foreign policy goal in official communications, and the Department of State website has increased information in this respect. Research and policy suggestions abound in American think-tanks; see, for instance, Michele Dunne in Incorporating Democracy into the US Middle-East Strategy, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Paper 50, November 2004.

69 Bush's reelection has very much astonished the European public, which may actually trigger the questioning of common transatlantic values and identification with America, and, based on feelings of "otherness", maybe even boost European identity-building. The political classes, more pragmatic, will more likely try to enhance US-EU rapprochement while, maybe also "dreaming of" European alternatives in a future scenario.

70 According to British MP Robin Cook, two priorities have already been identified for the next G8 summit: the Middle East and global warming (as mentioned in his lecture on America and the World –After the Election at the LSE on 4 November, 2004). The official agenda already includes a discussion on "The Broader Middle East Initiative"; updates are available at the 2005 Summit website http://www.perthshireg8.com.

participation in their making[71]. Indeed, it is probably preferable that MENA countries develop their own, new plans, and then seek support from international partners, but, alternatively, they should become more active in the current initiatives.

Finally, a word must be said about the international circumstances that we currently face. They will determine the democracy promotion strategies of Western origin and their outcome in the Middle East and North Africa region. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an inevitable source of instability, exacerbated by Sharon's aggressive Israeli policies and the uncertainty on the side of the Palestinian new leadership's ability to control terrorism and negotiate. The situation in Iraq is increasingly difficult according to most accounts, and may remain so after the foreseen elections, and even Afghanistan seems far from stable, too. Nuclear weapons capacity building come in and out of the Iranian agenda as a test for international diplomacy. All this adds up to domestic political instability in many of the MENA countries. Combined with stagnating economic prospects, this creates a picture that calls for maximum international attention. This complex situation of entangled roots and open prospects cannot just have an easy military solution driven by an external, distant force. The tensions must be addressed through a mix of cooperation and true, wilful demand for change in the MENA countries. Only then can peace-building and democratization offer a satisfactory approach for an enduring solution. As promoting democracy in the MENA region becomes increasingly important for the EU, developing an adequate strategy will be a must.

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71 However, a recent scandal regarding the 2004 report illustrates the difficulties to maintain independence and admit unfavourable reports: the authors have denounced pressure by the Bush administration to change their assessment of the Iraq intervention according to Ignacio Cembrero, Intelectuales árabes denuncian la censura de Bush a un informe crítico, El Pais, 3 January, 2005.

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