The EU's Democratization Agenda in the Mediterranean: a Critical Inside-Out Approach

MICHELLE PACE, PETER SEEBERG and

FRANCESCO CAVATORTA

Introduction

Democracy promotion in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) remains a central pillar of the foreign policy of both the European Union (EU) and the United States (US), despite the failure of 'democracy by imposition' in Iraq. A recent relative military success in fighting insurgents still leaves a problematic political reality where war-lordism and a weak central government make democracy a difficult goal to achieve. Despite the embedding of the Iraqi government's control, the growing numbers of actors who seem prepared to take part in politics according to democratic norms / rules of the game may yet be outflanked by extremists. The fragmentation of Shi'a and Sunni communities into numerous sectarian political organisations and the reluctance of many Sunnis to participate in formal politics mean that some eschew violence while others perpetrate violence on a daily basis.[1] In addition, external actors plough on with democracy promotion efforts even though there are still significant contradictions between the objectives of the policy and its instruments.[2]

To a large extent, post-2003 American policy in Iraq has focused attention of both scholars and policymakers on the methods through which the EU attempts to export democracy in the MENA region, such as positive political engagement with authoritarian regimes, the promotion of economic reforms and the strengthening of civil society activism.

Rather than concentrating on the relations between the incumbent authoritarian regimes and the opposition in the relevant countries, and on the degree to which these relations are affected by EU efforts at promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law (an outside-in approach), this collection of articles inverts the focus of such relationships and attempts to look at them 'inside-out'.[3] While some contributions to the Special Issue also emphasise the 'outside-in' axis, given that this continues to be analytically rewarding, the overarching thrust of this Special Issue is to provide some empirical substance for the claim that EU policy making is not unidirectional and is influenced by the perceptions and actions of its 'targets'. We thus focus on domestic political changes as they are happening at the time of writing (late-2008) on the ground in the MENA and how they link into what the EU is attempting to achieve in the region. Conceptually, the literature on democracy promotion takes it for granted that certain institutional structures are necessary to promote reform within existing institutions, in accordance with liberal-democratic and market-capitalist 'guidelines' for good governance. Rather than merely looking from the outside at how democracy promotion policies shape reform in the context of authoritarian regimes or how regimes and opposition are induced toward a liberal democratic model, we invert the focus and look from the inside-out at *how*

regimes and opposition groups can *induce* external actors to view and react to their situation as a viable exception to their preferred practices. Our reference to MENA countries as an 'exception' denotes, on the one hand, exception at a practical level where regimes rule over populations mainly unversed in democratic politics and, on the other hand, exception at a conceptual level where Islamists who accept democratic procedures aim to build a significantly different type of nation-state, which might challenge what European policy-makers would consider to be democratically acceptable (see Volpi in this Special Issue). Finally, we discuss the self-representation of the EU and its (lack of a) clear regional role (see Pace in this Special Issue).

The combination of strong regimes in weak states[4] and the reluctance of the EU to approach popular Islamist opposition groups in the MENA region creates a situation which - from an EU perspective - entails a very limited range of political options. Thus, while the EU promotes a liberal-democratic and capitalist type of governance that reflects its own experience and its own interests, it is also willing to compromise on what can be achieved in the region, especially in a context where MENA regimes and some secular opposition actors influence how the EU conceives both political change and, more importantly, stability. Thus, this Special Issue examines how MENA ruling elites encourage the EU to look at them as a 'special case' or as an exception in terms of the EU's preferred practices built around the notions of democratic accountability and human rights. Similarly, opposition actors, be they secular or Islamist, are not only influenced by the ways that the EU seeks to export its preferred norms, but also may contribute to the EU's preferred policies by virtue of their ideologies and policy positions. It follows that

secular opposition parties and civil society movements tend to present themselves as the only genuine 'democratic' actors in the region in order to gain benefits from a privileged relationship with the EU and organise their political activities around the necessity of satisfying the requirements of this privileged relationship. This behaviour tends however to marginalise them in the domestic political game, as the wider population may not subscribe either to their tactics or proposed policies.[5] In the case of the Islamists, related parties and movements generally accept democratic procedures while at the same time wishing to construct a different type of nation-state, which may offer a conceptual exception for the EU and the way it conceives of nation-state building in terms of founding norms. Yet, while Islamist movements in the region have generally accepted the primacy of elections as one of the crucial founding moments of democracy-building, the EU has remained highly sceptical of their involvement in the electoral process. Thus, the move towards electoral politics that many Islamist parties consider to be extremely significant is paradoxically perceived to be very problematic by the EU because such moves are not usually accompanied by the adhesion of Islamists to the liberal values that the EU considers inseparable from democratic procedures and institutions. In addition, it should be borne in mind that Islamist parties have usually not changed their views with respect to a number of international issues that the EU deems important for international stability, such as the Arab-Israeli question or the occupation of Iraq. It is thus the ambition of this Special Issue to move beyond an exclusively normative or exclusively realist approach, and to adopt a combined approach to understanding relations between authoritarian MENA regimes and opposition groups in Middle Eastern societies within the framework of external democracy promotion efforts. In some ways, this work has

already begun with the contributions of authors like Pace and Bicchi, who in their respective work use the concepts of discursive constructivism and ideational inter-governmentalism in order to capture the complex mixture of realist and normative concerns at the heart of EU external policy-making.[6] In this Special Issue, we assume such a mixture and examine in some detail how EU policy-making processes are informed by the feedback effects that the targeted domestic actors in the MENA generate. In other words, by highlighting the current reality on the ground in MENA, this Special Issue gives prominence to how local actors' actions themselves influence EU democracy promotion policies in the region.

Some claim that the whole idea of focusing on the EU's democracy promotion efforts is no longer enlightening. They suggest that the explicit focus on democracy promotion is in itself preventing new insights.[7] Schlumberger, for example, suggests that instead we should focus on the nature of MENA states, in particular, on the inter-relationship between rents, rent seeking, and the prospects for economic and political transformation to a market economy and democratic governance:

> For current research, the key challenge is to increase our knowledge of the causes for Arab authoritarianism. This topic has only recently become a core area of research on Middle East politics. Donor strategies, in their turn, should follow research and be ready to enter the "post-democratization era", take into account these causes and develop new ideas in order to explicitly address them (...) Such ideas need to start from present authoritarian

conditions in recipient countries rather than from ideal-type images of liberal democracies.[8]

But to our mind such claims still leave a research vacuum which has thus far not been filled. In fact the underlying assumption of these critics is that a comprehensive, academic description and analysis of democracy promotion initiatives by the EU in the Mediterranean region and/or the wider Middle East has been achieved and nothing more needs to be said. While we agree on the focus on conditions in MENA countries, we endeavour to add MENA actors and their actions to the context. The contention here is that, in light of both scholarly and policy-making developments, a new form of analysis is necessary, particularly when the focus shifts from evaluating the policies of the EU to analysing *how* the targeted actors (MENA regimes and opposition actors) themselves react to and influence how such policies are designed and implemented.

From a scholarly point of view, the wider literature on democratization has now accepted the significant role that external actors can have in influencing processes of regime change, which were previously believed to be solely domestic affairs.[9] This means that more refined, theoretical tools can now be employed to understand *how* specific EU policies and actors affect the transitional game within targeted countries. This allows scholarship to move beyond discussions of the EU's attempts at exporting the model of liberal democracy to the MENA and seek instead an approach where the focus is on domestic actors and their possible contributions in shaping the perceptions of the region of external actors. Previous discussions largely focused on the notorious failures of

progress in democratization processes in the region and on the internal contradictions that

characterize EU policy-making. [10] From a policy-making point of view, much has

changed since previous systematic analyses of the EU's relationship with the MENA, [11]

because of the extremely important impact of the US-led 'war on terror', which has

reconfigured both strategies and policy tools of action and led to the rise of security and

stability goals. Although this is far from being empirically proven [12], there is now, among

US policy makers in particular, the almost unquestioned assumption that democracy will

contribute to reduce, if not eliminate, political violence. [13] The type of democracy that is

envisaged by external actors for the MENA is one that, over time, will come to reflect the

institutions and the values upon which Western democracies are built. Thus, while

democracy might be an essentially contested concept in theoretical terms, at the practical

and policy-making level a blueprint for what democracy should look like does exist and it

is not surprising that it mirrors the experience and the institutions of the leading Western

powers. Western-style democracy is pursued as an objective partly because of its

presumed beneficial international repercussions, associated with 'democratic peace

theory'. We could hypothesize that the EU promotes democracy with vigour in the

MENA region because it believes it to be crucial to international stability and security. [14]

It might be logical to assume that EU democracy promotion policies would be

strengthened and made more coherent and effective after 9/11. This, however, does not

seem to be the case, as contradictions in EU policy regarding democracy promotion in the

MENA region are still significant. This would seem to point to an understanding of the

EU as a rationalistic and realist actor rather than a normative one. [15] Yet, this does not

entirely capture what the EU 'does' in the region and does not fully explain how its

policies are conceived and implemented by local actors on the ground. As Youngs[16] highlights, the EU pursues interests within an intensely normative framework and it is only through an understanding of this dynamic process that external policies can be analysed. When it comes to the MENA region, the normative value attached to democracy as a norm to be exported frames the manner in which specific interests are pursued because the EU has a very definitive image of what kind of outcome it wishes to see in the MENA region as a result of domestic political change: namely, European-style liberal democracy. Policies aimed at achieving this goal are both normative *and* realist. They are normative because any policy that aims to embed Western-style democracy can be justified as one defending freedom and democracy - (the Algeria case is quite paradigmatic in this respect). The policies, however, are also realist because in the EU's conceptualisation of stability, only Western-style liberal democracy can create a stable and friendly environment where Western material interests can be pursued. At the same time, EU actors have acknowledged that: (1) the 'Western' model does not necessarily work in the MENA, and (2) the EU must therefore adapt to local, regional, social and religious settings in this region.[17] Norms and interests are thus inextricably linked. It is at this juncture that domestic actors in the region can signal to the EU what their preferences are, highlighting their position and 'values' in order to influence the ways in which EU policies such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP, launched in 1995) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP, launched in 2003), are then implemented in practice.

Scholars are generally engaged in explaining under which circumstances the promotion of liberal democracy systems is successful or, alternatively, under which conditions failures are to be expected. It follows that much of the literature, just as in the case of analyses of the EU's key policies towards the Mediterranean, namely the EMP and the ENP, and their successes and/or shortcomings in fulfilling the promises they contain on matters related to democracy, tends to look at how external democracy promotion of the Western, liberal kind influences both authoritarian regimes and opposition actors.

It is widely assumed that powerful external actors, including the EU, are the dominant partners in unequal relationships, whereby resources available to them fuel their pursuit of their objectives and interests. To a considerable extent this is the case, as the EU enjoys a predominant position in the Mediterranean by virtue of its economic power, but relationships with individual MENA countries and political actors are not unidirectional. In this Special Issue, we want to emphasise that MENA regimes have a number of strategic advantages, such as natural resources, as well as the growing populations and the spectre of radical Islamism. Collectively, these factors can be put to use to try to manipulate how external actors conceive of their role in the region, potentially influential in shaping European attitudes. Domestic opposition political actors also have a role to play because they can provide knowledge and access to EU policy-makers and by virtue of their position, they can contribute to shaping the perceptions and views of the EU. Therefore, the apparent robustness of authoritarianism in the MENA, which, among other things, leads to institutionalisation of strong groups of elites in power[18] – and is a central paradox of weak MENA states[19] – becomes important as part of our analysis in this

Special Issue. In particular, as explained earlier, this can enable regimes to persuade the EU to view their situation as an 'exception'. The region has a remarkable success rate of incumbent autocratic regimes remaining in power for long periods, in spite of sometimes significant challenges to their rule and widespread lack of popular legitimacy.

The resilience and durability of the regimes in the MENA can be explained by various factors, as recent research has shown.[20] If we look at the many different attempts to explain authoritarian ability for survival or 'persistence', they span from orientalist/psychologically familiar assumptions about a special resistance of the Islamic mind,[21] via an extreme degree of state repression attached to Mediterranean regimes, to macro-sociological explanations taking their point of departure in the ability of the regimes to include or co-opt different forms of opposition groups.[22] Furthermore, there are also explanations based on assumptions that MENA political elites manage to stay in power by 'buying off' possible contestants to local hegemony. A distribution of significant amounts of symbolic or material resources to ethnic, religious or politically defined minorities (or majorities), makes it possible for often illegitimate regimes to survive, resisting demands for democracy and good governance from both inside and outside. In addition, they are able to convince external actors, including the EU, of the particular and exceptional circumstances on the ground.

Focusing on political issues in the MENA highlights how the supposedly normative, long-running EU push for democracy in the MENA is at best a very slow work in progress, and at worst democracy is not advancing but retreating. Disappointment in this

regard is in part due to inherent paradoxes and contradictions in the making of a policy with no clear, defined vision due to internal institutional problems of the EU structure itself. However, as this Special Issue highlights, the production of relevant policies and norms is not solely the realm of the EU, as the design and implementation of democracy promotion strategies is clearly influenced by the way the targeted actors react to them and transform them. This Special Issue is therefore specifically concerned with outlining *how* authoritarian MENA regimes and opposition actors induce external actors, and specifically the EU, to perceive and react to their respective situation. This approach marks a novel contribution to the study of democracy promotion, while permitting, at the same time, an examination of *how* the EU represents itself in the region and *how* it conceives its role. Some of the past critiques of EU democracy promotion strategies in the region tended to concentrate their attention on the tools, resources and discourse of the EU in an attempt to explain the gap between the normative rhetoric and the disappointing reality.[23] Other critiques came from those scholars subscribing to a more realist interpretation of EU external policy-making.[24] What both approaches have in common is an exclusive focus on the EU as the 'leading agency or actor' in this process. This Special Issue, on the contrary, attempts to analyse what the EU does in the region in light of what the targeted actors hope to achieve and how they utilise EU resources in order to achieve their objectives. These factors are an important insight into how the EU formulates and implements policies because it is only through a thorough understanding of the complexities of individual domestic political arrangements in each MENA country that we can have a clearer theoretical picture of EU policy-making.

An Agenda for Inquiry

The collection of articles in the Special Issue contains three separate but interconnected sections. The first section is informed by the academic debate about the current state of democratization studies. It seeks to frame conceptual arguments on the theme of EU democracy promotion and how this policy is read and affected by various political agents in the MENA. Thus, the first section deals with normative and discursive dimensions of EU democracy promotion efforts, how they influence domestic actors and, importantly, how they are influenced by them. This is a crucial aspect in explaining the so-far failed democracy promotion efforts of the EU in the region.

The next two sections contain case studies covering the Mashrek and the Maghreb respectively. The overarching objective of these two sections is to illustrate the complex interaction that exists between the domestic actors and the EU on matters related to democracy promotion. Such interaction contributes to an understanding of the persistence of authoritarianism in the region, and analysis is furthered by examining how domestic actors position themselves in relation to EU policies. Specifically, the articles in these two sections focus on different MENA polities and how they are influenced by the postcolonial legacy of the EU, with special reference to the role of opposition movements and parties, as well as how EU policy-making and implementation are in turn influenced by these domestic actors. Rather than once again outlining how EU efforts in the region fare, the goal is to examine MENA polities by concentrating on the recent emergence of

socio-political movements, their role as opposition forces to authoritarian regimes in the region and how the ruling elites exploit the emergence of Islamist movements to strengthen their hands *vis-à-vis* the EU.

Problems, Paradoxes and Contradictions

Traditional views about the problems in promoting democracy and controlling political Islam are challenged in the first article by Frédéric Volpi. Volpi discusses the democratizing potential of Islamist movements and parties and the challenges that they pose to basic assumptions about relations between liberalism and democracy. He points to the alternative of talking about 'grey areas' of democracy, suggesting a partial convergence between Islamist and liberal-democratic agendas. First, Volpi approaches the issue of political Islam and democracy as seen from an orientalist perspective with its dual philosophical and political sets of implications. He then discusses democracy in the Middle East after the cold war, looking at Iran and Turkey as these countries have been analysed within many democratization studies. Drawing on Perthes and Lust-Okar, he also discusses how MENA elites have managed to co-opt their opponents and, at the same time, neutralize popular demands for democracy by manipulating and exploiting splits between opposition groups. Finally, he points to the neglect of detailed considerations of conceptual compromises that are needed for a meaningful dialogue between opposition and government. This might help explain the current lack of options for democracy promotion in the region. Volpi concludes by claiming that we need to move beyond functionalist explanations, which tend to dominate the field, and that the undermining of modernization theory has left a vacuum in contemporary explanatory

frameworks of democratization in the Muslim world. He also criticizes 'civil-society' explanations for their weaknesses, particularly that they view democratization processes as functional adaptations of Islamist movements to state repression: by being predicated upon a static political order, such explanations fail to consider democratization processes as engines of change. This conceptual exercise leads to an important theoretical outcome in highlighting the challenges 'political Islam' poses to international actors attempting to promote democratic transformation in the MENA. As Volpi points out:

> [A]lthough sometimes presented as an exception to the dominant realist paradigm, the activities of the EU, especially in this context …, had difficulties in moving beyond a sophisticated realist model for politics in the region, not least because the EU had difficulty conceiving what the Mediterranean should be as a region.

MENA authoritarian regimes are able to exploit the existing suspicion of the EU towards Islamist movements by highlighting their illiberal traits on issues such as women's rights and religious minorities, therefore presenting current elites as the only viable alternative to the Islamist project. The access that ruling elites enjoy at the EU level, through a multiplicity of channels set up under the EMP and the ENP, ensures that their input is taken into account at the EU level.

Michelle Pace takes this theoretical insight further by explaining the EU's diagnosis of the Mediterranean 'condition', which in turn highlights the logic behind the EU's

prescription for liberal democratization in the MENA. The strategy of promoting democracy by the EU proved relatively successful in Central and Eastern Europe. This, however, has not been the case in the MENA. For years, theorists of international democracy have discussed why this is the case. Through a novel re-visitation of previous debates, Pace points to profound contradictions in EU democracy promotion in the Mediterranean. Specifically, Pace discusses the limits of EU normative power. She focuses on the interconnectedness between democratization on the one hand and stability and prosperity on the other. Pace takes the 1990s as her point of departure and the attempts by the EU to promote democracy and human rights in the Mediterranean as a counterweight to the unstable situation in the region. This was done in practice by signing a series of association agreements with the states south and east of the Mediterranean and by launching the EMP. Pace points to a problematic logic in much EU thinking, that is, that the promotion of economic development will automatically lead to democratization, and argues that the EU lacks a clear, long-term vision for democratic transformation in the MENA in particular and more generally in the South. Linking up with Volpi's arguments, Pace claims that the problems of modernization theory are particularly obvious in the MENA, where much of the struggle between sectors of the opposition and incumbent regimes is precisely about the very meaning and content of modernization. She also points to a tension between the EU's objectives of promoting democracy on the one hand and seeking to ensure security on the other. This refers to security in the economic sense, meaning oil and gas supplies, and, in the political sense, it implies relations with authoritarian regimes rather than opposition groups, including Islamist actors. Taking the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians as a case study, Pace

discusses the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in EU efforts to promote democratic transformation. She concludes that the EU, by focusing primarily on external democracy promotion in the Mediterranean region, creates the impression that the concept of democracy in itself is external to the region. This marginalises the domestic production of democratic norms because they do not seem to fit with European conceptualisations of how a polity should be governed or organised.

Case Studies I: the Mashrek

The sections consisting of case-studies begin with Are Hovdenak's study on Palestine. Specifically, he analyses the challenges for democratic reform in Palestine with a focus on the political transformation process which the Islamic Resistance Movement (*Hamas*) recently underwent. Hovdenak examines the implications of *Hamas*'s political role in relation to the prospects for democratic developments within the Palestinian Authority.

The international dimension is particularly relevant for Palestinian politics and outcomes that are contextualized in relation to the EU's activities in the region. Building on extensive fieldwork in Palestine, the article discusses the expectations on the part of *Hamas* of the possibilities for improving relations with European countries and the perspectives in the EU's policies towards the Palestinian Islamists. It discusses the role of the EU in connection with the international boycott of the *Hamas* government and the failure of the EU to respect the outcome of the democratic election among the Palestinians. Hovdenak concludes that EU democratization efforts have suffered a serious setback in the Palestinian case. The EU has been quite successful in presenting itself as a

normative actor which pro-democracy movements can rely on for support, as the cases in the Balkans demonstrate. It was, therefore, expected that a more positive attitude towards *Hamas* would have been forthcoming given the democratic mandate the movement received and the 'distance' the movement had travelled from the very margins of Palestinian and international politics.[25] The normative credit that the EU had built up significantly diminished, when it decided to follow the US in its boycott of *Hamas*. The renewed authoritarianism of both the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority and of *Hamas* in their respective strongholds can be seen as being partly the outcome of a redistribution of resources that the EU initiated by responding negatively to the electoral outcome of the 2006 elections. The democratic step that *Hamas* believed it had taken was understood in a completely different manner in Europe, widening the gap not only between two political actors, but also between two conceptualisations of what constitutes a *democratic* order. While *Hamas* partly believed that it was making a choice that would fit in with the requirements and wishes of the international community and of the EU in particular, the effect that its victory had on the EU was extremely negative because it challenged the latter's normative tenets. This clearly demonstrates how MENA's domestic actors and developments are understood in the EU, with policies designed according to both normative values (a *Hamas*-led government is conceived to be un-democratic by definition because of the presumed illiberal positions of the movement) and realist necessities (the difficulty of dealing with, what is considered by the EU as, a much less flexible partner for peace).

Irrespective of political and doctrinal religious differences, *Hezbollah* of Lebanon offers a parallel to *Hamas* and the former's political strengthening is taken as the point of departure in the second article covering the Mashrek-region. Peter Seeberg focuses on the EU's problematic role as a democracy promoter in this region. Seeberg describes the ongoing, political turmoil in Lebanon and its background. Both the war between *Hezbollah* and Israel in the summer of 2006 and the long lasting, presidential election process of 2007 and 2008 deepened the political turmoil in Lebanon. Seeberg points to the relation between Lebanon's particularistic political system and the proclaimed support of the Lebanese elites for a consociational political system. He also points to the importance of taking this into consideration when analysing internal political confrontations in Lebanon. *Hezbollah* is, in many ways, the entity around which regional interests revolve, not least because of the regional role of the movement, which is bolstered by Iran's foreign policy. The EU has been reluctant to engage with *Hezbollah* and has instead chosen a low-level dialogue with its leaders. Seeberg analyses the ENP Action Plan with Lebanon as an EU democracy promotion tool, through which the EU seeks to reaffirm its normative commitment to democracy. Despite this, Seeberg concludes that from the EU's perspective, the Action Plan is a rather defensive initiative. It represents another rather incoherent policy towards the MENA. The vagueness and inconsistency of EU policies in Lebanon are partly explained by tactical considerations. It also suggests that the EU pursues a realist agenda via normative policies while not officially engaging with a movement that, despite holding on to its weapons, has made a significant move towards democratic politics. More than normative policies, political expediency and political disagreements on the geopolitics of the region seem to dictate

the EU's refusal to engage consistently with *Hezbollah*. Lebanese opponents of Hezbollah make matters worse, as they successfully present themselves to international actors as an alternative to *Hezbollah* by emphasising their own democratic and liberal credentials, thereby turning the Lebanese political scene into a contest for the exclusive label of 'democratic group' that they hope will bring both material benefits and legitimacy.

The next two contributions deal with the case of Egypt. First, Sarah Wolff discusses the so-called 'revolt of the judges' as a test case for the EU in engaging non-state actors and movements without specific political-ideological programmes. Second, Thomas Demmelhuber presents a wider analysis of the EU's role in Egypt by examining the difficult reform process within this country.

The three stage election in Egypt during November and December 2005 to determine the composition of the People's Assembly occurred two months after the country's first, multi-candidate, presidential elections. The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) maintained its majority and control of the Assembly, but gains were made by others at the expense of the NDP. In her article, Wolff gives a detailed analysis of the election in 2005 with a specific focus on the 'Judges' Revolt', widely covered in the world media. Judges wanted to emphasise their important electoral supervisory role, as detailed in Egypt's constitution. She claims that, despite intimidations, the judges were successful in advancing the rule of law in Egypt. Given the normative and legalistic nature of the judges' protest, it could have been expected that the EU would have tried to seize the

opportunity to influence domestic political events by forcefully supporting the judges in the name of democracy and accountability. Yet the EU failed to support the judges. The Egyptian government managed quickly to defuse the issue through its privileged access to European policy-makers, successfully presenting itself as a reluctant strong ruler trying to modernise and liberalise in the face of widespread radical hostility from domestic actors. The privileged position the Egyptian government enjoys with EU policy-makers thus affected how the judges' revolt was understood at the apex of the EU.

Demmelhuber takes as his point of departure the succession issue in the Egyptian republic, where it appears the ageing president Mubarak is trying to manoeuvre his son Gamal into position to succeed him as ruler. Gamal Mubarak plays an important role in Egyptian reform processes, which mainly focus on economic relations, but also, to some degree include political reforms. These reforms do not solely arise from external pressures but can, according to Demmelhuber, be seen as the ruling elite's answer to the challenges of a changing domestic and international environment. The composition of Egyptian reform actors is of significance for European efforts at addressing the challenges arising from Egypt. Demmelhuber analyses the role of various political actors in Egypt, categorizing them in terms of the 'Gamal-group', the Muslim Brotherhood, various syndicates and associations, the secular opposition and the *Kifaya*; in sum, a varied and complex group of actors. In addition, Demmelhuber points to weblogs and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as informal yet important expressions of interest (and thereby also being potential reform actors) within the Egyptian public sphere. Demmelhuber claims that what unites all opposition actors is what he terms the

'variety-capability gap'. Moreover, they are all up against the Egyptian state, 'the type of state that allows a relative freedom of expression, but not freedom of action.' Demmelhuber acknowledges that the EU finds it difficult to respond adequately to Egypt's political realities. Echoing Pace's contribution, Demmelhuber argues that the EU's long-term goal may be to support democratization in Egypt. In the short-term, however, the EU prioritizes stability and cooperation with the incumbent regime as necessary for its achievement. Demmelhuber claims that despite the EMP and the ENP, there remains 'an incremental need for practicable instruments and partners'. His analysis has its foundations in a well-known fact: the EU privileges realist objectives to the detriment of normative ones, for example by providing resources for authoritarian actors, rather than engaging opposition actors that the EU may regard as lukewarm democrats at best. Demmelhuber claims that the 'Muslim Brotherhood should not be considered as part of the problem but more as part of the solution for the sake of Egypt's long-term stability'. Consequently, he avers that the EU should encourage the gradual insertion of the Brotherhood into the political process, not permanently exclude it as this will help destabilise the country.

Case Studies II: The Maghreb

The last part of the Special Issue discusses issues related to the EU's attempts at promoting democracy in the Maghreb. Two contributions focusing on Morocco commence the coverage, followed by articles on Algeria and Tunisia. Morocco has, for several reasons, including its proximity to Europe and its importance as a large-scale source of migrants, been subject to significant, European political and economic

attention. In his contribution, Francesco Cavatorta discusses the lack of unity within the Moroccan opposition and explores the reasons for this. Cavatorta explains that the opposition groups in Morocco do not pool their resources to pressurize the regime in the direction of meaningful political reforms. Rather, there is competition among the various opposition groups and especially between secular and Islamist groups. The EU influences Morocco's political contestation, by highlighting perceived ideological and tactical differences between Islamist and secularist political actors. The EU appears unwilling to conceive of the possibility that an alternative might exist to liberal democracy, which is what Islamists believe. For Islamist parties, the focus is on elections and accountability of officials (a corollary to their anti-corruption campaigns) and democracy is simply taken to mean catering to the collective needs of the people. Political Islam does not emphasise the liberal aspect of governance, crucial to Western democratic political thinking. By promoting a specific form of *liberal* democracy, to which only secular and liberal Moroccans might adhere, the EU helps reinforce the divide between opposition groups. In turn, the divisions within the opposition help secure the continuity of the regime through a 'divide and conquer' strategy, as the secular opposition subscribes to values that render it a privileged partner of the EU while political moves by Islamists are regarded with suspicion. The EU's normative values are not sufficiently flexible and the phenomenon of 'Islamic democracy' is regarded as a type of 'non-democratic confrontational regime', leading to what Bicchi has called 'cognitive uncertainty'.[26] This, in turn, leads to policy choices that, in the eyes of Islamists and of much public opinion in the MENA, run contrary to the EU's stated pro-democracy policies. In this context, it is no surprise that in their struggle against Islamism for political influence in society,

secular movements play up their liberal and democratic credentials in order to extract benefits from the EU.

Islamists are also at the centre of Eva Wegner and Miquel Pellicer's contribution. Their focus is specifically on the ideological moderation of the Islamist movements in Morocco. They define the concept of moderation as 'becoming more flexible towards core ideological beliefs'. Their point is that this understanding of moderation is feasible because it does not presume that Islamists are, by definition, anti-democratic. This potentially offers a way out of the problematic in regard to EU perceptions of Islamist movements in the MENA. Their article commences by analysing the relationship between the *Parti de la Justice et du Développement* (PJD) and the *Mouvement Unité et Réforme* (MUR) during 1992-2007, with the latter year being the most recent parliamentary elections in Morocco. The process of gaining autonomy informs the development of moderation which the PJD appears to pursue while, at the same time, gaining strength as both social movement and political party. Wegner and Pellicer claim that the EU's policy towards Islamists can be seen as a policy of avoidance of engagement with them. The PJD's recent moderation was not met with a response of political liberalization from the regime. In addition, the authors claim that the EU, consistently supportive of the governing regime in Morocco, has not yet developed a consistent stance towards Morocco's Islamists.

The preferences and political decisions of the political elite are crucial for understanding the conditions for democracy promotion in Algeria. The background for the discrepancy

between the political objectives of the EMP/Barcelona Declaration and the actual practices of EU policies in Algeria can be understood by focusing on the contradictions between the ruling elite in the country, which has been able to sustain non-democratic governing structures, and the Islamic opposition, which was denied electoral victory and kept from power by the suspension of the elections and army intervention in 1992. This situation laid the foundation for the tragedy of Algeria in the 1990s. Ayşe Aslıhan Çelenk interprets the Algerian reality within the framework of a 'misfit model' claiming that:

> When the costs of responding to EU pressure for change are higher, domestic political actors tend to resist EU-level pressure (…) the colonial legacy, perceptions about political Islam and the preferences of the military and the president as the major political actors are the domestic determinants of the way in which EU democracy promotion policies affect the country.

The EU, once again, preferred stability over the promotion of democracy and the authoritarian regime was accepted by the international community, given the alternative of an Islamist regime. Çelenk demonstrates this by referring to MEDA funding, which was never suspended even though steps toward democratization were not taken in Algeria. In her concluding remarks, Çelenk claims that security priorities and the concerns of the EU about political and economic stability led to it abstaining from pressuring for democratization in Algeria. The EU instead chose to support and cooperate with the incumbent political elite, leaving others out. Thereby, the EU contributed to

consolidating the power of the authoritarian political elite in Algeria, and did not contribute to democratization in Algeria.

The issue of identity and political change in Tunisia is analysed in the last article covering the Maghreb sub-region. Brieg Powel takes recent political developments in Tunisia as his point of departure, and examines how the EU presents them as a success story of its programmes of democratic assistance. Powell investigates the notion of normative power in connection with a discussion about the nature of the EU as an international actor. He claims that the inclusion by the EU of Tunisia within a discursive 'Mediterranean' construction associates the Tunisian state and society with signifiers which may actually only be of relevance to other parts of the region. He also examines the role of political Islam in the Tunisian context. Tunisia is, in its rhetoric and practice, securitizing Islamists. As a result the Islamist political parties, like for instance the *Nahda* party, are hounded by the security forces. There is little understanding amongst EU officials of differences between the Islamist groups in Tunisia, and it is shown that, seen from the EU perspective, democracy promotion and security issues are linked together, hence contributing to the sidelining of the Islamists by the Tunisian regime. Powel concludes that Tunisia represents a challenge to the conceptualization of the EU as a normative power. Contrary to the EU claiming democracy promotion as its primary ambition, Powel shows that, together with the incumbent regime, the EU first and foremost pursues stability in Tunisia, and in so doing contributes to delegitimizing non-regime, Islamist actors and discourses. Finally, Powel concludes that this has implications

not only for the role of the EU as a democracy promoter, but for the concept of democracy itself.

Conclusion

It is our claim that by taking an inside-out approach in our case studies, as well as seeking to combine realist and normative approaches, we can usefully generate new insights into relations between the EU and other external actors and authoritarian regimes in the MENA. We also argue that in choosing not to interact or engage with other actors in the MENA, the EU holds a very limited and blurred understanding of the specificities of each country in the region as well as of the region as a whole. By focusing in particular on Islamist groups in the MENA, the contributors in this Special Issue are not claiming that these groups are necessarily 'democratic': no such group has so far been given the opportunity to take part in a 'liberal political system'. Attempting to understand the exact political nature of Islamist groups without taking into account their surrounding institutional environments does not usefully help us understand how they might operate in democratic political systems.[27] Instead, we have highlighted how internal actors in the MENA have read the EU's efforts at promoting its particular model of liberal democracy and how they, in turn, have attempted to respond to the EU. We have also attempted to highlight how marginal groups, including Islamist movements in the MENA, are characterised by their own agency and are not merely subject to EU programmes and policies. Moreover, such groups can help shape what the EU attempts to do in the region. We have also emphasised how these agents play a specific political role in relation to the particular structures of MENA authoritarian regimes and how such governments seek to

initiate and develop political systems characterised by what might be called 'staged democracy' in order ultimately to retain power. Often ignoring such manipulative tactics, the EU typically continues to support authoritarian regimes in the MENA. This does not necessarily mean that the EU's policies have failed, but it does suggest that the EU's policies have serious unintended consequences. Although normatively, the EU's political endeavours at promoting democracy in the MENA may seek a positive image of the EU, it is unclear how local populations understand such initiatives. It may be that the EU is losing its credibility as well as its legitimacy as an external actor and as a result what may happen in the MENA is a move to more extreme and violent reactions from disgruntled groups.

Acknowledgements

NOTES

[1] Springborg, 'Political Islam and Europe'.
[2] Cofman Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March*.
[3] The authors are very grateful to Frédéric Volpi for teasing out the 'inside-out' framework of analysis.
[4] Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*.
[5] The weakness of established secular political parties and civil society organisations has been in evidence for some time. For the weakness of secular parties see for instance Willis, 'Political parties in the

Maghreb'; For the weakness of secular civil society see Cavatorta, 'Civil society, democracy promotion and Islamism'.

[6] Pace, *The Politics of Regional Identity* and Bicchi, *European Foreign Policy Making*.

[7] Schlumberger, 'Dancing with Wolves'.

[8] Schlumberger, 'Dancing with Wolves', 53.

[9] See the Special Issue of *Democratization* 12 (2005).

[10] Youngs, 'European Approaches to Security' and Olsen, 'The EU: An Ad Hoc Policy'. For a thorough overview of the EU's key policies towards the Mediterranean, namely the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy, see Pace, 'Norm shifting from EMP to ENP'.

[11] See the Special Issue of *Democratization* 9 (2002).

[12] Dalacoura, 'US Democracy Promotion in the Arab World'.

[13] Hasan, 'Bush's Freedom Agenda'.

[14] See the strong emphasis on democratic governance in the EU Security Strategy. Available in English at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf. Accessed 6 September 2008.

[15] Hyde-Price, 'Normative power Europe'.

[16] Youngs, 'Normative Dynamics and Strategic Interests'.

[17] Communication between Michelle Pace and an EU policy maker, Brussels, April 2008.

[18] Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism'.

[19] Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*.

[20] Jung, *Democratization and Development.*

[21] Tibi, *Islam and the Cultural Accommodation* and Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture.*

[22] Smith, 'Life of the Party'; Smith, 'The Wrong Kind of Crisis'.

[23] Philippart, 'The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership'.

[24] Cavatorta et al., 'EU external policy-making'.

[25] Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*.

[26] Bicchi, *European Foreign Policy Making.*

[27] Brumberg, 'Islamists and the Politics of Consensus'.

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