

The European Democracy-promotion Policy in the Mediterranean Region

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In only a few years the promotion of democracy has become a full-fledged objective of the European Union's foreign policies. In May 2001, the Commission published its first communication on "The European Union's Role in Promoting Human Rights and Democratisation in Third Countries", demanding a greater consistency between community politics and the integration of human rights in all sectors of relations with third countries. In the same year a resolution of the Development Council confirmed this new will to place the promotion of democracy and human rights more systematically at the heart of European external actions.

The aim of democratic promotion is essentially pursued through the community cooperation policies. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has thus theoretically, since 1995, encouraged good governance, democratic reform and respect for human rights in the Mediterranean. The current framework of cooperation between the EU and the "Mediterranean Partner Countries" (MPCs) adds a political dimension to the trade agreements of the preceding generation, notably establishing a form of democratic conditionality. This democratic dimension has become a priority in the post 9-11 context. While the American administration alternates between pressure and cooperation offers to accelerate the process of reform in the Arab world, the Europeans endeavour henceforth to make their intervention instruments more effective.

Democracy: A Basic Commitment at the Heart of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

Since 1995, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has provided a stabilising framework for relations between the European Union and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. Despite a strong economic element, it must be essentially understood as being a project of a strategic nature: for the last ten years the pacification of the region has been the task at hand, through reinforced cooperation in the political, economic and cultural domains.

The Partnership depends on a dynamic of reforms in these three domains. From the political point of view, the spread of democratic institutions and values has been presented since the start, as a condition of regional stabilisation. The Europeans thus give way to the plan of democratic peace, brought back into fashion after the fall of the Berlin wall; in accordance with this vision of international relations, the risk of war between democracies is very low. To guarantee peace in the Mediterranean, it would therefore be essential to establish a sort of democratic fraternity there, by encouraging political reform in authoritarian regimes. The judicial arsenal for the promotion of democracy in the Mediterranean seems at first glance to be quite full. The Declaration of Barcelona, on the 28th of November 1995, the founding text of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, mentions the necessary respect for democratic values and the constitutional state. The bilateral Association Agreements signed by each one of the MPCs include a suspensive clause linked to the respect of democratic principles and human rights, which theoretically intro-

duces a strong political conditionality (article 2 of the Association Agreements). Finally the MEDA regulation, which organises bilateral Euro-Mediterranean financial cooperation, sets as a condition for the awarding of aid, "the progress accomplished in terms of structural reforms", an expression which can take on a political meaning.

In practice, however, the European Union has shown itself to be very cautious up to now towards political questions. The method chosen to activate reforms in the Mediterranean is very indirect and works above all through economy. In the Partnership, the Europeans pursue a liberal economic project, which has political implications: The conversion of the MPCs to free trade and market economy, along with the improvement of governance, are supposed to lead full term/eventually to a political aperture/opening. A few programmes targeted at encouraging democracy have been implemented; from now on, the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) applies to all countries within the Partnership.

The European approach is in reality neither very political nor very restrictive; the Council has never expressed explicit condemnation against an MPC for breaching the principles of democracy, and the political conditionality contained in the bilateral agreements has never been used. Until very recently, one might wonder if the democratic issue was not in fact a taboo within the Partnership.

New Political Tensions Surround the Democratic Issue

It is in the after September 11th context that the democratic issue has been re-

ally essential in Euro-Mediterranean relations. The debate on the legitimacy of external intervention to hasten political reform in the Arab world is not over; tensions are developing around the question.

The Renewal of the Debate on Democratisation in the Mediterranean

The aim to promote democracy has returned in force since 2003, to the point of becoming today a central issue in the reform of the Partnership. This development results from a number of factors. Let us first note that, though a certain number of economic reforms was undertaken, internal political balance did not fundamentally grow in most of the MPCs since the launch of the Partnership. But the preoccupation of exterior backers over the issue of democratic governance in the Mediterranean has crystallised over time.

The publication in 2005 of the UNDP's first report on human development in the Arab world constitutes a first stage. This essential document, drafted by Arab researchers, brought to light three principle elements responsible for the delay in the region's development: a shortage of freedom, a shortage of knowledge, and an unacceptable status for women. The new report published in 2005 insisted again that Arab regimes had failed to reform internally, evoking the "black hole of the Arab State" and concluding that there was an urgent need for strong and immediate political and judicial reforms, to promote the respect of fundamental freedoms.

Once the debate opened, the European Commission seized the subject to clarify its intentions in the Mediterranean. The "Human Rights" section of the Directorate General for External Relations set out a first working document, transformed in 2003 in a communication by the Commission on "Reinvigorating EU actions on Human Rights and democratisation with Mediterranean partners". This communication, the first to deal exclusively and in depth with human rights in a particular region, included operational recommendations. Some of them are going to be implemented shortly within the con-

text of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): let us quote the EU's systematic inclusion (mainstreaming) of questions linked to human rights and democracy in all the dialogues which develop on an institutionalised basis; the establishment, within the context of the Association Agreements, of working groups on human rights; the development of national Action Plans for human rights with each MPC; or also more direct integration of the promotion of good governance, human rights and democracy in MEDA programmes.

The debate on regional democratisation became heated after the American intervention in Iraq. Since 2003, the George Bush administration explicitly displayed its objective of furthering democracy in the Arab-Muslim world, primarily *manu militari*, before converting it to a gradual and cooperative approach. The "Wider Middle East" project, published in Spring 2004, explains the basis of the American policy in promoting democracy. Here, economic development, the promotion of education, the role of civil society are held to be important. American views, in fact, show many similarities to the Barcelona strategy. Moreover, the United States have made many attempts to win over the European Union to their project of democratic promotion. Up to now they have clashed with some reluctant member states, like France, that accept the need to keep up a transatlantic dialogue on these issues but refuse to be enrolled under the American banner. In any case, from then on the American pressure has forced the Europeans to clarify their position. The progressive implementation of the Neighbourhood Policy seems today to be paving the way for a renewed political dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean context.

The Political Partnership in 2005

2005 has been a rich year for political events in the Mediterranean. Amongst symbolic advances and political tensions, the climate of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has evolved remarkably. The year was punctuated with political crises as well as experiencing some democratic advances; its overview is therefore full of contrasts. The Palestinian

transition has continued with the holding of free elections in the Territories under European surveillance, to the satisfaction of the international community. The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza during the summer has upset the balance of the area, confirming the difficulties of the Palestinian Authority in asserting its power over a divided territory. A genuine crisis has taken place on Lebanese soil: public demonstrations, supported by joint Franco-American pressure, led to the open retreat of Syrian occupying forces, but without entering into a lasting process of political dialogue. In Egypt, the electoral process leading to the re-election of President Mubarak, disappointed analysts; the organisation of the official campaign demonstrated, above all, regimes' growing ability to play with democratic rhetoric, which is so dear to Western powers. In Morocco, on the other hand, the pursuance of legislative reforms and the opening of public debate provoked the general approval of observers.

With the exception of the Palestinian case, the European Union has never appeared to be a front line interlocutor. The only action that seems to be directly linked to European efforts, is the pursuance of the internal reform process in Turkey; but the country has entered into negotiations in order to become a member of the EU, and this places it in a very exceptional situation. For the other Mediterranean partners, the political status and the intentions of the Union remain blurred and the launching of the Neighbourhood Policy makes the European objectives even more difficult to understand. The resistance of the member states sometimes causes an obstacle to the community processes and complicates the perception of European policies. In the Lebanese affair, France chose to go it alone by directly agreeing with the American ally; in democratic issues, Paris likes to keep some room for manoeuvre, nationally speaking. The strengthening of the American presence in the Mediterranean, in diplomatic terms as well as in financial matters, confuses the issue still further. Therefore, in 2005, the ten years anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was celebrated in an exceptional political climate. Amongst transatlantic tensions, regional crises and uncertainties over its own institutions, the Euro-

pean Union appeared to be strangely powerless. From the Mediterranean partners' perspective, having had their fingers burned by American activism, they mistrusted all the forceful views put forward on reform. The Euro-Mediterranean climate of confidence seemed to be eroded; the failure of the Barcelona summit in November 2005 finally signalled the re-politicisation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, but in a conflictual way. The partners were not able to agree on a symbolic radical reform of the Partnership. To encourage the democratic dynamics in the region, the Europeans must henceforth convince the MPCs that the Neighbourhood Policy is built on strong foundations.

The Prospect of Reforms Reinforced by the Context of Neighbourhood

Since 2003, the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy heralded a political refocusing of Euro-Mediterranean relations. If the prospect of Neighbourhood was not destined at the outset for Mediterranean countries, they have nevertheless entered the field of play quite rapidly, and this could provide for some interesting developments.

The initial goal of the ENP is above all to settle the question of the EU's external frontiers: this entails offering countries that are geographically close, a positive alternative to membership. But the ENP is also inspired by the worry over security: the Commission calls for the establishment of a "circle of friendly countries". From an economic viewpoint, the ENP anticipates extending the unique European market to the ensemble of neighbour countries, to create a vast "pan-Euro-Mediterranean" zone of prosperity. The general political objectives that have been set out are similar to those of the Partnership: strategic stabilisation in a peaceful relational context. Cross-border cooperation must be reinforced, political and cultural relations must become more intense and a shared responsibility must be established with regard to preventing conflicts. The implementation of this zone of harmony, supposes a harmonisation of the rules and values following the European model. The ENP sees itself as being refor-

mist, as much from an economic point of view as from a political one. Its official watchwords are modernisation, opening of markets, strengthening of the constitutional state, of good governance and human rights.

From a practical point of view, Neighbourhood is achieved via a reinforcement of the bilateral relationship with each of the targeted countries. Action Plans, which set the priorities of short and medium term reforms, must be negotiated with each of them, on a voluntary basis. Specific Action Plans to improve democratic institutions and the human rights situation will be conceivable, just like the creation of sub-committees dedicated to human rights within the monitoring framework of Association Agreements. The Commission has even suggested the possibility of strengthened conditionalities.

The transition towards Neighbourhood is now underway, without anyone knowing yet where they stand as to the possible results of this reorganisation. The slogan of Romano Prodi, "Everything except institutions", seems *a priori* attractive to certain countries who are satisfied with the opportunity of intensifying their relations with the EU. The Palestinian Authority, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia have quickly negotiated bilateral Action Plans, made public in 2004; intermediary finance plans have been adopted pending the creation of a unique instrument.

In view of past practices, the capacity of the ENP to activate processes of political reforms remains uncertain. The democratic issue of negotiation is evidently very different for each one of the countries concerned and the principle of an "à la carte" membership reduces the Union's capacity to use pressure effectively. In addition, the question of financing the ENP and of sharing out resources between neighbour countries is still not settled. In these conditions, the incentive to change remains quite weak.

Encouraging the Dynamics of Democracy: The Example of the Relationship Between the EU and Morocco

The example of the relationship between the EU and Morocco, provides an

opportunity to follow the development of methods used by the European Union to promote democracy in the Mediterranean. Morocco maintains an old and close relationship with the European Union; the country has been one of the first to sign a new generation Association Agreement and it is today the first beneficiary of MEDA funds. Morocco responded positively to the launch of the Neighbourhood Policy and has quickly entered into powerful dialogue with the Europeans. With regard to reforms, the Sherifian Kingdom is supposed to personify the ideal model, extolled since 1995, which brings together economic modernisation and political opening.

It is true that the wind of freedom blows across the Morocco of Mohammed VI. Symbolic and important reforms have been successively achieved (notably the reform of the status of women) while the political climate is calming down (pluralist elections). 2005 has been an extremely rich year from this point of view: the publication of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission's (IER) report, which looked into human rights violations during the reign of Hassan II, the detailed report on the fifty years of the Kingdom's independence, or even the launch of the national initiative for human development, all these bear witness to a certain political excitement.

Taking advantage of this particularly favourable situation, the European Union is attempting to take the lead with regard to democratic promotion in Morocco. The EU has adopted an opportunist strategy of encouragement. It is attempting to get on top of the dynamics in progress, by taking the Palace at its word, in order to urge it along the road to reforms.

The Action Plan adopted at the end of 2004 within the Neighbourhood framework, was largely given over to issues of democracy and human rights. The Programme of national interest 2005-2006 is reserving a special fund for the promotion of democracy; the Commission hopes to dedicate a part of these funds to the implementation of IER's recommendations. A specific Action Plan for human rights is under negotiation with the Moroccan government and a sub-committee dedicated to human rights should shortly be set up within the fra-

mework of the EU-Moroccan Association Committee. Morocco has in addition restored the zone eligible for the EIDHR, which will allow direct support to be given to civil society.

The European Union is at this moment the first external contributor towards the promotion of democracy and human rights in Morocco. The difficulties remain numerous. Inertia and dispersion are the two major obstacles to the definition of a coherent strategy. But the need also remains to test the reality of the Palace's democratic intentions and to target European efforts in Morocco where they will be most useful.

The Moroccan example demonstrates, however, that a concerted approach is possible when circumstances are favourable. In any case, assumptions still

cannot be made on the capacity of the Europeans to activate a democratic process when the partner's authority is opposed to it.

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