

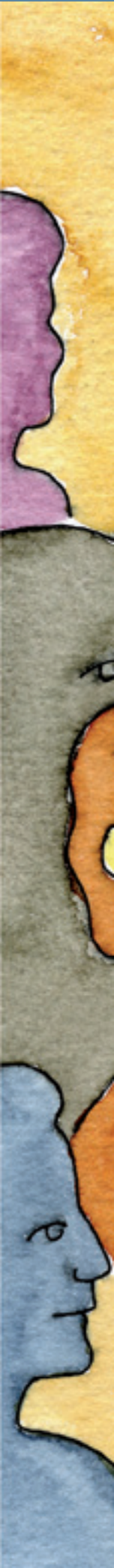


Regenerating the State in the Arab World: The Role Of the European Union in Democracy Building

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Abstract

In the socio-political history of the Arab world, two notions have defined the essence of statehood in the region: Arabism and Islam. It is argued by some that certain distortions by political extremists in relation to these two ideas have brought about either stateless nations or nationless states in Middle Eastern and North African societies. This explains some of today's facts on the ground regarding democracy in the Arab region. European governments, perplexed by the violence engendered by the contrasting realities of the 'legitimate states' in the region, have struggled to understand these facts, and yet have put forward policies for the regeneration of an effective role of the state in democracy building in the Arab world.

This paper makes policy suggestions for the Arab region. It presents a summary of the democracy challenges faced by states in the region. Most importantly, it provides a framework and recommendations for EU policy in support of the role of the state in democracy building in the Arab world. It argues that forcing democracy building in the Arab world, led by a self-serving European logic based on pre-established models of a European style democracy, without taking into account the dual characteristics of the state in the region, Arabism and Islam, can only end in failure. The paper suggests that the EU should support the states in the region in building an alternative, positive socio-political narrative of democracy in the Arab world, that is, a simple narrative of 'well-being for all'. This can only happen by creating a new paradigm in which the EU abandons the fantasy of stability offered by autocratic regimes in the Arab world, and if the EU learns from the problems caused by its approach to regime change.

Summary of Recommendations

The role of the EU in democracy building in the Arab world should not be confined to counting the number of political parties in each country of the region. The EU needs to examine progress towards democracy through the degree of circulation of power opportunities among all political groups. At the same time, pluralism cannot become a system of political equality and liberty without a minimum level of constant and

coherent development. At the socio-political and economic levels, the way to democracy in the Arab world necessitates a general review of states' structures in order to make political pluralism possible and effective.

The EU must stop unconditionally allowing transfers of capital by members of political elites from the Arab world to European countries, especially Switzerland. To support the role of the Arab state in democracy building, the EU can start by establishing a policy of encouraging Arab capital to be invested in the region, as well as effective measures to reduce the harmful impact of any form of capital transfer.

At the cultural and ideological levels, the EU can help states in the Arab world by encouraging a spirit of creativity in intellectuals and political leaders. The EU could encourage states in the region to build a spirit of forgiveness rather than hatred and revenge, and inclusion rather exclusion. This type of incentive could be extended by the EU to subregional state groupings in the Maghreb, the Middle East and the Gulf.

Islamist radicalism should be considered like any other political radicalism. It is through dialogue that violent radicalism can be tempered. Muslim European citizens can help in the process of better integrating Arab Muslim immigrants into EU countries.

The EU can help the Arab world to build a simple, positive narrative of 'well-being for all' – both rulers and citizens. The EU can provide practical help in this regard by reducing the number of antagonistic political speeches made against the Arab world and instead providing a narrative on democracy that does not mean regime change or political instability for the ruling elites. Democracy means that everyone can live in a country in which prejudice, insularity and fear are replaced by the great Arab and Islamic traditions of tolerance, diversity and justice.

1. Introduction

More than ever, no other word can better describe the situation in the Arab world than the word 'crisis' in its political and socio-economic senses. Since their independence, the Arab states have, unexpectedly, seen little evidence of political openness to democracy, human rights and institutional transparency. The gap between the Arab region and the rest of the world is dramatic. Quantitatively, 121 of the 192 states in the world are electoral democracies – 71 per cent of all governments. In the Arab world, of the 22 states, none is considered to have a fully elected government. Eight of the 22 Arab states are monarchies and the rest score among the highest in the longevity of presidential rule, which has steadily eroded the difference between monarchies and republics in the region. Moreover, 11 of the 22 Arab states are considered among the most corrupt governments in the world, and possess the lowest confidence rating from their citizens (Transparency International, 2009).

The Arab world has a higher percentage of monarchies than any other region of the world, the longest average tenure of heads of state and the highest prevalence of corrupt state institutions. The crisis in the Arab world reflects the deconstruction of the Arab state as a legal and political structure and the emergence of groups that act for individual or group gain (Ghailoun, 1991: 101). This crisis reflects the widening gap between Arab state institutions and the people in the region, a gap that some academics refer to as the distortion between the state and the nation in the Arab world. This distortion makes

countries in the region 'stateless nations and nationless states' (Helms, 1990). This leads those who are concerned about democracy to ask: what are the prerequisites for future reconstruction?

2. Challenges to the Role of States in the Arab World

Since the 1980s, Islamic activists in the Arab world have challenged the definition and the role of the state as the 'legitimate authority'. This reaction was mainly due to a rivalry between established Arab state institutions and an Islamic base, which some observers refer to as a rivalry between Arabism and Islam.¹ This rivalry was clearly demonstrated by the assassination of the then Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat, in 1981 and the reconfiguration of Lebanon's confessional state during the 1980s. The opposition between Arabism and Islam is not new to the political landscape of the Arab world. It has occurred frequently in the past, even though, from the 1980s, Arabism started to become a pillar of modern political expression. In the political narratives of the Arab region, Arabism claims a different identity to the one asserted by Islamic activists. Arab political leaders consider themselves better prepared to compete with the non-Muslim world, and to incorporate the challenges of democracy and human rights and the platform of modernization. These claims remained common in political debates during recent elections in the region, and in the political campaigns in the Palestinian territories, Morocco, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan and Algeria.

Arabism and Islam are the two notions that have characterized and continue to form the basis for the legitimacy of the state and its role in the Arab world. Islamic activists have been strongly opposed to the model of an Arab state that is generally open to Europe. Arab societies have seen the essence of their Arab states collapse because Arab leaders have failed to tackle sensitive and acute regional and national challenges that were originally generated by European colonialism or caused indirectly by European intervention. In addition to the main regional challenge related to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and the discontinuation of Israel's past and current aggression towards the Palestinians, as well as other regional challenges such as Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, there are national challenges such as the development of an effective pluralism and the management of diversity in the region, the role of states in sustaining a transnational identity in the Arab world and the problems related to socio-economic development.

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Management of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity

Since the 1980s, Arab governments have begun privately to accept political pluralism as a way to include ethnic and cultural minorities. Albert Habib Hourani has some interesting insights into the reasons for this sudden move.

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¹ Arabism or Pan-Arabism is the movement based on Arab nationalism that was initiated to fight colonialism and foreign involvement in the Arab World. This movement is mainly secular and mostly socialist. It was first used by Sharif Hussein Ibn Ali (Sherif of Mecca) to oppose and seek independence from the Ottoman Empire.

In Hourani (1947), the Arab world is limited to the states formed from the Ottoman Empire, which were predominantly Sunni orthodox Muslim, and linguistically and culturally Arab. These states are Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. Historically, these states became the most fervent advocates of Arab nationalism and of the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Subsequently, they were the founders of the League of Arab States. According to Hourani (1947), other groups in the region which are not Sunni Muslims are considered minorities. Hourani's classification of groups in the Arab region (Hourani,1947: 1–3) is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Hourani's classification of groups in the Arab region

Sunni Muslims, non-Arab speaker	Arab speakers, non-Muslims	Neither Arab Speakers nor Sunni Muslim
Kurdish	Heterodox Muslims (Shi'a, Alawi, Isma'ili and Druze)	Persian
Turkoman	Christians (Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Assyrian, Roman catholic, Maronite, Greek Catholic, Coptic Catholic, Syrian Catholic, Chaldean Catholic, Protestants, Anglican and Presbyterian)	Kurdish speakers
Caucasian (Chechen and Circassian)	Jews and semi-Judaic sects (Rabbinite, Karaite and Samaritan)	Syriac speakers
	Other religions (Yazidi, Mandeian, Shabak, Baha'i)	Armenian speakers
		Hebrew speakers
		Jewish of various European languages (Yiddish, Spanish, Italian...)

Source: Albert Habib Hourani (1947)

In addition to the groups mentioned by Hourani, the Arab word has expanded to include states with non-Arab minority groups. The addition of states in the Maghreb region has introduced new groups, such as the Berbers which perhaps form a majority in Algeria and constitute part of the history of Morocco, Tunisia and Libya. The accession of other states to the League of Arab States has led to the emergence of other groups in the political landscape of the Arab region: the Moorish in Mauritania, the sub-Saharan African in parts of Sudan, the Ibadis with Indian and African influence in Oman, and so on.

In the light of this diversity in the region, it is interesting to examine the extent to which the state in the Arab world has succeeded in creating the sense of 'cohesive national community' that is necessary for the idea of a national project related to building democracy and well-being. The lack of effective and efficient management of local diversity constitutes a condition for the deconstruction of the state as a legitimate socio-political entity, leading to its failure to realize the nation-state project.

The contemporary history of the Arab world is marked by repeated painful and complex failures. Modern experience in developing countries, particularly the Arab world, has demonstrated that pluralism does not necessarily mean the circulation of power, and that elections are no guarantee for real and equal opportunities or of effective participation in public life. Pluralism has sometimes been used to reinforce repression. Freedom has been limited and produced only to the degree necessary for the reproduction of the system. Arab regimes did not intend to establish an effective system for the protection of individual and collective rights and democratic governance (Ghalioun, 1991). The role of the state in democracy building in the Arab world cannot be taken seriously if the political management of cultural and ethnic diversity does not become an effective system of political participation and freedom. The claim by certain groups in power that such a system may lead to the ‘ruralization’² of the cities and formal political degradation does not diminish the positive character of pluralistic political participation. From this perspective, the role of the state should not be measured by how many political parties or pseudo political parties exist but by the degree of effective equality of political participation and opportunities.

However, history has demonstrated that, in the political experience of Western Europe, pluralism can constitute a system of equal opportunities and political freedom only when societies have a minimum level of coherent and uninterrupted development. Democracy is more than the simple application of a political response with moralistic aspirations. It is awarded to societies that have succeeded in inventing effective and original solutions to their national and local problems (Ghaliou, 1991).

Establishing Nation-based Unity

The political crisis in Lebanon, the conflict in Sudan, the dilemma in Iraq, the political situation in Algeria, Egypt and Libya, the political debate in Kuwait, to take some examples, revolve around the debate over pluralism, power sharing and the search for essential national unity. Neither Islam nor Arabism can build the unity that is necessary for processes towards democracy, mainly because neither Arabism nor Islam has been entirely accepted and legitimized as a political ideology by all the people in every nation in the Arab world. The crisis in Lebanon and Sudan, as well as the political dilemmas in Iraq and the Palestinian territories after Hamas won elections there, are examples of the inability of the two to build national unity. The state, a product imported from Europe, seems to have established a platform for compromise to which not much resistance has been put up by the people in the region, but severe doubts remain over its functioning and structure.

The malfunctions of the state have caused a distortion between the state and its structure from one side and society from the other side. In the Arab world, society has, in the expression of Burhan Ghalioun (1991: 156), been ‘dévorerée par son état’ (devoured by its state). Democracy does not and cannot exist in states in which societies have no

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² Ruralization of the city is the movement of migrants to major urban cities in such a number that leads to the introduction of traditional rural systems of socio-economic life to urban areas.

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control over their own future, such as in the case of states in which the state machinery exists and is maintained only through the use of excessive force by the armed forces, secret services and the police. These tools of repression represent the foundation of states in the Arab world. National unity in the Arab states is in fact tribal solidarity on which oriental monarchies are based (Jordan, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia). Technocrats have also emerged to suppress the political factors that threaten the system in Morocco,

which lacks a tribal basis, or reproduce the dominant party against pseudo-parties, which mark the 'monarchic-style' republics of Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan, Syria, and so on. Pluralism has become a facade and a political manoeuvre. Governments in the region use this facade to claim that the state is working towards democracy building. It has been used by rulers to domesticate opposition movements, soften international pressures for democratic change and formally comply with the 'essential element' clause, and thereby benefit from European technical assistance and aid. In many Arab states, such political manoeuvres reveal that pluralism remains far from being an efficient and effective system for ensuring people's political participation and liberties. Elections in many Arab countries take the form of a simple plebiscite that gives decisions already taken by Arab governments a constitutionally legitimate facade (Abdallah Saaf, 1991: 43). The state in the Arab world is in continuous strife with its citizens, who have been depoliticized, forced to remain illiterate and mired in economic disaster. Today, the state in the Arab world represents the principal source of corruption, particularly in its judicial, financial and police institutions (Transparency International, 2009).

The Arab world becomes a platform and lucrative sector for groups with private interests. The state in the Arab world is controlled by groups and becomes dependent on these groups rather than a platform for national political and socio-economic development.

The role of the state in the Arab world can be seen in two ways. One approach looks at the current role of the state in the region. Such a role refers to the maintenance of the status quo in terms of obstructing political change and the promotion of democratic values. The other approach is related to the role of the state in democracy building in the region, which looks at the deep-rooted causes of the state's failure to build the necessary national unity and the trust of the people, or make genuine efforts to change rather than put on a facade of democracy. The reality in the Arab world is that the state uses democracy and human rights as ideology to maintain the separation between the state and society. Democracy and human rights in the region do not find their origins in human morals or equality, liberty and justice. These are transformed into slogans for the state machinery to brag about their 'democratic achievements', but are in reality denied to the people. This reality is aggravated by the various aggressions against people in the Arab world. Such aggressions have been carried out under the narratives of democracy and human rights to justify wars in Iraq, Gaza, Sudan, Lebanon, Yemen, and so on.

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At the regional level, the League of Arab States (LAS) seems to institutionalize Arab unity, but the reality is different. The organization claims that it is based on Arab nationalism instead of Islamic belief. Going back to the origins of the LAS, many thinkers in the Arab world consider that the

Rank	Country/Territory	CPI 2009 Score	Surveys Used	Confidence Range
22	Qatar	7	6	5.8–8.1
30	United Arab Emirates	6.5	5	5.5–7.5
39	Oman	5.5	5	4.4–6.5
46	Bahrain	5.1	5	4.2–5.8
49	Jordan	5	7	3.9–6.1
63	Saudi Arabia	4.3	5	3.1–5.3
65	Tunisia	4.2	6	3.0–5.5
66	Kuwait	4.1	5	3.2–5.1
89	Morocco	3.3	6	2.8–3.9
111	Algeria	2.8	6	2.5–3.1
111	Djibouti	2.8	4	2.3–3.2
111	Egypt	2.8	6	2.6–3.1
126	Syria	2.6	5	2.2–2.9
130	Lebanon	2.5	3	1.9–3.1
130	Libya	2.5	6	2.2–2.8
130	Mauritania	2.5	7	2.0–3.3
154	Yemen	2.1	4	1.6–2.5
176	Iraq	1.5	3	1.2–1.8
176	Sudan	1.5	5	1.4–1.7
180	Somalia	1.1	3	0.9–1.4

Source: Transparency International, 2009

organization has constituted an extension of British foreign policy, which is now Egypt's foreign policy in the region (Mehdi El Menjra, 2008). During the First World War (1914–18), the British Empire needed the support of the Arab states as a counterweight to the Ottoman Empire. The British used the 'Arab League' to organize an 'Arab revolt' against the Ottoman Empire and later sought to cultivate its friendship as a way of gaining Arab allies in the Second World War (1939–45).

Of the seven Secretary Generals since the establishment of the LAS, five were Egyptians.³ Egyptian Secretary Generals have led the organization for 48 years of its 55-year life. In all the administrative structures of the LAS, Egyptian nationals outnumber the nationals of the remaining 22 member states. It is open to question whether Arab unity really exists in this organization. Many are the diplomatic clashes during LAS meetings of Heads of State, as well as the difficulties in reaching agreement on matters of regional concern. This reality has led some citizens in the region to say that 'Arabs

³ The Secretary Generals of the LAS are: Abdul Rahman Azzan, Egypt (1945–1952), Abdul Khalek Hassouna, Egypt (1952–1972), Mahmoud Riad, Egypt (1972–1979), Chedli Klibi, Tunisia (1979–1990), Assal Al-Assad, Lebanon (1990–1991), Ahmad Esmat Al Maguid, Egypt (1991–2001) and Amr Moussa, Egypt (2001 to date).

have agreed to not agree'. They also doubt that the LAS in its current state could work towards democracy building in the region.

3. The Arab World as a Gap in the EU Democracy Building Policies

Against the background provided above, the European Union (EU) has taken different approaches to the Arab region based on either security frameworks or financial development frameworks. The first is related to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) while the second refers to financial and technical development mainly in the Gulf states. A further approach is related to a Common Foreign and Security Policy-related policy on crisis management, which targets situations such as Iraq, the Palestinian occupied territories and Sudan.

Key Policies on Democracy, Human Rights and Good Governance⁴

EU policy since 1990 has been multifaceted, but the aim has remained the same. The EU has articulated its interests through democracy promotion, human rights and good governance. The various ways of including 'essential element' clauses on democracy promotion centre around the needs of the EU but they also take account of some third country interests.

Security and peace

Events in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans increased the EU's concern over security and peace and gave impetus to the introduction of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) with a particular emphasis on human rights. Grants of around EUR 120 million per year are offered to support the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the areas of human rights and democracy. This policy falls within the spirit of the European Security Strategy, which relates to EU security concerns about the need for well-governed democratic states in the world. The ENP focuses on promoting stability within and between neighbouring states, including the Mediterranean Arab countries.

Trade

The democracy and human rights clause in EU agreements with third countries made its first appearance in a Trade and Cooperation Agreement with Argentina, at the request of Argentina. This was in the context of the transition to democracy in Latin America. Since then, such clauses have been systematically included in agreements between the European Commission and third countries, including Trade and Cooperation Agreements with states in the Arab world.

Development

The parameters of development cooperation have also permitted progressively stronger commitments to human rights, good governance and democracy, as was the case with

⁴ The mapping of these EU state policies is based on a synthesis report that was prepared in accordance with the PSC conclusions of 31 January 2006 and was related to the EU-US dialogue on democracy promotion. The paper, *The EU Approach to Democracy Promotion in External Relations: Food for Thought*, was prepared by the Policy Unit of the CGS with the services of the Commission.

the 1990 Lomé IV agreement and the 2000 Cotonou Agreement. Both agreements include conditionality and the possibility of sanctions related to democracy, good governance, human rights, systematic formal dialogue, corruption and violations.

Technical assistance and aid

Technical assistance and aid is another area where EU policy has been used to give substance to EU objectives regarding democracy promotion in areas such as capacity building of the judiciary and poverty reduction strategies. Even EU electoral observation has opened up windows for pressure for political reform.

The EU has used various mechanisms, including the essential element clause, as a way to encourage positive political change. The EU's approach to democracy promotion, human rights and good governance can be summarized as conditionality, incentives and sanctions. These ways of introducing political change policies have been used intermittently throughout the EU's external relations with the Arab world.

In the framework of the ENP, the European Security Strategy states that 'the reunification of Europe and the integration of acceding states will increase our security but they also bring Europe closer to troubled areas. Our task is to promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean with whom we can enjoy close and cooperative relations.' In the Mediterranean, the ENP reinforces the Barcelona Process, which was established in 1995 in order to relaunch EU-Mediterranean cooperation, which already involved commitments by participating countries to develop the rule of law and democracy in their political systems.

If one maps all the different strategies of the EU for introducing policies on democracy promotion, human rights and good governance, it becomes obvious that there has been a significant development of EU policies on democracy promotion since 1990. However, even if the development of EU policies indicates a positive shift, the Arab world has been, for the most part, isolated from such policies. The EU's strategies have focused on the immediate needs of the EU – to secure peace, security, trade cooperation, and so on. The only countries in the Arab world to be actively included in the EU strategy for political change policies were Arab Mediterranean countries such as Morocco and Tunisia. The proximity of these countries to Europe and the potential threats posed to the security of EU member states may have pushed the EU into giving them special attention. These countries are now included in the European Security Strategy, particularly under the ENP.

The results of the EU policies have been mixed. While the role of the state in carrying out democracy and human rights development in some Mediterranean Arab states has been promising, in specific areas their state institutions remain highly corrupt. In the Gulf region, states have carried out a tremendous degree of financial and infrastructural development but their record on human rights and democratic governance is very poor. In the rest of the region, the impact of conflicts has diverted efforts from democracy building to conflict management.

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The current situation in the Arab world is referred to by commentators in the region as the *anomaly of Arab states*: states with considerable wealth but no technology, or military power but no influence. As disparities widen, Arab states' slogans for equality and democracy become more discredited in Arab societies, especially among the young who make up more than 60 per cent of the population in the Arab region.

The failure of Arab states to carry out processes for democracy building has led to the 'degeneration' of the state as a legitimate and reliable institution in the political landscape. Islam has been used by political activists as a vehicle of rejection, sometimes violent towards the state. This phenomenon has been forming over centuries, time that Arab states kept claiming was needed for the establishment of democracy in the region. The more state representatives justify the lack of democracy using the discourse that 'democracy is built over centuries', the more Islam is used by political activists as a vehicle for various political agendas, and the more relations with Europe continue to evoke severe doubt in people in the region. Today, and compared to Arabism, Islam has more impact on the legitimacy of the role of the state in the Arab region than it had before. Because Arabism and Islam constitute the entire political spectrum in the

Arab world, the failure of Arabism to keep its promises of democracy, equality and development has led populations to opt for the alternative solution. Such an alternative has deconstructed the conception of national boundaries for the benefit of transnational Islamic political movements across the region and in Europe.

This combination of the failure of Arab leaders to address the multiple challenges of democracy and development and their use of repression as a tool for maintaining a system of social inequality and political exclusion has been aggravated by the

lack of EU policies for positive change in the Arab world. The growing image of the Islamic tradition as a political refuge for a number of people in the region, on the other hand, forms plausible grounds for national and transnational resurrection in the name of Islam. Time is running out for democracy building, and the situation is benefiting transnational Islamic movements. Many observers believe that if the situation does not change, Islamic fundamentalism will become not only a socio-political refuge but also a catalyst for social forces in the Arab region.

4. Regenerating the Role of the State in Arab World Democracy Building

Democracy in the Arab world cannot become a criterion of state legitimacy unless pluralism becomes an effective exercise of political liberties, equality and social mobility. The role of the EU in democracy building in the Arab world should not be confined to counting the number of political parties in each country of the region. The EU needs to examine progress towards democracy in the region through the degree of circulation of power opportunities among

all political groups. At the same time, pluralism cannot become a system of political equality and liberty without a minimum level of constant and coherent development.

The combination of the failure of Arab leaders to address the multiple challenges of democracy and development and their use of repression as a tool for maintaining a system of social inequality and political exclusion has been aggravated by the lack of EU policies for positive change in the Arab world.

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The history of the EU has demonstrated that democracy is much more than a simple gift for a society that cannot invent original and effective solutions to its problems.

At the *socio-political and economic levels*, the way to democracy in the Arab world necessitates a general review of states' structures in order to make political pluralism possible and effective. Strengthening the role of the state as a vehicle for democracy building in the Arab world means enabling the state to become autonomous vis-à-vis the interests of elite groups. The state should not be a goal in itself, but a tool of democracy, liberty and socio-economic development.

The EU must stop unconditionally allowing transfers of capital by members of political elites from the Arab world to European countries, especially Switzerland. In 1989, USD 680 billion left the Arab region for the developed countries (Arab Institute for the protection of investments, 1989). This amount has increased dramatically in the past 20 years. To support the role of the Arab state in democracy building, the EU can start by establishing a policy of encouraging Arab capital to be invested in the region, as well as effective measures to reduce the harmful impact of capital transfer. The idea of establishing subregional development and investment banks, such as the EU-Maghreb, EU-Gulf and EU-Middle East Development and Investments Banks, is worth exploring as they can provide cooperation, knowledge transfer and transparency.

At the *cultural and ideological levels*, the EU can help states in the Arab world by encouraging a spirit of creativity in intellectuals and political leaders. This would help the state to transform itself from a closed circle of rivalry and antagonism between the modern and the traditional, the religious and the secular, and the Arab and the foreigner. The Moroccan experience of reconciliation and transitional justice, and the decision to establish a strategy for an extended regionalism are examples of how states in the region can become reconciled with their societies and move forward to democracy. Examples of encouragement could take the form of incentives, such as the advanced status with the EU that Morocco has recently earned for its political openness. This type of incentive could be extended by the EU to subregional state groupings in the Maghreb, the Middle East and the Gulf.

Islamist radicalism should be considered like any other political radicalism in Europe. It is through dialogue that violent radicalism can be tempered. The EU can no longer claim that Islam is the religion of the 'other', be it the immigrant or the foreigner. Islam has become a European religion in the sense that many Europeans are Muslims who live in Europe and respect European values, democracy and equality, and hold a European citizenship (Tariq Ramadan, 2004). When it comes to building a national identity in the Arab world, Muslim European citizens can help with the process by setting a platform for dialogue between Arabs and Islamists.

The problems posed by Arab immigration to the EU countries cannot be resolved through draconian measures by EU and Arab states, border security or repression. Immigrants from the Arab world leave their countries out of desperation and hopelessness in order to make their lives meaningful. It is only when the Arab world can provide its citizens with that which the EU provides its own citizens that problems of immigration to EU countries can be addressed.

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The Arab Maghreb Union, the Arab Cooperation Council and the Gulf Cooperation Council are concrete and pragmatic platforms which could be supported by the EU. The EU can provide a model for equal representation and how to reach a consensus (not necessarily unanimity) in a regional organization.

The Arab world desperately needs a positive political narrative for political change. Narratives of democracy and human rights, like those projected by the United States in the region, are negatively perceived by many societies, and Arab states perceive them as hidden agendas.

At the *geopolitical level*, the EU could be a platform for inter-state relations at the subregional level. There are tensions among many Arab states in the three subregional parts of the Arab world. In the Maghreb, there are political tensions between Morocco and Algeria. In the Middle East, there are tensions mounting between Lebanon and Syria, Iraq and Syria, and Saudi Arabia and Yemen as well as the problems posed by the Israeli occupation. The Gulf countries have specific challenges related to the tension between tradition and modernity. The EU can support subregional alliances among Arab states. This will help to address specific subregional challenges that do not normally figure on the agenda of regional meetings of the League of Arab States. The Arab Maghreb Union, the Arab Cooperation Council and the Gulf Cooperation Council are concrete and pragmatic platforms which could be supported by the EU.

At the *regional level*, the EU can play the role of catalyst in strengthening the role of the LAS in democracy building in the region. The EU can provide a model for equal representation and how to reach a consensus (not necessarily

unanimity) in a regional organization. The effectiveness and credibility of the LAS in the region and beyond are closely related to the need for the organization to adjust to the changing socio-political context in the Arab world. The context in which the LAS was established does not exist anymore. It needs to adapt itself to the current challenges of democracy in the region, and this cannot happen without modifying its charter. For the LAS to play an active role in democracy building in the region, it should learn how to draw on the benefits of democracy building for its member states. The experience of the EU in this regard can only be beneficial. The process of the establishment of the European Parliament is a very interesting one. The Arab world does not yet have a similar institution, but such an institution could be beneficial for the region (Amr Moussa, 2009). The establishment of an Arab parliament would be a step forward by including Arab societies in the decision-making processes at the regional level. This could bring societies and states in the Arab world much closer and reduce the negative impact of the rivalry between Arabism and Islam.

Finally, the Arab world desperately needs a positive political narrative for political change. Narratives of democracy and human rights, like those projected by the United States in

the region, are negatively perceived by many societies, and Arab states perceive them as hidden agendas. These narratives also bring the EU into line with the USA, which causes the EU to be perceived negatively in the Arab region. The EU can help the Arab world to build a simple, positive narrative of 'well-being for all' – both rulers and citizens. The EU can provide practical help in this regard by reducing the number of antagonistic political speeches made against the Arab world and instead providing a narrative on democracy that does not mean regime change or political instability for the ruling elites. Democracy means that everyone can live in a country in which prejudice,

insularity and fear are replaced by the great Arab and Islamic traditions of tolerance, diversity and justice.

Discussing the Approach

It could be argued that these recommendations suggest a more top-down approach for EU support with regenerating the role of the Arab state in democracy building. It is necessary to remind any states in the Arab world that oppose a top-down approach to relations with the EU that such states apply this same approach to their own societies. In addition, not all of the recommendations suggest such an approach. It is clearly shown above that democracy is more than a gift for societies that cannot find realistic and genuine solutions to their own problems. From this perspective, it is suggested that the Arab states should brainstorm within their national boundaries and at the regional level with the objective of finding specific solutions that can lead to democracy building in their countries. The EU can support states in the region in achieving their democratic goals, using EU experience gained in democracy promotion and building alliances for regional progress.

However, there are issues in which the EU acts according to its own convictions on how it should support the role of Arab states in democracy building. This is the case, for example, when the EU stops suspicious capital transfers by Arab rulers or their families to countries in Europe. It is also the case when it comes to basic democratic measures such as universal suffrage, women's rights, freedom of expression, and so on. It is important to underline that even the process of accession to the EU was considered to be a mostly top-down approach. The countries, especially those from Eastern Europe, that have recently become members of the EU understood that complying with the EU's standards of democracy, which these countries played no part in establishing, was a precondition for their economic development and social progress.

No other experience of democracy building and building regional economic alliances has been as successful as the EU model. States in the Arab world can only take such a model as a reference and move on towards democracy and beyond the old debate over how Arab states define democracy and their suspicion of 'hidden European agendas'.

5. Conclusions

In the Arab world, the state, which it is hoped will be the architect of the nation and the agent for democracy and development, is in a dilemma. The role of the Arab state is at the heart of multiple contradictions. The state acts against its people in the name of modernization and political progress. There is a continuing failure by the state in the Arab region to prove its legitimacy as an agent for progress.

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The history of the state in the Arab world is the product of the rivalry between the future of the state and the wishes of Arab society. This history is marked by painful failures of unreachd objectives, false promises and lost aspirations for democracy. The crisis of the state in the Arab world is general and profound. It reflects the paradox of hopes for democracy and progress, on one side, and accumulated deceptions, on the other. Despite the iron force used by the state to maintain its presence, its essence is weak and history proves that the Arab state has produced neither the political values of democracy, equality and liberty nor the capabilities for the protection of its people and of peace. In the expression of Burhan Ghailoun, the real coup d'état in the Arab world is in fact the 'état' (the state) itself. The role of the state, which Arab societies counted on to achieve democracy and socio-economic progress, has been turned by the state into repression, negation and suppression. In the Arab world, it has long been said that governments have forfeited the confidence of the people and can win it back only with genuine efforts.

For years, many governments in the region have opted to construct a society that represents the facade of unanimity, one that wins referendums with approximately 99 per cent of the votes. This situation exists in the Arab countries but also characterizes the current approach taken at the regional level by the League of Arab States. This explains in large part why democracy in the Arab world is much more in crisis than it is in other parts of the globe, and why genuine democracy remains elusive in the region. The state in the Arab world cannot yet be considered modern or capable of becoming an equal partner with the European Union or a vehicle for democracy building in the region. The democratic management of diversity, pluralism and national unity are far from happening through the will of the Arab states. The change to democracy would replace with pluralism the destructive factionalism that characterizes the Arab world. Political reforms in the region cannot happen without a cultural reform that would form a platform for turning the unanimity facade into such political pluralism.

It is only with knowledge of the local and regional realities of the Arab world that the EU can play a role in regenerating the role of the state in democracy building in the region. The EU can then develop policies specific to the region, because the challenges for democracy in the Arab world are specific to the region. Nonetheless, the approaches used by the EU for democracy promotion in other parts of the world can be effective. Conditionality, incentives and sanctions are still efficient but the specificities of the subregions of the Maghreb, the Middle East and the Gulf show that adjustment to the predisposition to accept changes towards democracy remains a factor which the EU can use to play the role of either catalyst or teacher.

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