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# 10 PAPERS

FOR BARCELONA 2010

## Why Europe must engage with political Islam

by Amr Elshobaki and Gema Martín Muñoz

With an introduction by Bassma Kodmani



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# Introduction

**Bassma Kodmani**

The key message that emerges from this report is that it is time to engage with the Islamists in the Middle East and North Africa. Both authors – one from the Arab world and the other from Europe – eloquently make the argument that there is no prospect of a credible democratic transformation of the Arab world without the full integration of one powerful player: political Islam.

One could argue that over the last five years one of the main changes in European thinking has been to acknowledge that political Islam is part of the reality of Southern Mediterranean countries. European commentators and analysts have gradually come around to the idea that it is absolutely necessary to engage with Islamic political movements and to get to know them better. This is undoubtedly a sign of progress, irrespective of one's sympathy or lack thereof for the Islamists and their ideas, if only because it indicates that European societies are not in the business of hand-picking interlocutors who are to their liking and seeking to re-shape Arab societies to mirror their own.

But it is also clear that the discovery in Europe of this reality, namely that Islamists are a major political force in the Arab countries, has diminished European (and American) enthusiasm for pushing forward a transformative agenda and has made the approach to democracy promotion a hesitant and reluctant effort at best.

Europeans are somehow disappointed and perhaps even a little offended that things have not turned out the way they expected. Over the last two decades or so, they nurtured human rights organisations across the region which championed individual rights and unreservedly espoused the Western discourse on democratic practices. They were expecting to see these like-minded groups evolve into full political players or to inspire powerful political parties. What they see instead is the emergence of Islamist groups whose constituencies are rooted in a civil society they do not know. In Arabic, *abli* and *madani* are two terms used to define what in Western languages is called civil society; *abli* refers to a society with traditional bonds of kinship and neighbourhood largely sustained by faith-based organisations, while *madani* is a more recent term and refers more to a secular-oriented

civil society as understood in Western terms. These bonds are very strong and structure a genuine grassroots civil society which maintains a large degree of autonomy *vis-à-vis* the state. It is mainly thanks to these solidarity networks that Muslim societies do not explode as often as an objective analysis of the hardships and frustrations to which they are subject might lead to expect. Unlike the civil society organisations that are on the map of the foreign community and outside donors, this brand of traditional civil society has never needed foreign funding, does not speak foreign languages, has no formal address and offices and the women within it are veiled (but play an active role in society). This civil society is not necessarily hostile but it is culturally alien to the West and suspicious of outside interference.

The process of coming to grips with the Islamist reality occurs against the backdrop of mounting apprehensions within European societies *vis-à-vis* the cultural visibility of Muslim communities living in Europe. Those who explicitly make the link between militant political Islam and the immigrant communities from Muslim countries most often seek to fuel fears and suspicions within public opinion towards the Muslim communities; on the other hand, it is also obvious that political leaders and the security forces struggle with the challenges posed by Muslim youth seeking a comfortable definition of their identity, one that would allow them to achieve economic and social integration and gain acceptance in the host society, and where disillusionment and failure leads some to be seduced by the sirens of extremist groups.

Can Islamists become modern? Can they cope with diverse societies? Can they govern democratically? How committed to pluralism are they and will they remain so if they hold a majority in an elected government?

In their contributions here, Gema Martín Muñoz and Amr Elshobaki are conscious of all the arguments commonly levelled against the Islamists and set out to refute them one after the other. While they address the issues from two different perspectives, they reach the same key conclusions:

- There will be no credible democratic change without the participation of political Islam as a full player in the political process.
- Authoritarianism thrives on the fears of Western governments and public opinions *vis-à-vis* Islam and the Islamists. It is authoritarianism that breeds conservative and reactionary attitudes, not the Islamists.
- It is the nature of the political system in which they develop that determines the orientation of the Islamist movements and defines whether they commit to democracy, not their intrinsic leanings. If some Islamists are radical, it is due to the undemocratic nature of the political system which governs them.
- The appeal of Islam for Arab youth is perfectly compatible with modern life. Islamists are in fact a modern political force: they run their electoral campaigns on a political platform and according to ideological orientations rather than on the basis of kinship and identity politics.



- Both authors rightly state that Islamists should only be required to fulfil two key conditions in order to integrate the political process as full players: commit to non-violence and respect the democratic process. Some might say that it is not enough if they only commit to the *process*, and that they should also commit to the *values*. It is true that there are no guarantees that once they are brought into the political arena, they will respect women's rights, minorities' rights and freedom of expression. But then on what basis can they be asked to provide guarantees with regard to their intentions? And who is entitled to put such conditions on them: governments, other political parties, civil society, outside powers who provide aid and seek to promote democracy? If we want to be honest and consistent, the answer is 'none of the above'. Authoritarian regimes cannot be trusted to conduct this 'security check' on the Islamists in an honest way because they are opposed to all forms of political demands that challenge their monopoly over government, Islamist or otherwise; external powers contain in their own history and in their present configurations examples of political forces which were integrated in the democratic process even though their ideological base and commitment to democratic values were highly questionable (no one in Western Europe required the communist parties to give up their doctrine of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as a condition for participating in elections and parliaments and even in government coalitions, and no one has banned any of the extreme-right and often openly racist parties from participating in elections and parliaments in more recent times).

## Democracy will provide the answers

Elshobaki expresses unlimited trust in the virtues of democracy and in its capacity to reshape dogmatic radical forces and steer them towards moderation. First and foremost, because democracy sets all political forces on an equal footing, Islamist parties would immediately lose their claim to any form of superiority based on some divine inspiration in a democratic context.

Islamist movements do not have a deep-rooted integral flaw or some dogma-based impediment that precludes them from becoming democratic. As a result of the limited opportunities for accessing the political space in many Arab countries over the last few years, Islamists have started undergoing a process of socialisation. They are joining multi-party coalitions, taking an active role in parliament, negotiating portfolios in government and advancing their agenda through peaceful means. This is true of Egypt, Morocco, Yemen, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan and even Syria and Tunisia where boundaries between opposition forces with different ideological affiliations have been softened through negotiating processes and the formation of opportunistic alliances. These experiments all indicate that Islamists are capable of pragmatism, amenable to change, and ready to commit to democratic principles.

Interestingly, both authors consider that outside parties, Europeans in particular, have an important role to play in this process of socialisation. When European governments started to signal to their partners in the South that peaceful moderate opposition would be rewarded, their message was clearly heard and began shaping the attitudes of political and

social movements, not least the Islamist parties' who sometimes go out of their way to reassure both their own societies and the outside world that they do not seek to monopolise the political scene, that they will respect pluralism and diversity, and that they will honour international agreements signed by the current governing regimes.

### **Political Islam is less dangerous than apolitical Islam**

There are high costs to preventing Islamists from accessing the political space as formal players. When they are not allowed to form their own political parties, Islamists in several countries (e.g. Egypt or Syria) have instead infiltrated existing political parties, state bureaucracies and non-state institutions. They thus become a pressure group working from inside. In Egypt, because the influence of political parties is limited, party leaders feel obliged to curry favour with their remaining members to retain their support, and they find that the best way to do so is by using the Islamic discourse. The result is that all political parties have adopted the Islamic vocabulary and slogans, and seek to outbid each other in calling for the implementation of Sharia law. Over the years, the Islamic religious establishment has developed a confrontational discourse (albeit one that remains deliberately vague when it comes to designating exact challenges and enemies), creating an atmosphere of suspicion about other religions. The political parties are tempted to ride the trend or at best do not seek to counter it. The larger the political party, the more ambiguous its discourse becomes on inter-religious strife because its constituency is in large part affected by sectarianism.

A crucial step towards reclaiming the political space would be the legalisation of Islamic parties as a less dangerous alternative to the domination by the religious establishment which seemingly sits outside the political sphere and has no declared political agenda. A political party or movement is a recognisable player. If it seeks to be legalised, it registers under a name, has an address, publicises the names of its leaders, and spells out its agenda. Such an identifiable actor participates with others in a debate over issues in the public sphere. Political movements may have an ideological agenda, but they fight political battles. They can be required to respect the rules and can be countered through political means. In contrast, religious authorities that claim to be apolitical are more problematic and dangerous because they are not required to abide by set rules, undergo the electoral test of credibility or to measure their popularity.

As Amr Elshobaki rightly notes, there is an ongoing struggle in Egypt within the Muslim Brotherhood movement between those who call for a transformation of the movement into a full political party on one hand, and on the other hand the inward-looking *dawa*-oriented trend which advocates for the confinement of the Brotherhood within the area of social activities and religious preaching. There are good reasons to believe that the integration of the Islamists into the political mainstream will contribute to marginalising the religious establishment.

### **The key challenge of managing diversity within Arab societies**

The case for integrating the Islamists in the political process having been made, it would be naïve or dishonest not to admit that the Islamists in most countries of the Middle East

have some important homework to do and will need their most enlightened and courageous leaders to make the leap from the conservatism that characterises their grassroots constituencies to responding to the key challenges facing their societies and in particular those brought about by globalisation.

They are conscious of the need to provide clear answers to a number of thorny questions, such as the neutrality of the state towards religion, the principle of equal citizenship for all members of society irrespective of religious differences, freedom of thought and freedom of belief, and the need for a fundamental reinterpretation and renovation of the Islamic legal system in order to respond to the requirements of the modern world.

The litmus test in our view is whether and how they will come to grips with the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of Arab societies, a challenge that Arab nationalism before them failed to integrate ideologically and that Arab governments failed to manage politically. There is no chance that democracy can bring harmony and stability to Arab societies without acknowledging the diversity of Arab societies and defining legal measures to protect key groups against discrimination. Democracy, if reduced in its definition to the rule of the majority, will bring considerable damage to most Arab countries and in that guise is a recipe for establishing what John Stuart Mill called the tyranny of the majority. The debate on the need to contextualise universal values so as to adapt them to the region is legitimate. There are cultural specificities, a highly potent debate about religion, culture, and social and familial patterns of relations. But standing firm on certain fundamental values is an existential matter for Arab societies. Pluralism is definitely one of them.

We have not seen any responsible approaches by governments aimed at managing sectarian diversity. Political authorities are not regulating inter-communal relations in such a way as to build harmonious relations between communities, and societies are not equipped or empowered to address the problem. Instead, religious institutions, Christian and Muslim alike, are often focused on protecting and organising their communities, with little concern for inter-communal coexistence. The experiences of Sudan and Iran where Islamists regimes have come to power are traumatic. They suggest that Islamists threaten the cohesion of the nation-state because they turn large non-Muslim communities into second class citizens. But again, the argument that both authors make in this report is only strengthened, namely that authoritarian governments consistently demonstrate that they themselves are a major threat to national cohesion. Iraq, Sudan and now Yemen all afford examples of the predatory behaviour of governments that results in the very foundations of the society being destabilised. To a lesser extent, Egypt's treatment of its Coptic community has been criticised and cited as the main reason behind the inter-religious tensions there.

Initiatives to promote good governance and the rule of law should include explicit and detailed provisions concerning the management of inter-communal and inter-sectarian relations (in terms of principles, mechanisms and the right institutions to uphold them). To be acceptable as well as coherent, the Western discourse should stop putting the accent on the protection of minorities and stress instead the principle of neutrality of the state *vis-à-vis* religion, equal citizenship and the good governance of diversity.

For the Islamists, while some of their leaders, particularly among the younger guard, demonstrate a capacity to understand the reality of diverse Arab societies and a willingness

to consider the political measures needed to accommodate this, they are obliged to cater to constituencies that are fundamentally sectarian. Here again, the religious institutions (both the Islamic and the Christian) with their discourse, media and educational institutions are largely responsible for the growth of sectarianism in society. The Islamist parties inevitably draw on this population and seek to exploit the increased religiosity within society in order to increase their political influence.

## **Waning already? Not quite**

The authors of this report are several steps ahead in their analysis of Islamist political forces. While analysts and decision-makers in Europe and elsewhere are only now reconciling themselves to the idea that the moderate Islamists should be integrated in the political processes of their countries, Amr Elshobaki here claims that their influence may already be declining because they are failing to respond to the primary aspirations of the people. The moderate Islamists have succeeded in marginalising and even defeating the radicals, but they are already facing a disappointed electorate.

Does this suggest that after the dazzling rise of political Islam we might witness its decline and fading into irrelevance? This is unlikely when one observes the impressive dynamism that Islamist movements demonstrate in the public sphere. What is true however is that most if not all Islamist movements have entered a critical and possibly turbulent phase of their history and are undergoing deep transformations as they seek to become credible political actors. When attacked from outside and put on the spot by other opposition forces or by foreign interlocutors, they admit that intense debates are underway within their movements. In this context, the moderates among them have this unequivocal and instructive message: 'keep pressing us on those thorny issues and challenging us for answers because you will strengthen the voice of the most progressive among us and help us prevail' – a plea from inside for engaging with the Islamists.

# 1. « Modérés » et « radicaux » dans le monde arabe – Quelle place pour les islamistes ?

Amr Elshobaki

## Introduction

La plupart des régimes arabes ont considéré les mouvements islamistes comme une menace pour leur existence, une menace pour une démocratie qui n'existe pas. L'Union européenne n'a fait qu'appuyer ce discours et d'une certaine manière n'a pas hésité à considérer les mouvements islamistes comme une véritable menace pour les régimes arabes alliés et, par conséquent, comme un danger pour leurs propres intérêts ainsi que pour la stabilité de la région toute entière.

Depuis le début du processus de Barcelone en 1995 et même jusqu'à maintenant, ce concept est resté prégnant au sein de l'UE. C'est pourquoi il devient important, au moment de célébrer le quinzième anniversaire de Barcelone, de commencer à réexaminer cette notion. Les interrogations ne manquent pas : la vision longtemps défendue par l'Union a-t-elle réussi ou échoué ? Est-il possible de garantir une intégration réussie des Islamistes au sein du processus politique ? Et dans quelles conditions ? Un partenariat euro-méditerranéen renouvelé peut-il avoir une nouvelle approche de ce dossier ? Peut-il aider le monde arabe ainsi que les mouvements islamistes à réaliser une transition pacifique vers la démocratie quel que soit le degré de désaccord avec ces courants ?

Différentes questions et problématiques sont analysées ici. Nous allons tout d'abord esquisser une carte des mouvements islamistes. Et, avant de conclure, nous examinerons la nature des défis présents au sein de l'arène politique arabe, notamment en ce qui concerne la dualité modérée/radicale.

## Les mouvements islamistes pacifiques et les défis de l'intégration

Il est important de distinguer entre les mouvements islamistes jihadistes violents, comme le Groupe « Gamaa'a El Islman'ya » et le Jihad en Egypte (qui ont formé le noyau d'Al Qaida et le Groupe islamique armé en Algérie [GIA]), ou les groupes salafistes jihadistes (Maghreb) d'une part et les mouvements islamistes pacifiques, conservateurs (voire arriérés) comme les Frères musulmans ou ceux « libéraux » comme le Parti de la justice et du développement en Turquie ou au Maroc de l'autre.

Lorsque l'on parle d'intégration des mouvements islamistes, quelle que soit leur orientation politique, on désigne en particulier les mouvements pacifiques et, spécifiquement, les Frères musulmans. Cette Confrérie, fondée en 1928 par l'Imam Hassan Al-Banna, peut être considérée comme le groupe politique et religieux le plus important dans le monde arabe. En Egypte, elle a actuellement 88 députés au Parlement.

Le débat sur les mouvements islamistes a sans doute été au centre de celui sur la question de la réforme du monde arabe, notamment sur le développement de la démocratie et la conviction répandue que l'accès de tels mouvements au pouvoir aurait tué celle-ci dans l'œuf.

Les questions concernant les réformes démocratiques et politiques ont suscité un discours « empêcheur de la démocratie » à deux niveaux : sur le plan intérieur, avec le refus de l'ingérence extérieure, et à l'étranger, avec l'idée du danger que l'islamisme représente pour la stabilité de la région.

La véritable question qui doit être posée en ce qui concerne la relation politique des mouvements islamistes avec le processus de réforme politique est de savoir si ces mouvements ont ou non des défauts « structurels » les empêchant de s'ouvrir à la démocratie. Les obstacles à leur intégration dans le processus démocratique sont-ils « génétiques », autrement dit liés à la nature même de la philosophie sur laquelle ils se fondent ? Ou le problème est-il principalement lié au contexte politique des mouvements islamistes ? Dans cette logique, peut-on imaginer qu'un contexte démocratique serait susceptible de remodeler le discours islamiste en le rendant conforme aux règles de la démocratie ?

De manière générale, l'histoire des idées et des mouvements politiques a toujours été liée au contexte sociopolitique. Ainsi, il serait difficile de séparer le changement effectué par le communisme en Europe dans les 1960 et 1970 du contexte libéral observé en Europe occidentale. Les partis politiques des pays de l'Europe occidentale n'en ont pas moins vécu une expérience tout à fait différente de leurs homologues dans les pays d'Europe de l'Est, placés, eux, sous le régime du parti unique. De même, il n'est pas possible de séparer le discours des mouvements islamistes dans le monde arabe de la nature des systèmes politiques et des réalités sociales qui les entourent.

## La problématique islamiste

On considère généralement que les islamistes ont en partie la responsabilité de s'intégrer au processus de démocratisation dans le monde arabe. Contrairement à ce qu'indiquent certaines analyses, l'empathie ne suffit pas pour qu'ils croient réellement à la démocratie, et cela est vrai pour les autres forces politiques dans le monde arabe, de l'extrême gauche à l'extrême droite. La principale question concerne plutôt la capacité des islamistes à se conformer aux règles démocratiques et constitutionnelles dans un cadre laïc, et de ne plus se référer au sacré pour bénéficier d'une situation privilégiée par rapport aux autres forces politiques.

Les leaders et les membres des mouvements islamistes estiment qu'être en désaccord avec eux revient à désapprouver la religion elle-même ; les autres courants politiques suscitent souvent la méfiance, voire le dédain, de la part de ceux qui se considèrent comme les fidèles protecteurs de la religion.

Ce complexe de supériorité chez les islamistes est le résultat naturel de l'image de « gardien de l'Islam » construite par ce courant. Il leur est donc souvent difficile de comprendre que ces valeurs sont des choix personnels de chaque individu relevant de la sphère privée ; et que l'action dans la « sphère publique » met tous les courants politiques à pied d'égalité sans aucune exception, puisque cette action ne dépend que de sa capacité de développement politique et économique.

## Radicalisme et modération dans le monde arabe : une dichotomie incomplète

Le terme « modération » est censé refléter les régimes rationnels et démocratiques, qui gèrent l'alternance au pouvoir par des moyens pacifiques, en respectant les principes de l'ordre mondial et de la légitimité internationale ; le « radicalisme » est, quant à lui, censé refuser les principes de cet ordre et se rebeller contre lui.

Le monde a connu des forces, voire des régimes et des Etats, considérés, les uns comme des modèles de modération, les autres comme des exemples de radicalisme. Citons, par exemple, toutes les forces communistes qui sont apparues en Europe au XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, et qui ont tenté de changer les régimes politiques en place à travers des moyens « révolutionnaires ». Les régimes démocratiques ont fini par les intégrer dans le système politique, ce qui a contribué à la transformation d'une bonne majorité d'entre eux en mouvements socio-démocrates. Ces derniers représentent un élément de stabilisation et de soutien aux régimes en place, et un facteur d'évolution vers un enracinement de la démocratie.

L'exclusion n'était donc pas l'option choisie, même dans les cas où certaines forces avaient ouvertement pratiqué le terrorisme. Par contre, le dialogue et l'interaction politique ont toujours été entretenus avec presque toutes les forces « radicales » pour les « obliger » à s'intégrer dans le système politique existant. Cet effort a rendu ces forces politiques beau-

coup plus réalistes, les a aidées préférer la réalité de la vie quotidienne aux rêves idéologiques lointains ; en contrepartie, ces forces ont pu apporter un certain dynamisme à ces régimes, et les rendre plus aptes à se renouveler de l'intérieur.

A l'évidence, le monde arabe a été perçu, après le 11 septembre, comme confronté à une dichotomie entre l'axe de la « modération » et celui du « radicalisme ». Presque toutes les forces islamistes se sont retrouvées dans l'axe du radicalisme : du Hamas en Palestine au Hezbollah au Liban, en passant par les Frères musulmans en Egypte ; simultanément, la majorité des régimes arabes – Egypte, Arabie saoudite, Autorité palestinienne, Maroc, Tunisie, etc. – ont été placés dans l'axe de la modération ; seule, la Syrie a été considérée comme un « Etat radical », à cause de son alliance avec l'Iran, alors que l'attitude adoptée par son régime n'était ni « résistante » ni « radicale ».

Cette approche demeure celle aussi bien de l'Union européenne que de l'administration américaine, même si le président Obama a l'intention de casser cette dualité trop rigide et de rechercher de nouvelles approches pour comprendre la complexité de la situation dans le monde arabe, et bien qu'aucun de ces deux « axes » ne continue à représenter la réalité telle qu'elle existe.

Pourtant, il est certain que cette dichotomie radicalisme/modération est bien antérieure au mandat du président Bush : elle date en effet de la période de l'ancien président égyptien Anouar el-Sadate. Après la visite de ce dernier à Jérusalem, et la signature en solo du traité de paix Égypte-Israël, le monde arabe s'est divisé entre les modérés et les radicaux, une mouvance pacifiste et un mouvement résistant... C'est dans ce contexte qu'est rapidement apparu le « front du refus » sous le leadership des régimes baathistes en Irak et en Syrie. Ces derniers sont entrés dans une série de confrontations putschistes, d'assassinats mutuels, sans cependant tirer un seul coup de feu sur l'armée israélienne, qui continue aujourd'hui d'occuper le Golan syrien.

Les campagnes de diffamation et les accusations de trahison faites contre l'Égypte suite à ces événements ont laissé des traces négatives sur une grande partie de l'opinion publique égyptienne, qui se replie sur elle-même après chaque crise. Il a été fait référence au discours politique de la période El-Sadate, selon lequel les Arabes veulent « combattre Israël jusqu'au dernier soldat égyptien ». Cette accusation demeure cependant imprécise car la participation arabe à la guerre d'octobre 1973 entre l'Égypte et Israël a été bien réelle en termes aussi bien de financement que de soldats.

Toutefois, alors que le terme « modération » demeure « honteux » pour beaucoup d'Arabes, parce qu'il reste synonyme de « relation privilégiée » avec les Etats-Unis et de normalisation des relations avec Israël, une grande puissance régionale comme la Turquie a offert un bon exemple réhabilitant le terme « modération ». Bien que ce pays ait des relations avec Israël et soit membre de l'OTAN, la Turquie dispose d'un régime laïc qui a fini par accepter l'accès au pouvoir de l'AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*), le premier parti politique civil, dans le respect de la culture et des valeurs islamiques.

Le nouveau gouvernement turc, dirigé par Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a une position ferme sur les agressions israéliennes contre Gaza, en allant beaucoup plus loin que les régimes arabes, qu'ils soient modérés ou radicaux. Le modèle de « modération » turque, bien que



les Frères musulmans se soient efforcés de démontrer qu'il constitue une expérience « non islamique » (comme l'indique leur site [www.ikhwanonline.com](http://www.ikhwanonline.com)), devient alors une force de pression réelle sur Israël et la communauté internationale pour mettre fin à l'agression israéliens à Gaza.

La Turquie est, par excellence, un État « modéré » : elle fait partie de l'ordre mondial, elle s'y est intégrée de manière dynamique, sans cristalliser sa position comme l'Égypte actuelle ; cette attitude » lui a permis de devenir un État responsable, qui a considéré son alliance avec l'Occident comme une chance pour développer ses institutions économiques et politiques, et établir un véritable système démocratique.

La Turquie ne s'est pas contentée de dénoncer des massacres israéliens, mais elle a également écouté les demandes du Hamas, qu'elle a considéré comme un partenaire dans les négociations et la résolution de la cause palestinienne. Elle a ainsi rejoint une école de pensée (en marge des cercles de décideurs en Occident malgré une influence croissante dans les centres de recherche en Europe et aux Etats-Unis), qui juge indispensable de dialoguer avec les mouvements islamistes modérés. La Turquie considère le Hamas comme un mouvement de libération nationale et non pas comme un groupe terroriste : malgré toutes ses erreurs et son discours idéologique fermé, elle pourra évoluer et faire progressivement une partie du processus politique.

Il existe clairement un mouvement dans le monde arabe, en dehors de l'élite gouvernante, et un mouvement en Turquie, au sein de l'élite gouvernante, qui estiment que le Hamas, s'il a subi un blocus international et régional sans précédent, n'en a pas moins été démocratiquement et librement élu par le peuple palestinien. Même s'il a mal choisi la majorité de ses décisions politiques, sans être conscient de leurs conséquences – coup d'état militaire contre l'Autorité palestinienne (malgré les graves erreurs commises récemment), abolition du cessez-le-feu avec Israël, tir aléatoire de missiles – il ne faut pas oublier que Gaza a été « occupé » par voie terrestre, aérienne et maritime, avec un blocus israélien continu, au cours duquel le citoyen palestinien a été cruellement privé de nourriture et de médicaments.

Quant à l'Égypte, elle n'a pas essayé de devenir un véritable Etat « modéré », considérant que ses relations « stratégiques » avec les Etats-Unis sont une chance pour elle de construire à l'intérieur une véritable démocratie au plan interne, afin de pouvoir exercer une influence à l'extérieur. Ainsi, la scène égyptienne demeure assez étrange dans la mesure où elle ne peut pas être qualifiée d'État « modéré » comme la Turquie, ni d'État « radical » comme l'Iran ; son discours en direction des médias et de l'opinion publique est imprégné de « modération » (priorité à la paix, au développement et à la démocratie) lorsque l'adversaire est le Hamas ou les Frères musulmans ; il s'oriente vers le « radicalisme », lorsque les Etats-Unis parlent des violations des droits de l'homme dans le pays.

## **Que faire avec les islamistes ?**

Le monde arabe connaît des régimes que l'on peut qualifier de plus ou moins modérés puisqu'il s'agit de régimes non démocratiques, confrontés à de nombreux problèmes poli-

tiques et économiques. Il connaît également des mouvements politiques de « résistants », tels que le Hamas ou le Hezbollah, ou fondamentalistes, comme les Frères musulmans. Ceux-ci n'ont contribué ni à la libération des Territoires occupés (en Palestine) ni au retour de la démocratie (en Egypte).

En ce qui concerne la première catégorie – les « mouvements résistants » – on remarquera qu'actuellement, elle ne maintient presque plus de relations avec la résistance, à l'exception de ses slogans ; elle commence à avoir un autre agenda politique qui se cache derrière les slogans de la résistance. Ainsi, le Hezbollah au Liban était résistant jusqu'à la libération du Sud-Liban en 2000 ; il s'est alors transformé en une milice confessionnelle armée, prolongeant le rôle de l'Iran dans la région, et appliquant dans le pays du Cèdre les pratiques des autres milices confessionnelles. La même logique s'applique au Hamas : loin de ses slogans politiques et idéologiques « résistants », il se soumet au « cessez-le-feu » avec Israël, se contentant d'attaquer Abbas et l'Autorité palestinienne. Le Hamas peut donc difficilement être décrit comme un mouvement de résistance, sauf à travers les slogans qu'il utilise. Par ailleurs, il a échoué à se transformer en un mouvement politique modéré et démocratique, respectant les résolutions internationales, et entre dans un combat politique, juridique et médiatique contre Israël, poussant la communauté internationale à saisir le droit légitime du peuple palestinien à créer son Etat indépendant.

L'accès du Hamas au pouvoir en Palestine, qui marque également la formation du premier gouvernement des « Frères musulmans » dans le monde arabe par des moyens démocratiques, exigeait la mise en œuvre de nouveaux programmes différents de ceux connus durant la période de résistance armée ; le Hamas se voit alors contraint d'offrir de nouvelles solutions ou alternatives « non idéologiques », calculées selon les équilibres de puissances mondiales et régionales, et non pas selon les rêves et les souhaits du Hamas lui-même.

La vérité est que la stratégie consistant à « briser » le Hamas, adoptée par la précédente administration américaine et fondée sur l'imposition d'un blocus économique, a maintenu le même cercle vicieux, qui n'aide pas le Hamas à réviser sa position envers Israël que ce soit au plan idéologique ou politique ; de même, elle reflète l'absence de toute capacité, voire de toute volonté internationale de faire pression sur Israël, pour l'obliger à respecter la légitimité internationale. Cela implique que le Hamas et d'autres mouvements islamistes continueront à parler de « complot » contre le peuple palestinien et de l'hostilité de l'Occident à l'égard de l'Islam et des musulmans, une théorie et un discours radical dans lesquels ils pourraient bien rester emmurés.

Les Etats-Unis ont choisi de ne pas dialoguer avec le Hamas, qu'ils considèrent comme une menace pour la sécurité d'Israël. Cet environnement d'« exclusion » sur le plan international est plus ou moins analogue à l'environnement régional arabe, qui cherche également à exclure le Hamas, même s'il déclare publiquement le contraire.

Ce qui est surprenant est que la position des Etats-Unis, qui refusent de dialoguer avec un mouvement islamiste comme le Hamas de crainte de froisser Israël, ne les a pas empêchés de dialoguer avec les différents mouvements islamistes sunnites en Irak, notamment avec le Parti islamiste irakien, appartenant à la même école de pensée des « Frères musulmans ». Ainsi, l'administration américaine s'est efforcée de les persuader de participer au processus politique en Irak ; elle a en outre dialogué avec quelques milices islamistes violentes,

qui exercent ouvertement des actes de résistance armée contre l'occupation américaine, et parfois même des actes terroristes contre les civils. Le paradoxe est flagrant : les Américains, dans le cas irakien, insistent pour que les mouvements islamistes sunnites participent au processus politique, et admettent le rôle décisif des références religieuses shiites (les *ulémas* ou les *maraje*) dans le processus politique ; simultanément, ils refusent les résultats des élections démocratiques en Palestine, qui amènent pourtant au pouvoir le Hamas, un parti beaucoup plus modéré que certains groupes islamistes sunnites en Irak.

Ainsi, les calculs américains ont été beaucoup plus liés à leurs intérêts qu'aux principes démocratiques. Leur priorité a semblé être de préserver la sécurité d'Israël, tout en acceptant pratiquement ses politiques coloniales.

Il est certain que le Hamas contient des éléments qui le rendent capable d'évoluer d'un mouvement « radical » à un mouvement orienté vers l'émancipation et la démocratie ; mais, d'un côté, il n'a pratiquement fait aucun effort pour déclencher cette évolution ; de l'autre, la communauté internationale ne l'a pas aidé à le faire. Le Hamas continue donc à vivre une victoire « illusoire », qui est le contrôle répressif par la force de la bande de Gaza assiégée.

Ici, le vrai paradoxe se cristallise dans l'attitude internationale et régionale envers ces forces radicales du monde arabe. En effet, les acteurs internationaux ont réussi à mettre fin à la capacité de résistance armée de ces forces, mais ont échoué à les transformer en des forces modérées, ou au moins à contribuer au déclenchement de cette transformation. Cette politique a contribué à favoriser la stagnation dans le monde arabe : la vraie conception de la résistance contre l'occupation a été éliminée, et on a échoué à établir des mouvements politiques modérés, qui luttent démocratiquement pour obtenir la liberté.

Il est également certain que les politiques israéliennes sont responsables de l'affaiblissement de la crédibilité de l'Autorité palestinienne chez les citoyens à la fois arabes et palestiniens. En conséquence, cet échec à la fois des « modérés » laïcs et des radicaux islamistes ouvre largement la porte à Al-Qaida, qui entre dans le monde arabo-musulman comme conséquence du désespoir et de la frustration

## Conclusion

Premièrement, on peut dire que plus la marge démocratique s'élargira et plus le régime politique s'ouvrira dans n'importe quelle société du monde arabe, plus il y aura de chances de voir les mouvements islamistes s'ouvrir aux autres forces politiques et s'intéresser aux dossiers relatifs à la démocratie et aux droits de l'homme. Pour autant, les positions de ces mouvements continueront de varier en fonction du contexte socio-politique qui les entoure. On peut cependant affirmer que le dialogue (à lui seul) de l'Union européenne avec ces mouvements est un facteur important dans leur évolution vers la démocratie.

Deuxièmement, il importe de noter que l'expérience de l'établissement de l'Etat-nation moderne dans le monde arabe est, inévitablement et à un niveau variable d'une société

à une autre, en accord avec les concepts de la laïcité. Ainsi, certains courants séculaires (de droite comme de gauche) ont le sentiment que le discours nationaliste fait partie de l'expérience de leur pays, à un moment au moins de leur histoire (courant nassérien en Egypte, par exemple). Les mouvements islamistes ont, quant à eux, une expérience historique très différente, hors du cadre de la construction des Etats modernes, en Egypte, en Algérie, en Syrie, au Maroc, et même en Tunisie...

Considérés comme étrangers à l'établissement de l'Etat moderne, voire même comme ses adversaires, les mouvements islamistes ont suscité la méfiance de l'appareil de l'Etat, qui, à son tour, n'en connaissait guère que le stéréotype créé par les appareils sécuritaires, et les erreurs commis par certains d'entre eux.

Ce processus de « normalisation » entre les régimes arabes et les mouvements islamistes ne sera certes pas facile, mais il est incontournable pour mener à bien le projet de l'intégration des islamistes dans le processus de démocratisation.

Il convient de noter que l'histoire des mouvements islamistes dans le monde arabe a suscité la méfiance du pouvoir en place, des Etats et de la majorité des forces politiques arabes, car, pendant longtemps, ces mouvements se sont créés et ont évolué en dehors du régime politique, du cadre étatique et du mouvement de libération nationale, voire même en s'opposant à eux.

Tout au long des années 1930 et 1940, les Frères musulmans sont restés hors du cadre du mouvement de libération nationale ; ils n'ont pas non plus participé au projet de panarabisme au cours des années 1950 et 1960. Le moment est donc venu de les intégrer dans le futur processus de démocratisation du futur.

Cette intégration n'est pas chose aisée pour l'ensemble des pays arabes. Par exemple, le Hamas est considéré comme une faction « étrangère » à l'histoire de l'Organisation de la libération de la Palestine (OLP). Il lui faut donc chercher un compromis pour s'intégrer à ce mouvement, ce qui représente un défi aussi bien idéologique que politique, aggravé par le clivage Fatah- Hamas.

Troisièmement, il faut noter que les mouvements islamistes se caractérisent par l'adoption d'un discours politique trop général, voire assez vague. Le dialogue entre les islamistes et l'Union européenne est donc important, dans la mesure où il contribuerait à clarifier et à préciser le débat autour de ce discours.

L'évolution ne se fera qu'à travers l'interaction avec la communauté internationale ; l'Union européenne doit travailler à l'intégration des islamistes (à la fois modérés et radicaux) dans l'espace politique.

L'expérience de l'Union européenne est elle-même une expérience intégrationniste, qu'il s'agisse des Musulmans européens ou de l'élargissement de l'Union. Le respect de la démocratie, comme valeur universelle, servira de plateforme pour un dialogue authentique avec les forces radicales dans le monde arabe, afin de les aider à s'orienter vers la participation politique, la modération et le respect des résolutions internationales, qui sont violées aussi bien par le Hamas que par Israël.

Il serait donc souhaitable pour tous de cesser de boycotter le Hamas, à plus forte raison sans exercer aucune pression réelle sur Israël, ce qui faciliterait le projet des modérés (Autorité palestinienne) d'établissement d'un Etat palestinien indépendant. Lorsqu'un véritable dialogue sera établi avec le Hamas, les bases seront jetées pour qu'un monde arabe stable et démocratique puisse voir le jour.



## 2. Democracy and the Arab world: the ‘Islamist dilemma’

Gema Martín Muñoz

If we consider opinion polls carried out in Arab countries since 2003, for example surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, we see that among Arab and Muslim citizens there is a great appetite for democratic freedoms and that they give a high value to freedom of expression, of the press, of multi-party politics and the principle of equality before the law. The fact that many of them also uphold a prominent role for Islam in political life does not on that account diminish their support for a system of government guaranteeing the same civil liberties and political rights that democracies enjoy. Even more significant is the fact that ‘those who support a bigger role for Islam in politics are those who express greater interest in liberties and free and competitive elections.’<sup>1</sup> These findings would appear to invalidate the stereotypes about the impossibility of reconciling Islamic interpretations of the law with models of democratic governance.

Similarly, these findings reveal the erroneous nature of those analyses or discourses that posit the cultural misunderstanding between Islam and the West as the explanation for a supposed incompatibility between democracy and Muslims. Anyone walking through the streets of Arab capitals today can see the extent to which modernisation has progressed and become a social reality. The young people in these countries dream of being able to study in the US and Europe, and embrace the liberal economic and political model which they do not consider to be incompatible with Islam or as implying that this involves them having to renounce their Islamic identity. This is perhaps the main reason why selective attempts to construct the perfect pro-Western and secular Arab man, pursued to the point of caricature, have usually failed – attempts that often govern Western political actions.

One key question to be posed, then, is whether to reverse the priorities, and put the principles and process of reform ahead of the players who take part in it: to favour the emergence of transparent mechanisms of government and management, regardless of whether the participants representing them belong to secular

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1. See Pew Research Center website at: <http://people-press.org>.

or Islamist circles. The citizens of these countries should be free to plan their own future, and elect their own representatives and the political parties in which they place their confidence.

### Causes of authoritarianism

Two striking facts indicate the great complexity and difficulty of the challenges facing North African and Middle Eastern countries today: according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the region has the highest level of unemployment in the world, apart from Sub-Saharan Africa, with more than 20 million people without jobs; and according to the UN, 47.2 percent of the total number of the world's refugees are concentrated in the region.

This stark reality reveals an acute internal crisis, and highlights the intensity and prolonged nature of conflicts in the region. All these accumulated conflicts, ranging from those that took place in the Middle East during the First World War to those of the last decade, and encompassing the Arab-Israeli wars and those that have taken place in Lebanon, the Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan, have contributed – as Hamit Bozarslan points out in his excellent book *Une histoire de la violence au Moyen-Orient* – ‘to the brutalisation of societies, and their banal resort to coercion and violence as legitimate modes of conduct and response,’<sup>2</sup> which has given political authoritarianism an enormous capacity for survival, and led to an increase in military incursions and terrorist acts. Consequently, conflict not only conditions the socio-political system in which people live, but also the development of education, culture and the arts.

The historical context is always a weighty factor in socio-political analysis and, in this case, helps us understand many of the root causes of authoritarianism. The nation-state was a result of decolonisation, hence historical legitimacy enabled rulers to establish an autocratic and patriarchal political culture that has sought to perpetuate itself to the present day. Nationalist leaders who achieved independence established themselves as ‘founders of the fatherland’ who built the modern nation-state. As they had liberated their respective countries and founded the nation-state, they felt that it belonged to them and thus according to a ‘dynastic’ logic was inherited by their successors. This political culture precluded the evolution of a democratic political system wherein political parties would take turns in power. On the other hand, these nationalist leaders developed a patriarchal relationship with their people, and set in place protectionist and distributive socio-economic models. The power structure represented the incontestable authority of a government that, in turn, was committed to guaranteeing the socio-economic welfare of citizens through subsidies and protective social policies. This model worked for the first post-colonial generation because it went hand-in-hand with a value system with which most people identified: nationalism, pan-Arabism and anti-imperialism (focused on the struggle against Israel) nourished the ideals of these societies during the 1960s and 1970s.

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2. Hamit Bozarslan, *Une histoire de la violence au Moyen-Orient* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008).



At the end of the 1970s, this whole value system entered into crisis because of an accumulation of failures: the model of the protectionist economy became bankrupt, and development was hampered by unproductive jobs, a swollen public sector and a state bourgeoisie that promoted a system based on patronage and clientelism. Several attempts to bring about a Pan-Arab state ended in failure and anti-imperialism directed against Israel collapsed in pieces with the defeat of the Arab armies in the Six Day War in 1967.<sup>3</sup>

This profound transformation was further complicated by a demographic factor that has been determinant in creating the present situation. Specific policies linked to the model of the protective and post-colonial developmentalist state, which favoured a higher birth rate, and a number of socio-economic changes that meant that more young people had access to secondary and university education and had higher expectations due to increased social mobility, created an enormous population growth to the extent that young people today (defined as those under 25) represent 65 percent of the total population in these countries.<sup>4</sup> Coupled with this, the intensive urbanisation process and the extension of education meant that the majority of this new generation are urban and highly-educated. But this new generation is currently suffering the impact of a period of acute economic crisis. The protectionist model led to a situation of economic bankruptcy, which prompted respective governments to apply for aid during the 1980s from big international economic institutions. These bodies forced governments to introduce stringent structural adjustment programmes, which led to a serious deterioration in social indicators. As unemployment increased, it became more discriminatory, affecting women more than men, young people more than adults and, notably, university graduates (57 percent of the unemployed Arab population today has received secondary or further education, compared with 37 percent in 1984).<sup>5</sup>

The growth of endemic conflicts meant that foreign enterprises were reluctant to invest in the region and drove governments to devote a large part of their budgets to defence and military spending to the detriment of social and educational expenditure. The permanent Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories (the bombardment of Gaza in December 2008 being the latest tragic episode in this situation), the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, the Gulf war in 1991, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the 33-day war in June 2006 in Lebanon have without doubt further jeopardised prospects for democratic and economic take-off in the region.

On the other hand, there is no ideological identification with those in power. As the value system that mobilised the first post-colonial generation entered into crisis, it was not renewed or replaced by a new project to mobilise the current generation. Instead, the various authoritarian regimes elaborated a system of strategies for survival in power, inevitably adopting policies of mounting coercion and repression. Consequently, an enormous political and ideological gap opened up between this new generation and its rulers, to the

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3. Gema Martín Muñoz, *El Estado Árabe. Crisis de legitimidad y contestación islamista* (Barcelona: Ed. Bellaterra, 2000).

4. However, demographic experts in the region all consider that a considerable decline in fertility is taking place, which does not mean that the high rate of growth experienced in previous decades has not generated an enormous rejuvenation of the population in these countries, and that a demographic balance will not be achieved, in the best of cases, within a decade or two. See: Philippe Fargues, *Génération Arabes* (Paris: Fayard, 2000).

5. Ismail Sirageldin (ed.), *Human Capital: Population Economics in the Middle East* (American University in Cairo Press, 2002).

extent that we can talk of a breakdown of consensus between state and society. According to sociological surveys,<sup>6</sup> the population at large, and particularly young people, are very dissatisfied with their lives: they scarcely identify with the prevailing political discourse, and feel alienated from their rulers. Consequently, in their search for a new value system to represent them, many people have turned towards a discourse that asserts 'what is theirs' and validates their indigenous cultural experience. An entire discourse around the notion of 'Muslim identity' has therefore become popular. However, this dynamic should not be understood as reflecting a desire to return to the past and stagnate there, but rather as a re-adaptation and new interpretation of Islamic identity that seeks to achieve renewal, development and independence. In relation to the question of modernisation and democratisation, Arab-Muslim societies need to overcome the all-too-common perception among their peoples that development and modernity emerge from the experience of the Western 'Other' and so are in some way tainted. Thus, the concept of cultural authenticity is a significant mark of credibility for a large section of these societies, divided between appreciating what is 'indigenous' and denying what is 'imported.' So, the new generation of reformist Islamism does not exclude seeking a reconciliation between modern values and Islamic legitimacy; it is a political player that seeks to actively participate in the drive towards democratic reform, as will be shown later in this chapter.

Another factor that distanced rulers from the ruled in the North African and Middle East region, a consequence of the crisis situation, was the growing trend towards regional fragmentation and division blocking prospects for creating structures for cooperation and integration on political, economic and security matters among countries of the area. Furthermore, while there was a marked tendency worldwide to engage in initiatives aimed at improving regionalism (e.g. by the EU, Mercosur, NAFTA) these countries were able neither to strengthen existing multilateral structures at the regional and sub-regional level, or to set up new ones aimed at jointly confronting the new challenges and opportunities presented by globalisation.<sup>7</sup> The lack of economic compatibility and the deep political differences between the respective states have important repercussions. It means the states have difficulty in acting as a regional whole, and exerting influence in the international community to uphold 'Arab causes' – such as, for example, achieving a just solution for the Palestinians, or preventing the invasion of Iraq – which also means that they lose legitimacy and credibility in their own societies.

However, there are other reasons for the failure to build common structures of integration and cooperation, such as the role played by the US in the last decade, especially regarding security matters. Since the Gulf War, Arab countries have been more divided than ever, while the US's hegemonic position in the region has never been more guaranteed by the military and economic dependence of most countries of the region on the superpower. The American view and policy on security and stability in the Middle East have up to now succeeded in blocking any movement towards forming multilateral institutions

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6. See: Mona Bennani-Chraïbi (ed.), *Resistencia y protesta en las sociedades musulmanas* (Barcelona : Ed. Bellaterra, 2003); Mekki Bentahar, *La jeunesse arabe à la recherche de son identité* (Rabat: Al Kalam, undated) ; Gema Martín Muñoz, 'Generational Change, Identity and Democratic Crises in the Middle East', in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Alienation or Integration of Arab Youth* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000).

7. Yazid Sayigh, 'Globalization Manqué. Regional Fragmentation and Authoritarian-Liberalism in the Middle East', in Louise Fawcett and Yazid Sayigh (eds.), *The Third World beyond the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

that could disadvantage their allies and provide strategic or commercial benefits to real or potential rivals. Will the new Obama administration rethink this strategic view of the Middle East?

### Democratic reform and Islamist parties

All this leads us to focus on two important questions. First, the need to build a credible political process that satisfies the strong aspirations towards democracy and rule of law among the peoples of the Middle East, bearing in mind that their sense of frustration in this regard carries enormous risks of radicalisation and identification with extremist movements – especially among large numbers of young people. And secondly, the dilemma posed by the issue of the participation of Islamist parties in these democratisation processes.

The debate about including and accepting Islamic political movements in the necessary process of reform has been broadening, and is today a key question in international analyses and discussion forums. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the open letter<sup>8</sup> sent to President Barack Obama in March 2009 by a group of more than a hundred experts and scholars from the United States and the Muslim world, urging him to make support for democracy in the Middle East a top priority. The letter, convened by the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy<sup>9</sup> and the Project on Middle East Democracy,<sup>10</sup> drew significant media and public attention, including an editorial in the *Washington Post*.<sup>11</sup>

As Shadi Hamid explained in an article in *OpenDemocracy*, the basic message of the letter was that 'the region is ready – and has long been ready – for substantive democratic change, and that a diverse coalition of Middle Eastern actors (including moderate Islamists, liberals and leftists) hopes that the American president will not forget their struggle against autocracy.'<sup>12</sup> And on the question of political actors in the democratic process, it said: 'For too long, American policy in the Middle East has been paralysed by fear of Islamist parties coming to power ... we want democracy but fear its outcomes. There is a tendency among policy-makers to see Islamists as violent or otherwise threatening. In reality, the vast majority of Islamist groups fulfil two important conditions: non-violence and a commitment to the democratic process. They represent the largest opposition forces throughout the region. If democracy will ever come to be in the Arab world, Islamist groups will figure prominently in that future. To put it more simply, there cannot be democracy in the Arab World without Islamists.'

It is perhaps useful here to clarify some points about the Islamist movement, both with regard to how it is perceived, and its trajectory and possible socio-political role. We are

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8. See: [www.csidonline.org/resources/news/131-petitions/473-open-letter-march-10-2009](http://www.csidonline.org/resources/news/131-petitions/473-open-letter-march-10-2009).

9. See: [www.csidonline.org](http://www.csidonline.org).

10. See: <http://pomed.org>.

11. 'Democracy's appeal: Will President Obama listen to liberal activists in the Muslim World?', *The Washington Post*, 14 March 2009.

12. Shadi Hamid, director of the Project on Middle East Democracy and a Hewlett Fellow at Stanford University's Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law, in *OpenDemocracy*, 6 March 2009.

dealing with a political current of thought present throughout the contemporary history of the Middle East, represented mostly by reformist parties explicitly opposed to violence. Nonetheless, and for a number of reasons that it would take too long to explain in this chapter, the predominant contemporary view of Islamism as a whole is based on the media's selective and exaggerated focus on either fanatical fundamentalists or the most radical and extremist sectors. Reformist tendencies occupying the middle ground have usually remained eclipsed by fundamentalists and the people of violence.

This reformist, or 'moderate', Islamism represents the emergence of a new political generation that has also experienced the modernisation process that is already well-advanced in many Arab countries. It is therefore linked to social and political changes that Muslim societies are currently undergoing. Increased Islamic assertiveness in the public sphere shows three interdependent features considered by social science researchers to be strongly associated with the emergence of modern societies: (i) increasing autonomy of the individual, (ii) individualisation of social actors and (iii) increased participation of women in public life. Therefore, for the most part, these Islamic reformists do not identify with the ahistoricist viewpoints espoused by traditional Islamists, in which Islam is perceived as a timeless and immutable system. Islam expects to be acknowledged by the West and treated with respect, but it does not set itself against the West. It does, however, question the fact that the distinctiveness of the West's cultural world view has been arbitrarily elevated into an absolute universal reference. Criticisms are levelled at the West's political actions, which sometimes reveal double standards – as for example when Western powers demand democratic reform but do not accept its results when those elected to power are not the ones they want. This happened in the Palestinian case with Hamas, with the result that the image of the West has been considerably tarnished among the citizens of this region.

With regard to political action, it can be said that a third Islamist generation has now emerged, which has evolved within the territorial framework of the nation-state (in contrast to Pan-Islamism). This new generation has shown a certain degree of political maturity, which has pushed it towards the culture of consensus with other socio-political projects distinct from Islamism within the framework of political pluralism, of elections and government. Acceptance of a multi-party system and power-sharing, and strengthened participation in state institutions demonstrate an adaptation to pluralism and to democratic principles. This is confirmed by the parliamentary participation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Jordan, Hezbollah in Lebanon and more recently of the Justice and Development Party (PJD) in Morocco, and is clearly established in the case of Turkey where an Islamist government is carrying out extensive democratic reform. Meanwhile, governments that favour the exclusion of Islamist parties are typically among the most autocratic and repressive regimes in the Middle East.<sup>13</sup>

These Islamist parties command a significant body of popular support, to the extent that their non-inclusion in the democratic process would present a profound credibility problem for the regime in power. Similarly, we should recognise that marginalising Islamist re-

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13. Gema Martín Muñoz, op. cit. in note 3; James Piscatori, *Islam, Islamists, and the Electoral Principle in the Middle East*. ISIM Papers, no. 1, 2000; Najib Ghadbian, *Democratization and the Islamist Challenge in the Arab World* (Boulder, CA: Westview Press, 1997); Maher al-Charif & Salam Kawakibi (eds.), *Le courant réformiste musulman et sa réception dans les sociétés arabes* (Damascus: IFPO, 2003); Ahmad S. Mousalli, *US Foreign Policy and Islamist Politics* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008).

formists would favour extremists. At moments of high tension and risks, like the present, reformists could perform a moderating intermediary role in turbulent societies vulnerable to radicalisation, whose disaffected populations are fed up with the authoritarianism and socio-economic marginalisation to which they are subjected. Their role as social stabilisers and as delegitimisers of extremist alternatives is therefore a factor to be valued.

### Which comes first: economic development or democracy?

A view has often prevailed that the first step to be taken in order to create the necessary structural changes that will enable democracy to emerge must be that of economic reform. However, this has been increasingly countered by an alternative view that holds that this so-called 'virtuous circle' will not produce the hoped-for results, and that ultimately political reform and democratisation are the motor that drives change and economic development.

Authoritarianism has engendered clientelist behaviour, systems of patronage and networks of corruption. For this reason, economic liberalisation processes tend to be imperfect and incomplete. Liberalisation in the strict sense of the word, which would mean the independence of economic actors from politicians, the rule of competition, transparency, and the suppression of monopolistic practices, is obstructed because traditional elites seek to protect themselves from transparency and from the emergence of new autonomous elites that could challenge them politically.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, there has been resistance to introducing the necessary juridical changes (the World Bank has stated ceaselessly since the 1990s, but with little success, that fiscal reform and transparency are crucial for market liberalisation to take root in the region). So efforts are made to maintain the economic role of the state, while increasing the private sector, which leads to a worrying bifurcation of economic policies,<sup>15</sup> because the private sector forms a parasitical relationship with the public sector, or privatisation is limited to selective, less productive, economic sectors (e.g. trade, construction, clothing). This way, the state preserves its power and autonomy while selectively offloading economic decision-making to a protected market. As a result, although some macroeconomic indicators may have improved, the benefits have not been distributed among the general population.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, the interplay between population growth, political authoritarianism and the unequal distribution of wealth is producing a vicious circle of political alienation and economic marginality that progressively fuels support for resistance movements, including violent ones. Because of this potentially unstable situation, the region attracts very little foreign investment (only 5 percent of European investment in emerging countries goes to southern Mediterranean countries as a whole, and only 1.5 percent of world investment enters emerging countries). This reflects the mistrust felt by potential foreign inves-

14. Béatrice Hibou and Luis Martinez, *Le partenariat Euro-Maghrébin: un mariage blanc?* Les Etudes du CERI, n° 47, novembre 1998.

15. Eberhard Kienle (ed.), *Politics from Above, Politics from Below. The Middle East in the Age of Economic Reform* (London: Saqi Books, 2003).

16. Clement M. Henry and Robert Springborg, *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

tors about a region they regard as blighted by political instability and poor governance, not to mention poverty and illiteracy, and where political methods of managing tensions have tended to be superseded by military methods.

## The attitude of Europe and the US to political reform in the Arab and Muslim world

The European Union, at least since the inauguration of the Barcelona Process in 1995 (the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement) has adopted the view that advances in democratisation and respect for human rights are an important factor in establishing an area of peace and stability in the Mediterranean region. The region has great strategic value for Europeans for four basic reasons: (i) emigration; (ii) energy dependence (half of Europe's imports come from the region); (iii) the economy (the EU is the biggest trade partner of all countries in the region, except for Jordan) and (iv) security, with particular emphasis on counter-terrorism.

However, neither the EU nor the US has translated its discourse in favour of promoting democracy into concrete actions. Europe has in general kept a low profile in approaching the question, favouring the view that the economic dimension comes first. Similarly, Middle East Development Association (MEDA) funds have been used mainly for government programmes and only 1 percent has been devoted to political reform. Relations with Arab NGOs receive low priority, with MEDA funds mostly devoted to explicitly secular, pro-Western or non-political movements. And the specific MEDA democracy programme was axed in 2001.<sup>17</sup>

In reality, the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement's lack of effectiveness in promoting political reform derives from various factors. Short-term stability and preservation of the *status quo* have prevailed, focusing on the promotion of relations between governments, while avoiding potential instability or the conjunctural uncertainty that change would involve. In this regard, moreover, southern European countries do not share the same interests as those in the north. The former, for reasons of proximity, always preferred not to confront risks or uncertainties, while the latter, because of their distance from the turbulent arena of the Middle East, could afford to be more intransigent about partner countries strictly implementing the wording of the accords about human rights and democratisation. In other words, the EU has difficulties in acting jointly or in consensus on the question of political reform. Consequently, there has been considerable resistance to using conditionality: clauses in the free trade accords that require a commitment to respect for human rights as a condition for their implementation have been sidestepped.

Since March 2003 the EU's new Neighbourhood Policy, whose latest version was approved in June 2004, has provided a new framework for relations with countries bordering the

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17. A detailed description of all the European initiatives and their results can be found in Mona Yacoubian, *Promoting Middle East Democracy. European Initiatives*. Special Report. United States Institute of Peace, October 2004.

EU. Europe seeks to establish a preferential relationship with those who share the same democratic values, respect for human rights and rule of law, by offering in exchange entry to its internal market and, ultimately, access to the same products, services and capital as EU members.

This new perspective undoubtedly enhances the prospects of a serious plan of action being undertaken in promoting democracy and human rights. But there is no guarantee that these objectives will be achieved if the EU, and its individual Member States, do not demonstrate sustained commitment to use conditionality as an instrument for reform, and if they do not renounce the maintenance of the *status quo* at all cost.

With regard to the 'Islamist dilemma', the issue has become increasingly prominent in international diplomacy as politicians reflect on how best to go about promoting democracy in North African and Middle Eastern countries. At an informal meeting in Luxembourg on 16 April 2004, EU foreign ministers presented for the first time a discussion paper, drawn up jointly by Javier Solana, the then High Representative for CFSP, and the team from Luxembourg's European presidency, which posed the question whether the time had come to open up dialogue with moderate Islamist opposition groups so as to encourage a transition to democracy in the Middle East. It stated: 'in the past the EU has preferred to deal with the secular intelligentsia of Arab civil society at the expense of more representative Islam-inspired organisations', and went on to ask: 'has the moment come for the EU to become more involved with the Islamic-based civil society in those countries?'<sup>18</sup> The question has undoubtedly assumed a new importance in the debate but has not given rise to a coherent response at any practical level.

It should be said that the question of entering into direct dialogue with Islamists has generated greater consensus among analysts than among European politicians.<sup>19</sup> In government circles, the matter is considered but not fully taken on board. Kristina Kausch analyses the state of play with regard to this issue within European politics in a recently published working paper,<sup>20</sup> and confirms that although 'engaging with and strengthening non-violent, non-revolutionary Islamist actors in order to prevent radicalisation has become a common notion in European policy discourse<sup>21</sup> (...) engagement has been undertaken by EU Member States mostly on a decidedly informal, bilateral, low-key and ad-hoc basis.' The fear of the 'unpopularity' of such a policy due to negative perceptions in public opinion about dealing with Islamism, and the fear of the complications that this could imply for Middle East governments, the lack of clear political objectives that might result from such dialogue, and strong ideological convictions among some against Islamism, are just some reasons for doubts and objections that have been raised on the matter. To which we could add that the inclusion of Hamas in the list of terrorist movements "poisoned" the general EU debate on engagement with other Islamist actors.<sup>22</sup>

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18. Discussion Paper drafted by Javier Solana and EU Foreign Ministers, Luxembourg, April 2004.

19. Amr Hamzawy, 'The Key to Arab Reform: Moderate Islamists', Carnegie Policy Brief no. 40, 2005; Muriel Asseburg (ed.) 'Moderate Islamists as Reform Actors. Conditions and Programmatic Change', SWP Research Paper no. 4, 2007.

20. Kristina Kausch, 'Plus ça change: Europe's engagement with moderate islamists', FRIDE, Working Paper no. 75, 2009.

21. The Resolution of the European Parliament of 10 May 2007 on reforms in the Arab World raises the question clearly.

22. Kausch, op. cit. in note 20, p. 5.

However, it should be pointed out that those Islamist parties considered as moderate have shown increasing interest in communicating with European actors and indeed Western actors in general. In so doing they seek to differentiate themselves from violent and extremist groups, and to exert the political influence that the broad popular support that they enjoy should grant them.

With regard to the US, at the G-8 summit of 9 June 2009, Washington launched the 'Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa' initiative. The proposal had been revised following reactions to leaks of the first draft in which the American initiative was presented as a unilateral act, and thus seen as an imposition liable to irritate Arab states and that marginalised any cooperation with Europe. A new version stressed the importance of dialogue, consultation and multi-lateral cooperation.<sup>23</sup> However, the initiative contains important gaps. Both the US and Europe asserted that promoting democracy was a crucial factor for their security and for stability in the region, but did not elaborate a clear strategy of implementation. The implementation of reform was thus made contingent on the readiness of governments to promote change. Given the voluntary nature of the proposed reform plan, it remained unclear how governments were to be motivated to implement such reform.

Public presentation of the American proposal undoubtedly had the positive effect of opening up the debate. There were discussions about democratisation in member countries, and numerous declarations and opinions on the need for reform were voiced in the public arena, among both government and non-government bodies, as well as in the media. Various political parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood, published papers or formed platforms presenting aspects they considered essential in the reform of their respective states. Similarly, even though Arab states, and more particularly Egypt and Saudi Arabia, reacted against the plan, describing it initially as the imposition of Western views and values, at the summit of the League of Arab States on 22 and 23 May 2004, they raised the question and accepted the principle of reform, although they chose to interpret the idea of a 'home-grown democracy' in a way that suited their own purposes. In other words, ruling elites did not reject the principle of reform, if it were applied in a limited, gradual and controllable way. On the other hand, the US initiative established three priorities for action: to foster democracy and good governance, to build a knowledge economy, and to expand economic improvements, paying particular attention to microcredits.<sup>24</sup> The initiative was presented as pioneering and innovative, even though all the elements (promoting women's rights, literacy, legal assistance, civil society, educational reform, reform of the financial sector) had already existed long before in USAID programmes in the region, without entailing real promotion of democracy and the rule of law.

The monolithic view of the Arab and Muslim world that the initiative presented had problematic implications. It was based on a common template for an immense region, extending from Morocco to Pakistan, whereas the diversity of internal situations, and hence different initiatives to adopt according to individual cases, should have been a substantial ingredient. In reality, although it sought to present itself as a response to the 'clash of

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23. Völker Perthes, 'America's Greater Middle East and Europe', *Middle East Policy*, vol. XI, no. 3, 2004, pp. 85-97.

24. It was inspired by the results of the *UN Arab Human Development Report* of 2002 and 2003.



civilisations' it carried with it a sort of 'positive Huntingtonism', which – as Huntington did – interpreted the Islamic world as a closed and monolithic bloc, and Islam as a totalitarian belief system that treated all variants as one. It failed to consider that the promotion of democracy needs to take account of national realities and cannot afford to ignore distinctive internal factors.

In reality, the initiative sought to respond to an enormous challenge, that of growing anti-American feeling in the Arab and Islamic region, and to compensate for the spiral of insecurity and anarchy that had resulted from the military occupation of Iraq. In other words, the initiative's importance lay more in its symbolism than its content. Now the US has entered a new presidential era. Barack Obama told the Saudi channel Al-Arabiya in his first interview as president that 'ultimately, people are going to judge me not by my words but by my deeds.'<sup>25</sup> Closing Guantánamo, appointing an experienced envoy to the Middle East and Afghanistan, opening channels of communication with Iran and Syria, and addressing the Muslim world directly in terms of respect and mutual interest were first steps that obviously marked a great distance from the preceding administration, and aroused a certain degree of optimism. This raised expectations in the Arab and Islamic world in the first few months of the new administration. But, given the damage wrought by Obama's predecessor to America's international reputation and the acute crisis in the area, expectations could be so high that disillusionment could set in if no conclusive first steps become evident. And even if the White House's main preoccupation seems to be trying to find a solution to the Afghan and Pakistani (Af-Pak) situation, the real test is in the crucible of the Middle East conflict.

The Obama administration has defined its policies clearly in the case of Afghanistan, with a new plan of action that does not seem to exclude some form of negotiation with sections of the Taliban. It has clearly acknowledged how ineffective Hamid Karzai has been against corruption and in promoting good governance. And it is relatively clear about Iraq, announcing a wish to withdraw – albeit without defining exact dates or numbers of troops. With regard to the Middle East, the opening towards Syria and signals towards Iran (both symbolic, such as Obama's good wishes for the Iranian new year in March 2009, and political, like the invitation to Iran to participate in the summit on Afghanistan) are not however matched by equally strong overtures with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – even if the appointment of George Mitchell as special envoy sent out a positive signal. It is thus difficult to make an initial evaluation on the possible scope for change. However, there are a number of important current circumstances to bear in mind.

Negotiations between Syria and Israel, internal reconciliation in Palestine, and support for the peace initiative proposed by Saudi Arabia in 2002, which the Arab summit in Riyadh in 2007 approved as the Arab Peace Initiative, are the three strands of a process that must necessarily run in parallel with the momentum of regional negotiations with Syria and Iran. This scenario must be seen as a whole, and the strategy must be global. To separate or favour one of these dynamics over the rest would be unlikely to produce significant results. And the role of the US is crucial, not only because of its longstanding world political supremacy, but also because traditional parties to the conflict are particularly exhausted and

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25. President Barack Obama, Interview with Al-Arabiya television, 26 January 2009.

fragmented (on the Arab side) or unwilling to assume voluntarily a process of definitive negotiation (on the Israeli side).

The Arab world has leaderships that are experienced but not strong; Arab coordination often suffers from fragmentation. At times, Saudi Arabia undoubtedly takes the lead (e.g. the peace initiative, the ephemeral agreement to establish a Palestinian unity government in February 2007). Egypt tries for its part to maintain its traditional influence in the region, and in 2009 assumed the role of mediator between Israel and Hamas over the proposed release of the Israeli sergeant Gilad Shalit in exchange for freeing Palestinian prisoners; and between Hamas and Mahmoud Abbas's Palestine Authority to reach a reconciliation agreement. Despite Egyptian efforts, and particularly those of the intelligence chief Omar Suleiman, no definitive deal seems to have been reached. Qatar, despite its small geographical size, has been taking initiatives and is emerging as a new regional player. In May 2008, Qatar was the mediator that brokered an agreement between Lebanese parties that extricated Lebanon from a potentially alarming constitutional and political crisis. And on 15 and 16 January 2009, Qatar convened an emergency summit devoted to the critical situation in Gaza caused by Israeli bombardments. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Mahmoud Abbas declined the invitation, but the Hamas representative Khaled Mashal accepted, and the Iranian president attended as an observer. Days later, on 19 and 20 January, Kuwait hosted a previously arranged Arab summit on economic development, which all Arab representatives attended. On this occasion the Saudi Arabian king played a central role, trying to smooth over divisions with a speech that – far from reproaching Qatar for its earlier initiative – stressed the need to reach a new Arab solidarity and coordination. However, Egypt did not seem to be very comfortable with Qatar taking on a high profile as part of these initiatives.

Israel for its part, which has always exploited ambiguity and contradictions in its discourse while pursuing a *fait accompli* policy on the ground, has since March 2009 been ruled by a new far-right government which has neither the incentive nor the desire to create a worthwhile and viable Palestine state.

Another important factor to bear in mind is the existence of new political players in the region, who are fast gaining ground on the traditional ones. Both Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon enjoy strong popular support in their respective constituencies, and the exclusively military response, or attempts to isolate them politically, do not seem to have succeeded in weakening them. The Arab world is itself increasingly divided on how to act towards them.

Turkey, for its part, is showing great capacity to be what we might call 'a new mediator' and could fulfil a key role as interlocutor between all parties to resolve the Middle East conflict. An indispensable mediator between Israel and Syria, Turkey is respected in Iran and, as the Gaza crisis demonstrated, can act as an effective mediator between Hamas and the international community, and interlocutor between Arabs and Palestinians (it should not be forgotten that it attended both the Qatar summit and the summit in Kuwait). At the end of March, President Gül made the first visit of a Turkish head of state to Iraq in 33 years; and President Obama, on his first visit to this side of the Atlantic, made a bilateral visit to Turkey on 6 and 7 April 2009.

## What changes should be recommended?

There is general consensus in considering that problems, tensions and conflicts are accumulating in the North African and Middle East region. People are highly politicised, and are demanding more freedom and respect for the rule of law. There is a clear need to give political answers to what is happening in this part of the world, including with regard to the fight against terrorism. And democratisation is an essential factor in resolving this critical situation. Of course, democracy cannot be imposed, but its gradual emergence can be favoured. That is why certain parameters applied up to now must be modified, and all efforts to promote democracy in the region require strong cooperation between Europe and the US.

The traditional idea that democratisation will inevitably result from economic liberalisation should be abandoned, and it should be accepted that to continue upholding the regional *status quo* only yields short-term benefits or serves the interests of particular groups. A new approach based on long-term results should be applied, bearing in mind that reform and development cannot be implemented globally, but can only be achieved by taking account of specific national circumstances and characteristics. In this regard, greater impetus should be given to applying positive conditionality as an instrument to encourage reforms and democratic progress. Stronger political will, determination and engagement is needed to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially in view of its repercussions in relation to other regional factors like militarisation, authoritarianism and radicalisation – and bearing in mind that the credibility both of the US and Europe depends on brokering a just solution to the conflict.

Similarly, it is of paramount importance that policies for fighting terrorism and promoting democracy should be coordinated and harmonised, within the framework of scrupulous respect for the rule of law. We should be aware that contradictory messages have been sent out in this context. Cooperation with governments in the region on security and intelligence in the fight against terrorism is to be applauded. But violations of human rights and increased repression have often occurred in the name of this fight against terrorism, even while the need to democratise the region is proclaimed and upheld. So, a policy to promote democracy must respond to the crucial question of how to develop civil society, freedoms and the rule of law, while simultaneously protecting society from violent extremism. In this regard, respect for human rights must be considered non-negotiable. Neither Europe nor the US can demand that governments be democratic if they use or support authoritarian methods to achieve their own aims. Nor can they expect the rule of law to develop if they seek to eradicate violence by consenting to abuses and arbitrary acts of repression.

Clearly, we need to confront the 'Islamist dilemma.' Reform is considered, rightly, a powerful antidote against extremism, but the role that moderate Islamists can play in this regard has not been sufficiently considered. Any credible reformist process must be inclusive, and its positive development requires a fresh approach that produces timely and effective results.

## Annexes

### About the authors

**Amr Elshobaki** est docteur en sciences politiques de l'université Paris 1 Sorbonne. Il est le directeur du Département des études arabes-européennes du Centre Al-Ahram pour les études politiques et stratégiques (Le Caire). Il est l'auteur de nombreuses publications sur les systèmes politiques arabes et les mouvements islamiques. Parmi ses ouvrages récents, on peut citer *Les frères Musulmans des origines à nos jours* (2009), *The crisis of Egyptian political parties: the experience of the Al-Amal party* (2005) et *Islamists and Democrats: The problems of building a democratic Islamic movement* (2004).

**Bassma Kodmani** is currently the Executive Director of the Arab Reform Initiative, a consortium of Arab policy research institutes with partners in Europe and the US working collaboratively on reforms and democratic transition in the Arab world. She is also Director of the academic programme at the Académie Diplomatique Internationale in Paris. Prior to that, she was associate research fellow at the Centre d'études et de recherche internationales (CERI) at Sciences-Po, Paris; senior adviser on international cooperation to the French national research council (CNRS) and visiting fellow at the Collège de France. Her latest book *Abattre les murs* (Breaking Walls) was published in France in February 2008.

**Gema Martín Muñoz** is Director of Casa Arabe and the International Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies in Madrid. She has a Ph.D in Arabic and Islamic Studies and carried out her postgraduate studies in Cairo University (Egypt) for three years. She has made numerous research trips to Algeria, Morocco, Tunis, Jordan, Iran, Israel and the Palestinian Territories. She has been visiting professor at Harvard University, Roma Tre University, Colegio de Mejico, La Habana University, and the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) of Teheran. Her research interests include the sociopolitical situations in Middle Eastern countries, Islamist movements and the situation of Muslims in Europe.

## Abbreviations

CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MEDA	Middle East Development Association
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PJD	Justice and Development Party
UN	United Nations













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This fifth paper focuses on the way Europe approaches the issue of Islamic political movements in the Middle East and North Africa. The key message that emerges from the report is that it is time for Europe to engage with political Islam in this region. Both authors of the main chapters in this report – one from the Arab world and the other from Europe – eloquently make the argument that there is no prospect of a credible democratic transformation of the Arab world without the full integration of Islamist movements into the political mainstream.

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European Institute of the Mediterranean  
Girona 20  
08010 Barcelona  
Spain  
phone: + 34 93 244 98 50  
fax: + 34 93 247 01 65  
e-mail: [info@iemed.org](mailto:info@iemed.org)  
[www.iemed.org](http://www.iemed.org)

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EU Institute for Security Studies  
43 avenue du Président Wilson  
75775 Paris cedex 16 – France  
phone: + 33 (0) 1 56 89 19 30  
fax: + 33 (0) 1 56 89 19 31  
e-mail: [info@iss.europa.eu](mailto:info@iss.europa.eu)  
[www.iss.europa.eu](http://www.iss.europa.eu)