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# EU's intervention in the Middle East not addressing core problems of the region – study

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The European Union's intervention in democracy building in the Middle East has not really addressed the lack of basic rights and needs in that region, according to research at the University of Birmingham.

Michelle Pace presented 'Democracy Promotion in the Context of An Occupied Nation? The Case of Palestine' at a conference on Europe and Progressive Islamist Movements: Perceptions of Democratisation in the Middle East, held at the European Research Institute, University of Birmingham.

The research paper was based on extensive fieldwork carried out by Michelle, in Palestine, among various academics, representatives of NGOs, political party activists, parliamentarians and journalists.

Her findings reveal that since the 2006 elections in Palestine, the European Union (EU) had lost the credibility and legitimacy that it had built in the region up to then.

Although some people still welcome some engagement by the EU in democracy building, most actors in Palestine reflect increasing mistrust in the EU's real intentions in the Middle East.

According to the research, some Palestinian NGO representatives, in particular, are perceived as either pursuing the US and the EU's agendas or are using the funding to retain their own power positions in their respective societies and thus for their self enrichment.

"After the negative legacy of the Bush administration in the Middle East, the EU is once again left with a golden opportunity to have an impact, by listening more to the people on the ground in Palestine and the Middle East more generally," Dr. Michelle Pace revealed.

She therefore proposed that EU actors should move away from conforming to liberal democracy models and get their priorities right.

The EU, according to Dr. Pace, must be consistent in its rhetorical pressure on Middle East governments when violations of democratic principles and human rights occur.

She also stressed that a radical democratic project was very much needed in Europe itself.

"If we take democracy as a process rather than as a procedure, then we can more easily accept the practices, contestations as well as the struggles and claims being made by people across European as well as Middle Eastern societies," Dr. Michelle Pace stated.

Her research was funded by the British Academy and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

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**Notes to Editor**

• Dr Michelle Pace, trained as an International Relations specialist and as a European-Middle East/Mediterraneanist. She is a Senior Research Fellow and Research Councils United Kingdom (RCUK) fellow at the Political Science and International Studies department at the University of Birmingham.

• In 2002, Michelle worked in Morocco on a MedaDemocracy EU-funded project. From 2003, she was research fellow on a Framework Programme V project on The EU and Border Conflict Transformation (EUBorderConf) at the University of Birmingham. Her research mainly focused on the EU's role in five cases of border conflicts namely, Israel/Palestine; Cyprus, Turkey/Greece, Northern Ireland and Pskov, Karelia and Kaliningrad.

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