Democracy Promotion and Human Rights in Europe and the Middle East

Birmingham and Leeds Universities Joint Workshop and ESRC Research Group on the EU and Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: Fourth Research Meeting

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REPORT ON THE PROCEEDINGS

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The workshop’s rationale was to bring together two separate but overlapping research projects and networks. These are Michelle Pace’s (University of Birmingham) research in the field of EU Democracy Promotion in the Middle East and Jason Ralph’s (University of Leeds) work on human rights and the war on terror during and after the Bush administration.

Dr. Jason Ralph opened the workshop by welcoming everybody to the University of Leeds. He pointed out that the idea of the workshop is to discuss democracy promotion and human rights in Europe and the Middle East and it consists of three panels, two held in the morning and one in the afternoon. He also thanked the sponsors of the workshop – UACES (www.uaces.org), Taylor and Francis and Leeds’ POLIS (Politics and International Studies) for their financial assistance; Michelle Pace for putting together the Workshop programme; and Sally Howarth for her help with travel arrangements for participants.

Prof. Clive Jones, Head of School, POLIS, University of Leeds, chaired the first panel and started by introducing the speakers. Dr. Charlie Dannreuther, Lecturer in
European Studies, POLIS, University of Leeds, presented the first paper entitled “Between Foreign Policy and Good Governance – Evaluating EU Economic Rights Promotion in Bosnia and Turkey”. He discussed some of the challenges of foreign policy evaluation from a practitioner’s perspective drawing on his own experiences in Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The focus of his paper was on three main issues that help evaluate the outcomes of each programme: the project awards’ framework in the production of expectations; the matching of capacities with project aspirations and the relevance of standard management norms in practical contexts. In conclusion, the paper explored the role of EU member states’ foreign policy interventions in relation to EU goals, the ability of evaluative mechanisms to read and nuance the importance of local contexts in foreign policy implementation and the importance of practical foreign policy evaluation in the literature on “foreign policy evaluation”. Dr. Neil Winn, Senior Lecturer in European Studies, POLIS, University of Leeds, presented the second paper entitled “Towards a “European” Route to Democratization in Europe’s Near Abroad? The Impact of EU, OSCE and NATO Democracy Promotion in Europe’s Periphery”. Using illustrative cases from the former Soviet Union Countries and North Africa, the paper analyzed the role and impact of the EU, the OSCE and NATO in promoting democracy, human rights and good governance in Europe’s Near Abroad. The main argument of the paper was that regional international organizations engaged in democracy promotion often vie for policy space at the detriment of effective international cooperation and that this attenuates the impact of European democracy promotion programmes.

These presentations led to a lively discussion. Dr. Michelle Pace pointed out that a common theme running across both papers is that they idealize civil society, which she emphasized is a Western notion. She also underlined that both papers show that there is no change on the ground in the EU’s neighbourhood. In this light she posed questions to both speakers. She drew Dr. Neil Winn’s attention to the voices from what she termed the political societies, rather than civil societies, in the region that struggle to achieve real change. She also posed a series of questions to Dr. Charlie Dannreuther: how in practice did his project measure if there was an impact on the rights of people on the ground? how did the investigator communicate with the local people? was there any reflexivity on the part of the people conducting the research? was there any sharing of experiences between
the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the EU, which would imply exchanges between EU member States and the Union? Also, Michelle shared her view that the “business bus” used in the research on Bosnia sounded like a patronizing act on the part of the FCO. She also questioned Neil Winn whether his research found any coordination between the international organizations on the ground. Michelle further pointed out that EU actors often define interests as values and underlined the discrepancy between ambitions and capacities in the EU. She agreed with the presenter that the overriding intention is not democracy but security. Also, Michelle asked both speakers if they agree that the international organizations, acting on the ground in these cases, desire to be seen to be doing something. Dr. Thomas Demmelhuber (University of Erlangen-Nuremberg) posed a second series of questions. He agreed with Neil Winn that it is important to look at the state of power in the partner country but in distinction to Neil Winn’s position Thomas argued that in the Middle East there are many forces that want democracy in the region. He gave examples with the 2004 and 2006 elections in Iraq. Thus, for him there is a trend within the region that promotes liberalization.

Dr. Charlie Dannreuther agreed with the points made but pointed out that although one can have discussions in academia on these issues, when one wants to do something on the ground, things are rather different. On the question of how much his project has dealt with real people versus the elites he said that in Turkey it was all about dealing with the elite. He underlined that the FCO liked that: Later on he tried to start a project that was aiming to liaise with the Turkish Trade Unions. According to Charlie, such an approach is driven by the evaluation methods of the project, an issue he also highlighted in his paper. On the point of the “business bus”, he said that this idea was in fact put forward by a local NGO called Populas. In regard to his experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina he said that there was a limited amount of money for this project due to the Iraq war. Nevertheless, the project tried to find ways of incorporating local NGOs so that they are effective for their own society and also tried to promote a bottom-up approach, which in Bosnia and Herzegovina is proving very difficult to achieve. The project further tried to encourage such a development by making the NGOs more dependent on the local markets.
Dr. Neil Winn agreed that he might have taken a Western approach but he pointed that the societies the three international organizations want to engage with are not “Western”. Despite all the ‘Othering’ these societies want to be seen as democratic. His next step in the research will be to take some time to familiarize himself better with these regions. Regarding coordination between the three organizations, he said that currently there is a duplication of work, therefore, more can be achieved in this direction. He agreed with Michelle’s points about interests equating with values and the gap between capacities and ambitions. In conclusion, he again emphasized that the order of priorities of the three international organizations is security, economic interests and values. Dr. Winn agreed with points made by Thomas and asked him for more information on the Iraq elections which could be discussed after the first panel.

A second round of questions followed. Martin Dunwoodie (FCO) praised the ambition and scope of the two papers but said he would like to see more details in Dr. Winn’s paper. For him, Iraq was not a very suitable example. Instead, he thought North Africa and Central Asia would be better examples. He also suggested to Dr. Winn to look at what has been proposed by previous participants and what the actual reality on the ground is. Martin inquired about conflicts within the EU’s structures and whether conflicts existed within the Copenhagen criteria. Elvira King (Leeds) took the floor next and expressed her disagreement with Dr. Michelle Pace about the FCO’s patronizing project. She said that during the former Yugoslavia period, Western democratic values already existed in Bosnia, which made it easier now for EU or Member States’ projects to implement their political reform ideas. She pointed out that today Bosnians are tired of NGOs. According to Elvira, this is the problem, not with the values. Dr. Charlie Dannreuther’s response to these points was that the press is very pessimistic but in practice there are some impressive things being done – a lot of people want to be self-sufficient and rely on themselves rather than the international community. Thus, for instance, in many places in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are cooperatives.

Dr. Neil Winn, who chaired the proceedings, opened the second panel. Wael Abdelal, Doctoral Candidate at the University of Exeter, presented the first paper which was entitled: “Hamas’ Media: towards a New Political Discourse?” The paper interrogated a series of issues relating to Hamas’s media discourses, such as: is there a
double-discourse of Hamas? one aimed at the Arab and Palestinian people and another at the West and how has Hamas’s discourse responded to the drive by the Obama administration to brokering peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians? The major argument of the paper was that there is a shift in Hamas’s discourse towards a more pragmatic and less ideological stance vis-à-vis the West. Dr. Michelle Pace, Senior Research Fellow and RCUK Fellow at POLSIS, University of Birmingham presented the second paper, entitled: “Liberal or Social Democracy? Aspect Dawning in the EU’s Democracy Promotion Agenda in the Middle East”. Engaging with similar sets of issues as Wael’s paper but from the perspective of the EU’s involvement in the Middle East and North African region, her study questioned how liberal democracy has come to symbolize (for the EU) an ideal, universal set of values ready to be exported anywhere in the world. The paper discussed the implications of such a narrow framing of EU conceptions of liberal democracy using examples from her extensive fieldwork carried out in Egypt and Palestine during 2007 and 2008. In conclusion, Aletta Norval’s notion of Aversive Democracy was suggested as an alternative approach that could help to highlight the need for recognition of crucial aspects of political change stemming from the Middle East. Dr. Jason Ralph, Reader in International Relations at POLIS, University of Leeds, presented the third paper of this panel, entitled: “Drawing Lines around “Europe”. The Practice of Extraordinary Rendition and what It Tells Us about Europe’s Relations with its neighbours”. The paper argued that the practice of extraordinary rendition should not be concerned only with the acts of torture itself but should also take into account the ideological character of the states involved. By focusing on Europe’s geography of extraordinary rendition, the paper argued that lines that separate ‘liberal’ from ‘illiberal’ worlds are consolidated. This works against European governments’ broader objective of democratization. Dr Paul James Cardwell acted as discussant on this panel and asked a series of questions to each paper-giver. To Wael Abdelal, he posed the questions: does Hamas’s discourse about the West make a distinction between the US and the EU? is Russia included in Hamas’s notion of the West? how is the Hamas discourse reflected in Palestine? what has caused the change in the discourse? did this change happen after the 2006 election? To Michelle’s paper Paul said he thought the recommendations part was interesting and pointed out that the paper looks more from the
EU side – outwards. He also flagged out that in the EU citizenship has a very specific meaning and therefore it can be problematic to employ the concept in the Middle Eastern context because it will be tricky to project that externally. He also questioned if the EU can export the idea of civil society if there is not an agreement of its meaning internally within the EU. He commented that he found interesting Michelle’s assertion that the EU should take time to reflect on its policies in the region because it is usually accused of not acting fast and effectively. Paul also inquired whether the EU should rather not deal with economic integration since this is something that it can do. With regards to Jason’s paper he made several comments. Firstly, he pointed out that the reference to ‘Europe’ was about the Council of Europe and the EU but after that the paper actually talked about states. Secondly, that in the title of the paper the reference is to EU neighbours but the paper itself talks largely about the US. He also said that it was a very interesting point that the US wants to protect the EU’s image of a ‘civilized’ entity.

Each of the paper-givers responded to the comments. Regarding Hamas’ discourse to the West, Wael said that traditionally Hamas has adopted a sharper rhetoric in regard to the US than the EU due to the US’s unconditional support to Israel. Furthermore, Hamas uses different discourses for the outside than the one employed in Palestine. Hamas actually wants to find a middle ground between the movement being a Resistance Movement and its new political position. Now they actually want to talk to the West and convince them that they are part of the Palestinian social fabric. On the issue of civil society, Michelle said that while in Europe civil society is about groups mobilizing support for contentious issues, in Egypt for instance this is not happening. Instead, the notion of civil society is based around powerful families. On citizenship and education, she responded that from a Derridarean perspective the EU needs to see how these concepts develop in the particular contexts. On the question of the Middle East, she said that her aim is to see how these issues are reflected in the EU. In response to the points made on his paper, Jason admitted that currently the issues raised by Paul are not entirely clear and that he needs to pin these down. This in fact was flagged out as one of the reasons why he sticks to the US. He clarified that he had used the Council of Europe as an example of cosmopolitan Europe. The European Union, however, takes a normative
position, which the governments of the member states do not always meet in practice. Thus, he concluded that there is probably a normative-positive divide on this matter.

This discussion was followed by a series of questions raised by the audience. Dr John Schwartzmantel (POLIS, Leeds) requested a definition of democracy from Michelle Pace because, according to him, there are different conceptualizations of the term and none of them can fit all the case studies. Furthermore, he thought that the paper did not explain well what was aversive democracy. He also disagreed that what the EU does is mainly a focus on procedural democracy. Ahmed Badawi (SOAS) asked Wael what does Hamas mean by ‘state-building’? He pointed out that the movement keeps going back and forth from ‘state-building’ to ‘self-determination’ in its speakers’ articulations. He also asked how does Hamas’s discourse compare to the shifts in the discourses of other movements in the Arab world, such as the Muslim Brotherhood? Thomas Demmelhuber said that according to him Hamas has three, not two discourses. One addressing the West, one local and one the wider Arab world. Thus, for him a distinction needs to be made between the latter two. He also made a comment to Michelle’s paper that there is a similarity between Hamas, Hezbollah, etc. in that they all talk about citizenship. He also said that for him talking about liberal autocracy in the MENA as a result of the EU’s efforts overestimates the Union’s power.

In response to Ahmed Badawi’s questions, Wael said that regardless of what Hamas means by state-building the fact is that they use it. On the second question he replied that although there are some areas (democracy, human rights) where the discourses of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood are similar, nevertheless, the context and the circumstances are entirely different. In response to Thomas’ point, Wael agreed that there are in fact three levels of the discourse, since Hamas tries to keep a distance from the Arab regimes. In response to John Schwartzmantel’s request in regard to a definition of democracy, Michelle said that in her ESRC project she is in fact investigating how this concept is understood amongst EU actors and how in turn it is then put into practice via the EU’s external relations. In Palestine, for example, she pointed out that although there were free and fair elections in 2006 (declared as such by International, including EU observers), the result was nevertheless disregarded. She clarified that she sees democracy from a Derridarean perspective - that is democracy as a
process to become. Thus, it is a fluid concept. During her interviews in Brussels, she found out that EU actors themselves in fact do not have a fixed definition of democracy. In 2006, as a result of American insistence on engaging with the EU on democracy promotion abroad, there was a brief discussion in Brussels, which did not last very long but has now, more recently been taken up again by the current Swedish Presidency. Despite this lack of a formal definition, she maintained that one can infer what the term democracy means from EU documents. Nevertheless, there is no single definition, which causes problems in policy implementation and which is the reason why she is hesitant to put her own definition because for her it is important to understand what EU actors perceive and think about this concept. In response to Thomas’ comments, Michelle said that during her interview with the Egyptian Ambassador in London, she sensed that the business elite in Egypt have quickly learnt to speak ‘the EU-speak’ in terms of economic liberalisation.

A second round of questions from the audience followed. Charlie Dannreuther asked all the presenters whether they could explicate how the economic dimension affects the EU’s efforts on democracy promotion. To Jason he pointed out that the black-holes of illegality have always been there for the financial markets. Volha Piotukh (Leeds), agreed with Michelle’s position on democracy that it is the interpretation that matters. She also addressed Jason and said that she thinks that a thorough understanding of how torture is being exported is very important. Thus, liberal states, due to their passivity, are complicit in torture practices. Therefore, it is helpful to look at what these practices tell us about the liberal states themselves. Martin criticized Wael’s paper because he found that there are competing topics in it and that at present Wael does not seem to be comparing like with like. Furthermore, he pointed out that Hamas’s political experience has impacted upon its discourse. The panelists responded to these comments and questions. With regards to Charlie’s question, Michelle said that the economic dimension is a selective aspect of the policy of democracy promotion. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) for example has, as one of its aims, the creation of a free trade area in the MENA by 2010 but this is probably not going to be achieved. Jason said that his interests lie in international human rights, which convention is a universally ratified one. He pointed out that the US did not make the argument of why they used torture techniques until very late and when they did
they focused on the intensity of the threat of international terrorism. In response to Charlie, he said that it is a novelty to talk about these black-holes and that in a globalized world they should not exist. Otherwise, this would be reminiscent of colonialism. In response to the point on liberal states being complicit in torture, he said that communitarian liberal states can do what they want to protect their “inside”, while cosmopolitan ones cannot do that. Wael responded to Charlie’s question by explaining that in 2006 the international community (the US and the EU) required Hamas to accept Israel and the PLO and that when Hamas did not satisfy this requirement, the financial help to the Hamas-led Palestinian government was stopped, including developmental help. Hamas, he pointed out, has an economic programme but after June 2006 the movement’s situation has become more difficult because even Palestinian banks do not deal with Hamas. This makes it very difficult for the movement to have enough cash to survive and they probably smuggle money from Iran and/or Qatar. Nevertheless, they are unable to implement development projects due to lack of the necessary materials.

Dr. John Schwartzmantel chaired the third panel and opened it by presenting the paper-givers and their papers. The first paper was co-authored by Dr Hendrik Kraetzschmar, Lecturer in Comparative Politics of the Middle East and North Africa, University of Leeds and Dr Francesco Cavatorta, Lecturer in the School of Law and Government in Dublin City University. It was entitled: “State-sponsored Election Violence in Liberalized Autocracies: Egypt and Morocco”. It put forward several propositions that can help explain the decision-making rationale of authoritarian power-holders to use force against strong electoral challengers and tested these propositions against the recent experiences of Egypt and Morocco. The main argument is that there are three principal factors that influence the regimes’ calculations: the centrality of the elected institution; the availability of alternative tools; and the anticipated response of the international community. Thus, the authors conclude that a more complex set of factors needs to be taken into account for a better understanding the decision to use violence in elections. The second paper was entitled: “EU Democracy Promotion in Turkey: Funding NGOs, funding Conflict?” and was presented by Markus Ketola, a Doctoral Candidate at the Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics. The paper, just like Charlie Dannreuther’s paper, engaged with civil society in Turkey but focused more specifically
on the experience of women’s movements in Turkey in order to explore how EU funding induces democratization in this candidate country. A central finding of the paper is that shifting away from supporting advocacy NGOs in favour of projects that are more aligned with the pre-accession process may not be the best strategy. Instead the EU should continue to fund ‘conflicting arguments’ within the civil society milieu because in so doing it encourages important social debates in Turkey. Dr. Thomas Demmelhuber, Lecturer at the Friedrich-Alexander-University of Erlangen-Nuremberg in Germany, presented the last paper. It was entitled: “Illegal Immigration in the Southern Mediterranean: One more Obstacle for Political Reform?” and also related to Jason Ralph’s paper in that it dealt with aspects of the question of borders. The paper engaged with the externalization of security cooperation in the field of Justice and Home Affairs with the Mediterranean countries in particular and problematized whether this strategy does not deepen the incoherence in the EU’s foreign policy. More specifically, it argued that there was a contradiction between development aid in return for cooperation on migration management and the aims of promoting democracy, the rule of law, etc. Thus, the paper found that the EU bears responsibility for increasing the legitimacy and stability of authoritarianism in the region, which the Union under its democracy promotion policies wanted to fight. Ahmed Badawi, Research Associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies, acted as discussant on this panel and commented that a key function of ideology is to make the contradictions of the power-structure block obscure for the people who lived under it. He made a few technical suggestions for improvements in Thomas’ paper and disagreed with the presenter’s description of Israel as a parliamentary democracy on the grounds that it discriminates against 20% of its Arab population. He proposed to define democracy as polyarchy and underlined that it is virtually impossible to see change if the economic system is not taken into account. Regarding Markus’ paper, Ahmed asked whether it is fair to say that the EU is successful in creating a contestation in Turkish society because it is failing in its democracy-promotion efforts. Ahmed also said that he thinks that the civil society dialogue programme is a misused frame. With regards to Kraetzschmar and Cavatorta’s paper, Ahmed praised the method employed and said he thought there were two particularly interesting issues in it. Firstly, why Middle Eastern monarchies manage to embark on
healthy social and political changes, while republics in the region do not. Secondly, Ahmed regarded the use of a choice, theoretical approach as a strength of the paper because, in distinction to game theory, it leaves greater scope for agency choice.

Following Ahmed’s discussion points, the chair took questions from the floor. Dr. Neil Winn agreed with Thomas Demmelhuber that Libya is a key actor used as a buffer zone. Thus, the EU moves the border back for illegal immigrants. This, however, undermines the EU’s own principles. Neil also asked Marcus how does the EU know how to back each NGO and if that makes any difference in putting its message across?

Dr. Michelle Pace raised the second series of questions. She asked Hendrik what was the rationale behind the paper’s starting premise that elections can stop violence. To Marcus she pointed out that the negotiation process is one thing but it is a different matter whether Turkey will eventually be granted full EU membership. She also engaged with Thomas’ paper and said that it was a good illustration of how migration relates to security issues in the EU. She, however, also asked how does security as understood in this paper, relate to human security; and whether there was a distinction between different types of illegal migration in the EU’s discourse? Dr. Charlie Dannreuther took the floor next and pointed out to Marcus that the Constitutional Court is crucial in the Turkish case.

Each of the paper-givers responded to the points raised. Thomas replied to Michelle that the EU has started to make a distinction between illegal immigrants but also said that recently this has been watered-down! Nevertheless, for him that was a process that was just starting now. In response to Ahmed Badawi’s comments, Thomas said that he wanted to locate his work in the wider literature and maintained that academic thinking in the early 1990s influenced policy-makers. He further pointed out that he wanted to engage with the question: is it really possible to promote democracy? He defended his use of the term ‘parliamentary democracy’ with regards to Israel on the grounds that it is different in comparison to the other countries in the region. He also recommended some recently-published works on the genesis of monarchies and republics in the Middle East. Marcus Ketola responded to Ahmed saying that it is possible, to an extent, to argue that the EU is successful because it is failing. Despite that, the EU according to Marcus is also one of the reasons for tensions in Turkey. The way in which funding is operationalized makes the EU a bureaucratic beast. He also clarified his point.
that for him the ultimate end goal was to create a civil society, which would democratize Turkey. To Neil, Marcus replied that much depends on the priorities of the EU as to what is actually funded each year. In response to Michelle’s point, he said that he will consider the controversies around Turkey’s long path to EU membership because so far he has not thought of the issues in his paper from this angle. Dr. Hendrik Kraetzschmar said that he will share with the co-author Francesco Cavatorta Ahmed’s ideas and will take them on board. In response to Michelle’s query, he said that this is the prevalent discourse in academia and between practitioners. He also clarified that as far as their conception of the state is concerned, they are in fact not problematizing this concept but the regime in power. John Schwartzmantel closed the panel by thanking everyone for their contributions.

Dr. Pace closed the workshop by thanking Leeds for hosting the event, Jason Ralph for all the coordination efforts, UACES and POLIS for financially supporting the workshop, Sally Haworth, Clive Jones, and all the contributors and participants for such lively and interesting debates throughout the day. All participants were encouraged to visit the projects’ web sites and their continuous engagement was welcomed. She finally reminded all that the debate will continue since revised versions of all the paper contributions will be published in a special issue of the Journal of International Human Rights which she and Jason Ralph will co-edit.