

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S INTERNAL DISCOURSE ON DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

**ESRC PROJECT RES-061-25-0075, Palestine Workshop. Presentation by Dr Michelle Pace,
Principal Investigator, University of Birmingham**

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Report on the Proceedings

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The workshop was opened by the Director of the Kenyon Institute Dr Jaimie Lovell who briefly introduced the speaker, Dr Michelle Pace and explained the organisation of the seminar. This workshop consisted of two sessions. The first part consisted of a presentation on 'The European Union's internal discourse on democracy promotion in the Middle East', delivered by Dr Michelle Pace. It was based on material collected from her two-week intensive interviews with EU officials in Brussels (from the European Commission, Council of the EU, European Parliament, and Representative Offices of the Member States of the EU) during March and April 2009.

Dr Pace started her presentation by explaining the rationale of her research, which is to investigate key paradoxes and contradictions in EU 'democracy-promotion' efforts in the Middle East. She argued that the key underlying assumptions of this policy was that democratisation required political institutions and processes, particularly regular free, fair and transparent elections; a thriving middle class and proper civic education. Dr Pace explained that the research is focused on two case studies – Egypt and Palestine. In order to unravel the self-understandings of EU actors and what they think they are doing by promoting a specific model of democracy in the Middle East, as Principal Investigator on the project, she had conducted intensive interviews in Brussels during March-April 2009 (the interview questionnaire was sent in advance to interviewees) and had analysed the discourse of EU documents on democracy promotion since the 1990s. During the Brussels interviews when the interviewees realised that Dr Pace had been in Egypt and Palestine in 2007-2008 and had interviewed Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood representatives they asked the investigator a number of questions about the views of Islamists in these two case studies. Michelle Pace explained how she had already presented the findings of these Brussels interviews to two kinds of audiences, one mainly European and another mainly Egyptian in Cairo during October 2009 and was currently doing the same with the Palestinian case. Her aim was to listen very carefully how her audiences in the two case studies read and hear the Brussels-based actors' understandings and perceptions and to feed these back to Brussels. Dr Pace stressed that she was fully aware that a potential flaw of this methodology was that it only

provided her with her reading of what EU actors think. Thus, her findings related to her interpretations of what interviewees had enunciated during interviews.

After outlining her project's aims and methodology Dr Pace focused on the way democracy was framed in the EU's discourse. She argued that although there was no working definition of democracy in EU documents, the meaning of the term could be inferred from some policy documents. For her there was a mix of policy areas (human rights/ development/ democracy promotion/ trade/ security). This was coupled with a lack of a coherent strategy or a well-articulated policy. In practice, the EU brought together the various instruments it had at hand. Nevertheless, in 2006 a discussion ensued within the EU on the need to define a general strategy on democracy promotion. This, however, only arose when the US wanted to discuss democracy promotion with the EU. Under the Czech and the Swedish Presidencies of 2009 these attempts to define a common overarching EU framework on democracy support/ building were renewed. Overall, there was a consensus between policy-makers and practitioners in the EU that the EU should not try to impose democracy: that democracy had to grow from within societies and that the EU could only offer its support in this process. The 2009 Swedish Presidency saw the policy of democracy building through the prism of development and the aim of the Council Conclusions of November 2009 had been reaching a European consensus on democracy by 2010. There were several general principles on which EU democracy promotion policy was built. Firstly, the belief that democracy and free market economy were what the EU itself is about. Therefore, it was only 'natural' for the EU to promote this system. Secondly, the belief that only democracy could effectively guarantee the enjoyment of full human rights. Thirdly, there was a linkage between (economic) development and democracy (political pluralism). Thus, democracy is perceived as an instrument to an end.

Next Dr Pace focused on how the EU promotes pluralism in the Middle East. The main ways for achieving that were through election support/ election observation missions; through support for the development of civil society; through specific financial instruments, such as EIDHR that allow the delivery of assistance without the need for governments' consent; through the example set by the Union, which represents a 'nice' way for settling differences. Nevertheless, the security-stability-democracy-development nexus in the foreign policy of the EU towards the Middle East was a complicated one that often impeded the achievement of democracy building. There were several prevalent framings of the Middle East in EU policy-making circles. The first of them was the realisation that the Middle East was not a part of an overall grand strategy. Thus, in this region the EU reacts ad-hoc to situations as they arise. Secondly, although the EU wanted to be seen as a different actor from the US, it lacked an independent posture in the Middle East. Thus, the EU always waited for the US to make the first move. Thirdly, the EU had much less leverage in regions with countries that cannot become EU members. Lastly, EU policy priorities depended on who holds the 6-month rotating Presidency. Another important aspect of EU engagement with the region was that often it was more plausible to argue that the Union promoted liberalisation rather than democratisation. This was a statement, which many of the interviewees agreed with.

On the basis of the above, Dr Pace outlined several main limits and constraints in the EU's democracy promotion efforts in the Middle East. The major internal problem that the Union faces is that it is composed of 27 member states, with unanimous voting powers. That makes reaching any decision very difficult. Another internal EU problem is the lack of coordination between different units in Brussels. This leads to a fragmented approach that in turn makes the EU lack a single voice on democracy promotion, and lacking coherence and efficiency. Furthermore, there are clearly problems in the way the policy is currently conducted. The exclusive focus on periodic elections reduces

democracy to a procedural process. While civil society organisations are singled out as playing a crucial role in ‘monitoring’ human rights and democratic reform processes there are more critical voices, which question the EU’s real interests and motives for engaging in this terrain. The disparity between EU ambitions and its capabilities, moreover, means that there are other strategic objectives for the EU besides democracy and human rights. This often leads to the necessity of trade offs. In relation to the Palestinian elections in 2006 and their outcome, the responses of some interviewees revealed a realisation that there was nothing inherent in civil society that attached it to a democracy promotion project. In fact, often civil society actors are part of the elites in Middle Eastern societies and therefore they remain split from marginalised groups. Furthermore, there was an acknowledgement across EU institutions that a mistake had been made when the election results were not recognised and that eventually the EU would have to start talking to Hamas.

Given all the above mentioned, currently there is a rethinking of democracy promotion in Brussels. EU actors acknowledge that ‘when the going gets tough’, security considerations come first. This, however, makes any democracy promotion policy less credible. Furthermore, EU officials realise that perceptions of the EU from the Middle Eastern region would have to be taken into account in the policy-making process and the instruments would have to be adapted accordingly. Other areas where improvements are needed include thinking of short to long-term policy planning and not of short-term fixes and achieving better coordination between the different arms of the EU. However, for democracy building to be successful it is also necessary that different sides, especially in the Middle East, pull together in the same direction and that there has to be a successful outcome of the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP).

During the second session the audience discussed these and other points raised by Dr Pace. The general question of interest was whether the Middle East actually listened to the EU. Walid Salem, Director of the Centre for Democracy and Community Development in Jerusalem, was the first to take the floor. He pointed out that democracy promotion efforts in Palestine had passed through stages. In the period 1993-2000 the international community was talking about giving Palestine gradual freedom at the expense of democratisation. At that time the strategy was to keep a blind eye to Arafat’s abuses of democracy as long as he stuck to the peace process and delivered security to Israel. Then elections were a public relations show but after the elections all the processes of decision-making in the Palestinian political milieu continued to be made as if no elections had taken place. Arafat’s entourage was kept despite election outcomes. As a result at that time no freedom was given to the Palestinians and no democracy was achieved. Thus, both were unsuccessful. The second stage was from the year 2000 with the eruption of the Second Intifada up to the Annapolis Summit. During that time the international community did the opposite of its policies in the first period. The Palestinians were asked to build democracy ‘in the cage’, which is Palestine. Thus, at that time democracy was not combined with freedom. Since then building democracy has become a precondition for getting freedom. What happened in the end, however, as Michelle Pace rightly pointed out, was that it was not internal democracy that was built. It was in fact more about building transparent, accountable security departments than building the structures of democracy. It was these transparent accountable security departments, which would later on allow the Palestinians to get freedom. So, these two periods were examples of moving from one extreme to another. At the Annapolis meeting the promise was that these two processes (of freedom and democratisation) would go together, hand-in-hand. Since then, internal institution building, economic viability and development were presumed to go in line with the peace process. The outcome was that there were some successes at building economic viability but the process to freedom had not been materialised.

He asked Dr Pace what she thought was the exit strategy for getting the two tracks going simultaneously.

Michelle Pace responded by emphasising that this was a very important point. In her work she tried to tease out what ‘freedom’ meant in the EU context. In the EU the discourse about freedom was not as pronounced as in the US democracy promotion literature or rhetoric, which had been associated with G. W. Bush and hence, completely blemished. In the EU she did not see freedom as playing out in its thinking about democracy promotion at all. The EU might talk about freedom of expression or in the context of freedom of the media but not in the way that, as far as she understood, Walid implied – that is, in terms of social, economic and political rights. For example, the freedom to have basic needs was not addressed by the EU. This, for Michelle Pace, is quite an important gap in what the EU is trying to do in the Middle East.

Omar Shweiki, a Research Fellow at the Kenyon Institute in Jerusalem took the floor next. He said that he did not think that it was necessary to use two different concepts in order to identify what was being talked about. For him, in European political thought, there were two dimensions of democracy – the question of individual human rights and the question of collective rights and more specifically the right of the body politic: sovereignty of the general will. In classical European political thought this was the foundation of democracy. Within a state, by realising collective rights, individual rights were also protected. European discourse on democracy promotion in the Middle East, however, focused almost exclusively on individual rights without discussing the foundations of these rights, which was the realisation of the general will in popular sovereignty. This last point, for Omar, was obviously the foundation of what is lacking in Palestine. Therefore, he maintained that the question was not freedom or democracy because freedom was the foundation of democracy.

Turid Smith Polfus, an international consultant and researcher, took issue with this problem and said that in the Palestinian discourse freedom was about the freedom of movement. She also shared her own experience of observing that, in the Arab world, Palestine was the place where one had most freedom of speech, thought and of expression. Probably, she argued, that was why freedom was not too much on the agenda in Palestine as it would be for instance in Egypt.

Jorge Torres-Pereira, the Portuguese representative to the Palestinian Authority (PA), said that if he understood correctly, freedom was the freedom of acquiring statehood, a state free from occupation, political freedom. That was how he understood what Walid Saleem said. He shared the impression that in Palestine there was a culture of democracy that one did not see elsewhere in the Arab world. He pointed out that (cynically) that could be attributed to Palestinians being exposed through day-to-day contact with Israeli democracy through the media such as TV, etc. He maintained that it was well worth promoting a culture of diverse opinions. If the culture of institutionalised democracy promotion could not be imposed, the EU could still do a lot in promoting the culture of what democracy was all about.

Walid Saleem said that it was encouraging what the other participants said about freedom of expression and so on. He pointed out that Palestinian intellectuals had spoken about democracy in Palestine with three main characteristics from 1919 onwards. The first related to participation, the second, to pluralism and the third, to elections. He maintained that Palestinians did not need Europe to teach them about democracy because they already had that understanding throughout their modern history. He clarified that what he meant in his previous contribution was that in order to have a full democratic system it was necessary that the focus is placed on the demos. In Palestine the refugee part

of the Palestinian population was not free to decide to live in their own country. Thus, not only was the demos scattered but it was also not free to decide on the issue of citizenship. For example, before Oslo, people from the West Bank were formally 'Jordanian citizens residing in areas administered by Israel' and after Oslo they became 'Palestinian residents'. He was not sure if that should be seen as an improvement because previously they were 'citizens' and after Oslo they became only 'residents', Palestinian residents, residing in 'disputed' areas, whose status was to be decided under permanent status negotiations. The Jerusalemites before Oslo were 'Jordanian citizens residing permanently in Israel': after Oslo, this has not changed. As far as Gaza was concerned, before Oslo these Palestinians had undivided citizenship and were classified as living in an Israeli administered area. After Oslo they became Palestinian residents in a Palestinian territory. Thus, Gaza was the only officially recognised Palestinian territory. So, where there was Hamas it was accepted by Israel as a Palestinian territory but where there was the PA it was considered as 'disputed area'. Thus, what he meant when he said 'freedom' was one's freedom to be assembled in one's country. In the absence of such freedom there was no democracy but a 'hopeful' route to democracy. There is not even a democratic process. So, it was not correct to speak about the current process as a democratic one because the Palestinians were not there yet. According to the Moroccan liberal thinker Abdullah al-Harbi colonisation would not have happened if Palestinians had had their Renaissance. Therefore, arguably during the late Ottoman time Palestinians had somehow a better democracy than today. Democracy was native, indigenous, created by the Palestinians themselves. When the British occupation came they brought back with them religious denominations. The process of citizenship-building was beginning in Palestine and then the British came and they brought the system of denominations, which for Walid was something that had to be mentioned. This was an issue he was looking into in the book he is working on.

Vanessa Farr, an international civil servant, argued that if the EU was even vaguely interested in democratisation in Palestine it would never have cut-off ties with Hamas and would not have promoted a policy of non-engagement with Hamas because this destroyed Palestinian unity. Furthermore, it had destroyed Palestinian pluralism. All that had happened now had hardened the binary party-system and left no space for a third political party. She wondered why no one ever talked about Palestinian political pluralism and how that could be supported in the face of the current extreme dividedness. If there was a real interest in democracy-promotion it would be about engagement and discussion. In her opinion this was related to the concept of freedom. Until there was admission that what was happening in Palestine was a process of re-colonisation, which also required racist policies, there would not be any progress.

Turid Smith Polfus intervened once again on the issue of contacts between different parts of Palestinian society saying that although it was a truism that Palestinians had never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity, she maintained that actually this also applied to Israel. And now the international community had also missed two big opportunities, with the elections and with the Unity government. She argued that the world did not really see the National Unity Government (NUG) because it was never appreciated that Palestine was a nation under occupation, under extreme pressure, which still managed to get the NUG on its feet and to produce a document that answered all the demands of the Quartet. Despite that one never heard this brought up in the official discourse of the 'international community'. She argued that she was struck when she heard Michelle saying that people in the EU were so confused about what Hamas is really about. According to Turid this could be because Hamas is just as divided internally as Fatah is. It is a movement (and now a political party). Thus, Hamas does not speak with one voice. However, Hamas had produced the 'Change and Reform Program', which contained very specific details. She argued therefore that it was unfair when

people say: ‘What does Hamas mean about anything?’, ‘Let’s go back to their Charter’ because this was not what happens to any other political party. Thus, for Turid the whole media discourse in her native Norway, for example, about what Hamas meant had been very unfair and full of unwillingness to look at what Hamas had actually said. In fact, there were two places where Hamas stipulated its positions – the Change and Reform and the Program of the Unity Government. The latter met the demands of the Quartet, which was why Norway re-established normal relations with the NUG despite falling short of recognising the Unity Government in diplomatic terms. The French Council in Jerusalem said that the EU Foreign Ministers would meet and were hoping to follow on the Unity Government program. This did not happen however. Due to all these issues, Turid asked Michelle if she could comment. Would she agree that Hamas had said what they actually mean and why is it that they did not get the chance with the NUG? What was the discourse on that in the EU and why the sanctions on Hamas? Was that the Quartet and mainly the US’s fault?

Dr Pace responded by first of all emphasising that as an academic she would talk freely. She shared that personally she did not think there was a majority interest in peace in Israel and that Israel seemed to miss any opportunity for peace that became possible. The NUG was a good opportunity not just for the Palestinians to move forward in terms of democratisation. Now internal divisions between Hamas and Fatah as well as within them are playing into Israeli hands. Thus, for her this was a strategy worked out by Israel. And Israel dictated US and EU policy. She did not see seriousness in the external actors to change something. In fact, as the EU’s own internal discourse showed, ‘stability’ has higher priority. But real stability would require the West putting a reign on Israel because currently the talk was about democracy promotion in the context of occupation, which simply did not make any logical sense. It was a contradiction in terms. Michelle then moved on to say that she was not optimistic when Obama was elected as US President because he has to support Israel unconditionally. Thus, when he tried to follow a different line he was told by the Israelis that he was not going to make certain statements: Israel made it clear that it was not only not going to freeze settlements but it was going ahead in building new ones. Thus, Michelle remained strongly pessimistic about prospects for peace. Regarding the issue of Hamas, the movement’s officials Dr Pace had spoken to had told her that the international community should focus first on the Change and Reform Program, which no one read but which was all about Palestine; especially developments in Palestinian society and economy. In this document Israel was not mentioned even once! Instead everyone was still referring to the 1987 document (the Hamas Charter) where the destruction of Israel was mentioned. Dr Pace herself took this point very forcefully to Brussels. She also emphasised that there was a very strong Israeli lobby that works 24/7 and opposes every EU move to do something which may be perceived as pro-Palestinian. EU member states have tried to put forward a very clear strategy, which was leaked from the European Council by members connected to the Israeli lobby. As far as Hamas was concerned, of course they had been trying very hard to gain international recognition. Thus, they made every effort they could to have the NUG in 2007. However, they misread the EU. Hamas thought that the NUG would give them EU recognition, which did not happen. Furthermore, they said that the EU should judge them by their actions. Of course, this could be political rhetoric and a pragmatic step but the situation in Gaza at the time of the NUG was conducive to develop a Palestinian democratic process. Another important aspect of this problem, however, was whether Fatah was interested in a NUG. It was necessary to focus more on the internal reflections from within Palestinian society, which was an area where someone like Walid Saleem could have an invaluable contribution. Michelle said she would like to see more Europeans based in Palestine to engage with such representatives of Palestinian society.

James Carroll, representative of the Republic of Ireland to the PA took an issue with some of Michelle's points and called on the audience to think about imperial Europe. The latter was not interested in peace. It was instead taken up with glorious armies, wars, etc. It took an almost near collapse of Europe for people to start looking for alternatives. The response they chose was a regional one – shared regional challenges, values and principles led to looking at shared economic interests, pooling economic interests and limited pooling of sovereignty. This had had positive changes for European society. Therefore, he maintained it was important to think about what Europe could offer the Palestinians, the Israelis and the region as a whole. For him the answer to this question was the regional formula, which for him represented a better way to deal with any inter-state conflict. Inherent to this was the pooling of different types of interests and policies. The outcomes of these, he argued, had won the allegiance of the governed; their lives had been enhanced. In the Euro-Med framework there was an effort to identify such common principles but many people involved in this process were frustrated that one conflict could bring to a halt all other projects. He guessed that the same was happening to the Mediterranean Union at the time of the workshop as well. He suggested that although there was not a European peace formula or peace plan there was a model of success that people had bought into because the outcome enhanced their lives.

Jorge Torres-Pereira shared that it struck him that it was easy to engage in bashing the EU because people did not understand how things worked in reality. On the NUG he agreed that there were some member states that were more flexible than others and that the way the EU's decision-making process was done had negative sides (some of which points Michelle Pace mentioned during her presentation). However, he said that in fact during that period the EU took a pragmatic approach. It was somewhat understood that after a few months of having contacts only with non-Hamas ministers, the contacts at the level of departments had the potential to go much further. However, in the meantime, there was the coup in Gaza and at that moment all the pragmatic experiences ceased. He disagreed that the EU did not give a chance to the NUG (although at the time there were already some people in the EU that were unhappy with that pragmatic approach) and said that the catastrophic experience with the coup was not the EU's responsibility.

Turid intervened and said that the NUG fell apart quite quickly. However, she stressed that in this region, with Palestine being so vulnerable due to this entity not being a state, it was not feasible even to think that this government could work over some time without the support of the international community.

Dr Mohammad Abu-Koash, a former Palestinian diplomat, said that the USA and the EU supported democratic elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. However the USA and the EU failed to accept the outcome of the democratic elections and imposed, inter alia, financial sanctions on the Palestinian National Authority. Thus, the Palestinian People were punished for carrying out a genuine democratic election and expressing their political opinions freely through the ballot boxes. The lesson learned is that the USA and the EU support democratic elections with the provision that the outcome thereof should be acceptable to and endorsed by the occupying Power, Israel. Dr Abu-Koash was interested to hear the EU response to the question of whether the EU and the USA would have a different reaction if miraculously there were elections in January or June 2010. He stated that the Palestinian People would like the USA and the EU to address the central question, namely, ending the Israeli occupation instead of supporting the peace process which had been transformed into a mere process devoid of peace and accompanied by constant Israeli violations of International Law including continued building of colonial settlements. The Palestinian People, he said, were eager to be

free and to exercise their national rights including the right to self-determination. He argued that if the Goldstone Report was not about the human rights violations and war crimes committed by Israel, to his mind there was no doubt that it would have been fast-forwarded to the UN Security Council and the International Criminal Court. He continued by saying that the sympathy of the public opinion in Europe was for the Palestinian People and that the people there wanted an end to this protracted conflict. He maintained that the Palestinian People had made some difficult compromises particularly the acceptance, at the urging of centers of power, of the two-state solution which means a Palestinian state on 22 per cent of historical Palestine, but if on this day the Palestinian People went to the UN Security Council and demanded a resolution on the recognition of that state it would not get unanimous support of the permanent members of the Council. In his view that was because everything that was done was taking account of Israel. On the issue of emulating the West, Dr Abu-Koash argued that it was not necessary to follow the Western models for a country to be successful. Countries such as India, China and Brazil were making considerable progress by following their own indigenous models.

Vanessa Farr paid tribute to Dr Abu-Koash's contributions and pointed out that the Oslo Agreement explicitly stated that the Palestinian security services were aimed at protecting the state of Israel. Thus, Oslo was designed to support and protect Israel and not in any way designed to create a Palestinian state. Thus, from its inception the institution-building in Palestine was contradictory. She said that her question followed from Jorge's point. On the issue of the coup she asked Jorge what did he think had happened in the six-months between the elections and the coup? Did he really think that the US and Europe and Israel were not guilty? In Vanessa's opinion, in the forceful isolation of democratically elected parts of the Palestinian government, there was very little consideration given to the possibility that this would lead to the pursuit of violent means on the part of Hamas. She argued that there were specific ways in which if the international community refused to acknowledge the democratic choice of a people; the alternative was a move to violence. She also wondered what did the international community do to make it impossible for Hamas to pursue a different line to the one that they had pursued in the last few years and also what had the international community done to make it impossible for Hamas to realise parts of its own vision. She said that the way in which Hamas conducted itself in Gaza at present was terrifying and the great fear of the people in Gaza was that the population in the West Bank would not know how badly Hamas behaves. Her impression upon visiting Gaza in mid-November was that people there were terribly depressed and felt absolutely hopeless in trying to resist the Islamisation of Gaza.

In response to Vanessa's point Michelle Pace referred to the article published in Vanity Fair which stipulated that the Americans sent arms to Fatah's Dahlan, in support of a coup against Hamas. For her the issue was whether the EU was aware of this and if yes, that would mean that it was complicit in creating the current divisions between the West Bank and Gaza.

Jorge Torres-Pereira took an issue with some of the points raised by Dr Abu-Koash and asked him if he knew the result on the EU's position on the Goldstone Report. Dr Abu-Koash said he did not. Jorge then replied that this was another example of immediately bashing the EU because in fact five member states had voted in support of the Report, including Ireland, Portugal, Cyprus, Malta and Slovenia. This, for him, was evidence that the idea that the EU only hinders the process was a wrong one. He went on to say that he could not argue that there was a unified EU position on the events leading to the coup. However, pragmatically, on the ground in Palestine, the EU had been given the possibility to deal with non-Hamas NUG representatives. Thus, for Jorge that already was progress in comparison to the policy followed just after the elections. So, in his opinion fairness would require

awareness that commentators tend to underline only the negatives, which frustrates the EU. This can partly be attributed to the EU's decision-making system, which many would admit is very cumbersome. In response to Dr Abu-Koash's comments regarding elections Jorge said that the EU should be prepared to have well thought through reactions and not ones done quickly in just a couple of days. He shared that his personal view was in unison with that of the Fatah Foreign Affairs Committee - when allowing elections to take place it should be arranged that in regard to the outcome of these elections Unity should be the key objective. He said that he did not want to hear about what would be the EU's response if, as a result of the elections, an Islamist majority was voted in. He was interested in whether the Palestinians wanted to address their internal needs, working together or was their only interest in defeating the other major faction?

Dr Abu-Koash replied that with regards to EU member states there were common and uncommon issues. Therefore, he did not see the 27 countries as a single voice and clearly their attitudes towards the Question of Palestine vary. While the Palestinian People were grateful for the EU's financial help they were appealing for treating the cause of the disease not just the symptoms. He asked why those who imposed sanctions on the Palestinian People refrained from doing the same with regard to Israel where now there is an extreme right wing government.

Omar Shweiki argued that if anyone thought that the Palestinians needed to be taught in democracy, they needed a lesson in history. He asked what nation had suffered the 1948-type of catastrophe and had gone on to establish an infrastructure of political pluralism, a multi-party system with elections and representation across divided territories? For him these achievements were completely ignored and forgotten by the EU. Therefore, for him Oslo did not only ignore the institutional achievements made before it but also attempted to establish alternatives with the PA. Omar argued that the PA was the least representative leadership the Palestinians had had in their history. He maintained that the detachment of the Palestinian leadership from the population had come about as a result of historical processes that the EU had supported. He did not doubt the good intentions of the EU but pointed out that intentions and consequences should not be confused. For him the title of a recent academic contribution entitled 'Political guilt, waste of money' encapsulated well the way the EU felt about Oslo. Furthermore, he maintained that Oslo established the foremost premise of security, while all the main issues of interest to the Palestinians were not even allowed to be discussed by the Palestinian leadership. The PA was representing the Palestinians from the occupied territories but not the society as a whole, which would also include the refugees. Thus, he thought that Oslo contributed to the de-democratisation of Palestine because it destroyed the infrastructure that had been established with the aim of representing all Palestinians across the different existing divisions. The establishment of an electoral process in the West Bank arguably only exacerbated the fragmentation of the Palestinian body politic. On the issue of civil society one of the most important contributions of the EU was the neo-liberal philosophy that stipulated the need to establish civil society alongside the state-building process. Furthermore, this rested on the presumption that civil society did not exist in Palestine, thus the efforts were towards its establishment. This led to the increase in funding for NGOs that were accountable not to the local population but to the donors and that were representing the local population but working on the donors' agenda. This again undermined the Palestinian's capacity to represent themselves.

Walid took issue with these matters and pointed to the internal and external factors in building democracy in Palestine. He said that there was a tendency to attack the West without discussing the responsibilities of the Palestinians. He was quite skeptical about the future of democracy in Gaza because in his view Hamas was against civil society, self-organisation and the freedom of association.

He said that the discussion on democracy promotion in Palestine had already seen three approaches: to postpone democracy promotion until statehood was achieved (Fatah's original idea); build democracy in order to attain statehood; to have transitional democracy within an agreed upon jurisdiction. The last type was the one he thought should be adopted by the Palestinians. He concluded this issue saying that from his personal experience of imprisonment if the Palestinian national movement was democratic it probably would have taken Palestinians a shorter time to achieve statehood. The achievement of statehood is taking long because the Palestinian National Movement was not democratic. In terms of the international strategy and the EU's approach to democracy promotion another factor had to be taken into account – building citizenship. On the issue of political Islam he said that we should be talking about the dialogue of civilizations; thinking about how could we on the basis of partnership get discussion going about the link between democracy and the Shura? For Walid the way EU funds were dispersed was questionable. Decisions on funding should not be technical but should be built on the idea of not supporting people that only speak 'Euro-speak' or who the EU thinks are Europeanised. They should instead be aimed at creating links with the real civil society that was to be found around the mosque. For Walid the mosque in the Middle East was the centre of civil society life.

There were concluding remarks by two participants. James Carroll said, on the issue of the EU, that many of the member states were not UN members in 1947. In his view the EU had become a burden-carrier in the Arab-Israeli conflict, which had resulted in the EU as a tax-payer paying vast quantities of money. As a result, the highest amount of aid per capita in the world today went to Palestine. The EU did not set the security agenda but under the current security agenda the Gaza strip was more and more often referred to as 'Hamastan' and envisaged to become 'Alqaidastan' over a number of years. The EU was not yet strong enough or close enough to the conflict protagonists to over-turn this.

Turid shared that the Palestinians did not establish the PLO but it was serving them. Oslo was construed, in her opinion, to kill the aspiration of a Palestinian state and also to disable Palestinian democracy. In her opinion it was a great achievement of the Palestinians to be able to build something very close to a democratic state. In her view that was also why the second Intifada started. The question was how to move from civil society to political parties. She concluded by saying that she did not think that Fatah had yet accepted that it had lost the 2006 elections.

In her concluding remarks Dr Pace encouraged a discussion about what were the pillars of a Palestinian state and what it meant for Palestinians from all factions to work together on a day-to-day basis. She concluded the workshop by thanking everybody for their participation and the great discussion that ensued and said that on this basis a Report will be prepared and circulated to all concerned. She thanked the Director of the Kenyon Institute Dr Jaimie Lovell for hosting the event and to Valentina Kostadinova for taking notes from the discussion.