The end of the ‘Euro-Mediterranean vision’

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The original spirit of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) has suffered a slow and tortuous agonía. Attempts to resuscitate the failing strategy have merely hastened its demise. The Union for the Mediterranean is not a new lease of life but another nail in the coffin of the vision that infused the inception of the EMP in 1995. Spain promises to revitalize Euro-Mediterranean relations during its EU presidency in early 2010. It does so, ritually, under each of its presidencies. This time, broader reassessment is required. Relations between North Africa and Europe have become increasingly devoid of the ‘transformational’ partnership that has long been promised. The EMP was predicated on joint commitments to cooperative security, region-building, burden-sharing, cultural proximity, economic support and political modernization. That vision languishes today in North Africa. The policy areas that are flourishing are those of a defensive and exclusionary bent, subversive of the EMP’s ostensible rationale. Relations between Europe and North Africa are suspended in unhealthy stasis. Partnership has shifted even further towards controlled surveillance. What might be termed the founding ‘Euro-Med vision’ is on life-support.

Anatomy of a perished vision

Structural pathologies infect European policies in North Africa. The problem is not simply that—as has been exhaustively argued over many years—the EU is failing to invest sufficient effort and resources in North Africa. It is not simply a question of more determined political will being required. Rather, it is that the basic premise of the EU’s approach is at odds with the proclaimed philosophy of the EMP, with its own supposed identity as a foreign policy actor, and with the interests of European and North African citizens. The design, not the mere implementation, of policy is now at fault. The familiar rhetoric of the EU simply having to put a little more effort in is no longer convincing. It is not a case of the glass being half empty. The EU is filling the wrong glass.

The new Union for the Mediterranean (UMed), established at French instigation in July 2008, clearly dilutes the political character and thrust of the EMP vision. Some relief was felt that the initial, intemperate proposal put forward by the French government to exclude all but the coastal EU member states was...
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reined back and the new initiative, in effect, folded into the EMP. But this does not change the substantive gist of the new Union. Its headline focus is on relatively uncontroversial areas of cooperation such as solar power, maritime transport, civil protection, education and small businesses. It is little more than a ‘project of projects’.1 It prioritizes southern-led, intergovernmental, low-politics cooperation.2 At this technical level, most policy areas identified as priorities are in fact already the subject of deep institutionalized cooperation. The final format of the UMed was not based on ‘a collective analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Barcelona Process, but was the product of bluster and horse-trading’.3 The idea of lightening bureaucratic procedure is a good one—although not one easily squared with the creation of yet another institution, a Barcelona-based secretariat charged with running the UMed. But the main issue is that the UMed is expressly designed to push the focus of relations between Europe and North Africa away from the most sensitive political areas.

The initiative is widely hailed by Mediterranean officials as ushering in a welcome focus on pragmatic and technical cooperation, unencumbered by sensitive political issues. As a result, North African governments certainly feel more ownership of the UMed. All Arab leaders attended its inception in Paris, while they boycotted the tenth anniversary of the EMP in 2005. It has not yet been clarified exactly how the UMed and EMP will relate to each other. Some EU member states see the former in maximalist terms as taking over from the latter; others see it in minimalist fashion as a coordinating mechanism for project finance. But at the very least, the essential strategic core of the EMP looks increasingly atrophied. The UK, along with Spain and Italy, failed to prevent this depoliticization.

While rightly expressing concerns over the technocratic nature of the UMed, Spain has declared as the most immediate priorities for its presidency a focus on water management, solar energy, small and medium-sized enterprises, and maritime transport. Compare the UMed with the new Eastern Partnership,4 which talks plainly of highly geostrategic and political issues. The UMed is curiously divorced from the world around it. Much international attention has turned away from North Africa to more dramatic challenges in places such as Afghanistan. Gulf resources are displacing the European influence in North Africa. European partnership in North Africa is not keeping pace with changes in the international system and the crisis-hit global economy.

The familiar problem of relations with North Africa being ‘infected’ by the Arab–Israeli conflict has not been overcome. No positive link has been made between policy in North Africa and efforts to revive the Arab–Israeli peace process—supposedly the EMP’s central rationale as a pan-Mediterranean initiative. The impotence of both European and North African states in the face of

Israel’s invasion of Gaza in December 2008 paid tragic testament to this. It demonstrated that the logic of positive spillover being generated within a comprehensive cooperative security endeavour is further than ever from realization. In private, senior diplomats admit that the new, ‘co-owned’ institutional structure narrows even further the separation of policy towards North Africa from the obstacles of the peace process. The UMed was paralysed for most of its first year in operation by the Arab League’s insistence on a seat and then by the Gaza conflict.

The bilateralism of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has offered North African states some concrete gains in specific sectors of cooperation that have been liberated from linkage to the problematic regional context. Yet such compartmentalized approaches sit uneasily with the loudly proclaimed logic of the EMP. With Saudi Arabia now playing a lead role in the peace process, and so much diplomacy hinging on the link between this and the Syria–Iran nexus, the ‘Mediterranean’ basis of European relations with North Africa looks increasingly at odds with the political dynamics of the broader Middle Eastern region. While Gulf states’ presence in the region is increasingly noted, the EU still declines to link North African policy into broader Middle East development initiatives.

Work on nesting North Africa within a broader regional strategy in practice has lost ground. Experts have criticized the ENP for undermining the multilateralism of the Euro-Med vision. The UMed is presented as a means of recovering such regionalism. But its form of regionalism makes little sense in geopolitical terms. Mixing North African challenges with Balkan dynamics must count as one of the more idiosyncratic efforts to improve strategic coherence (Balkan states are members of the UMed but not of the EMP). North African diplomats complain that the EU has jealously guarded its own initiatives when the region seeks broader multilateral partnerships. Competition with US initiatives still outweighs transatlantic cooperation, to the dismay of North African diplomats. The EU is yet to open up to such cooperation in response to President Barack Obama’s call for a ‘new beginning’ in the region. It has shown no willingness to modify the framework of its own partnerships to incorporate Russia’s and emerging powers’ roles in the region.

Away from ‘post-modern’ security

An exclusionist approach to security increasingly prevails in European policy towards North Africa. In 2005 a fourth chapter, on ‘Migration, social integration, justice and security’, was added to the Barcelona process. The very rationale of the new UMed is to address issues that have a specifically trans-Mediterranean dimension, such as reducing illegal migration. Migration has been increasingly defined as a security concern. The lifting of border controls within Europe has been accompanied by a strengthening of external controls. One of the most extreme cases was

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Italy’s pressure on Libya in 2004 to sign an agreement to take back illegal migrants and hold them in detention centres ready for return to other African states. In May 2009 a new Italian–Libyan agreement was signed to facilitate further the return of migrants. Most diplomats admit that the security logic is increasingly one of ‘just keep them out!’ The formation of the Algeria-based Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has entrenched such thinking, rather than prompting a renewed focus on the underlying causes of migration pressures.

Conditionality clauses now apply to cooperation on stemming migration. Border management has also been brought into the EU’s Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. The new borders agency, Frontex, has grown steadily larger and more powerful. A 2008 border package strengthens entry and exit controls, and new Rapid Border Interventions Teams have been set up. Frontex has negotiated new agreements on the return of migrants, and North African states have been its primary targets. The reactivated ‘5 plus 5’ initiative has focused almost exclusively on a securitized approach to stemming migration. Meetings between defence ministers within this framework have become one of the most active of the many cross-Mediterranean fora in recent years.

The EU Justice and Home Affairs framework is being mobilized to strengthen North African regimes’ security capacities. Security cooperation and information-sharing with North African governments are both proper and necessary. However, they have been prioritized to such an extent that Europe now encourages rights derogations in North Africa in pursuit of a ‘surveillance and control’ approach to security. The European Parliament has been increasingly critical of a diversion of EU aid from development and social priorities to counterterrorism. The Spanish government has even incorporated into its development aid guidelines an explicit link between migration controls and security cooperation with North African regimes. Interior ministers are increasingly dominant in Euro-Med fora. The securitization of migration has been tenuously conflated with the issue of cross-border criminal networks and illicit trade across the Mediterranean.

European officials insist that their security and counterterrorism initiatives are broader than critics claim, and increasingly incorporate rule of law issues and human rights training. The UK says its involvement in such matters has increased under its Contest II programme. Yet such efforts remain limited in scope and ambition. While governments label many of their security measures as supporting governance reform they are, ironically, not willing to give details of such efforts to improve ‘transparency’. The approach to ‘radicalization’ is increasingly defensive—exactly what the EMP promised to avoid. Optimists suggest that the threat from North Africa has been contained better than most could have anticipated. But if so, this is not the result of the holistic, long-run approach to soft security.

7 The 5 plus 5 dialogue gathers together 5 southern European countries and 5 states of the Arab Maghreb to cooperate on security issues such as terrorism and illegal migration.


issues that the EMP portrays as its trademark. Eventually, the attempt to recreate a Euro-Mediterranean ‘frontier’ must be a futile one.

The focus on human rights and democracy has virtually disappeared from view. The UMed rolls back the EMP’s *acquis* on democracy and human rights. The Arab–Israeli conflict continues to militate against European enthusiasm for the democracy agenda and provides North African regimes with a grievance they feel justifies a resistance to partnership on democratic values. And, as discussed below, despite endless rhetoric to the contrary, European governments remain highly cautious in engaging with Islamist opposition forces in North Africa. After launching a number of useful reform projects under its ‘Engaging with the Islamic World’ initiative (which was later tellingly integrated into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office counterterorrism unit), the UK has disappointingly now absented itself from this area of policy. The EU has moved further and further away from seeking a ‘ring of well-governed states’ on its southern edge and towards seeking a ‘ring of *firmly* governed states’. European claims to a ‘post-modern’ approach to security ring increasingly hollow.

Nor is the vision in much better shape when it comes to linking political objectives with transformation in the economic sphere. European investment in North Africa remains limited. After increasing in the mid-2000s, in 2008 investment flows across the Mediterranean fell by a half. The investment that does take place is still oriented to large-scale state-led projects, not useful for stimulating and supporting grassroots economic activity. Growth in the southern Mediterranean has been driven in large measure by an expanding informal sector outside the framework of Euro-Med linkages. Both the UMed and the ENP exclude the focus on economic restructuring that was central to the original Euro-Med vision.\(^\text{10}\) Diplomats concur that the goal of creating a Euro-Med free trade area has now been pushed back even further. This is another area of policy drift in relation to which the UK’s voice has been increasingly inaudible. Under the ENP southern states have to take on swathes of EU standards, but still do not get full and free access to the European market. Contrary to North African demands, the Commission is still minded to argue that free trade in agriculture would not be important as an incentive for Arab states. As one diplomat acknowledges, ‘without free access for agriculture we are not credible as a foreign policy actor’. It is an old problem, the matter of many promised breakthroughs; and yet it remains.

The UMed does not offer new aid for development or economic integration. Its operation reflects a statist development theory of big projects that offer little linkage to local economies. At the same time, elitist cultural exchanges have done little to bring together the peoples of Europe and North Africa. Observers agree that Europe has lost weight as a cultural reference point within North Africa. Other sectors languish too. Compare the sparse attention given to energy cooperation with North Africa with the diplomatic initiatives and resources accorded to the Caspian Basin and Russia. In energy the EU has drifted towards geostrategic protectionism, quite contrary to all its commitments to integrating European and

\(^\text{10}\) Joffé, ‘European policy and the southern Mediterranean’, p. 324.
North African markets. A new European programme for the development of solar power in North Africa does not mask the fact that North Africa’s potential as an energy supplier has received relatively little attention compared to the EU’s fixation on Russia. Europe’s discourse on renewables expresses a mercantile push to sell its own technologies in the southern Mediterranean. Echoing trends in other areas, the EU has sought to substitute technical energy cooperation for the lack of a vision of how North Africa fits into the broader geopolitics of its energy security strategy.

**The Islamist dilemma**

Direct European engagement with Islamist political movements in North Africa has advanced little. Indeed, recent signs are of even greater reluctance systematically to incorporate Islamist organizations into EU policy initiatives. The consensus in the Middle East is clear: Islamists are the main agents of social and economic change, but are ignored by the EU because of the ‘securitization’ dynamic.

A strong European unease towards Islamist organizations persists. The question of when and how to engage with Islamists in the diverse national settings across North Africa is approached on an often inconsistent and erratic case-by-case basis. Fearing potential negative implications for bilateral relations with the host governments, most EU member states have been keen to maintain full decision-making power on this issue at the national level.

EU government relations with Islamist opposition parties and movements in North Africa vary greatly according to different national settings. In Morocco, the Justice and Development Party (PJD) is a legal, recognized political actor with parliamentary representation. It has fairly regular and unproblematic contact with European diplomats. Thanks to the comparatively liberal environment in Morocco, European embassies are also able to make occasional contact with illegal but non-violent Islamist movements, in particular the widely supported Justice and Charity organization. But expressions of displeasure from the regime have led to greater diffidence on the part of European governments.

In Algeria and Egypt, European diplomats have some contact with Islamist parliamentarians; again, however, such efforts at dialogue are only tentative. In Algeria, Islamist parliamentarians are largely viewed as coopted and as insufficiently promising interlocutors for diplomats to risk upsetting the regime. In Egypt, by contrast, European interest in the Muslim Brotherhood is considerable, and some EU member states also have active contacts with highly critical Islamist leaders outside the parliament. In Tunisia, Islamist parties are illegal and EU efforts are largely limited to contacts with members of outlawed Islamist movements on European soil, outside the direct radar of Arab security services.

In most such cases the most reluctant member states have diluted tentative common EU principles of engagement to a lowest-common-denominator policy that is likely to remain reactive rather than proactive. Such policies are failing to support deradicalization.
Inclusion remains theoretical. Despite frequent abstract declarations of intent, a development of strategic ties with moderate Islamist groups in North Africa via systematic contacts has not yet taken place. There are no open institutionalized partnerships, let alone funding from European sources. The timid trend towards an inclusion of all relevant societal actors at the discursive level has not yet found its way into policies and political practice. The gap between discourse and deed is, if anything, becoming wider.

Europeans still raise a plethora of doubts over the issue. Many remain sceptical over Islamist movements’ intentions and the potential benefits of engagement with them. Many still question moderate Islamists’ true democratic commitment. There are genuine reservations about Islamist parties’ positions on women’s rights, Shari’a law, religious minorities and tolerance of secular beliefs.

The amount of debate on this issue within European government institutions remains disconcertingly small. Many high-level European decision-makers have never personally met and exchanged views with a representative of an Islamist party. Since 9/11 fear has too often equated Islamism with terrorism. The spectre of Hamas’s ostracism looms large in the wider deliberation of policy towards political Islam.

Trends in political Islam in North Africa are enormously complex. Some observers detect an incipient ‘reradicalization’ as Islamists realize they have been duped by regimes into fruitless cooperation; others think such fears are unfounded. Picking out ‘acceptable’ moderates is certainly an unduly simplistic idea; many EU diplomats recognize as much, yet protest they have no other practical means of developing practical policies. New dialogue between Islamists and leftists in North Africa calls for a far more nuanced approach from the EU that treats Islamism as one among many factors nested within rich and changing domestic political contexts, rather than a phenomenon to be separated out and ‘dealt with’ as a stand-alone ‘problem’ for European interests.

Interviews with representatives of mainstream Islamist parties in North Africa reveal that the latter judge the range of EU initiatives in the region—insofar as they are even aware of them—to be about containing rather than engaging Islamism. Worryingly from a European perspective, Islamists in some cases speak more approvingly of the engagement they have enjoyed with US political foundations than that achieved with Europeans. They perceive EU foreign policy to be fundamentally anti-Islamic. European diplomats might with some justification reply that this is an unfair caricature and that they are grappling with genuinely difficult questions of how to give the proclaimed policy of ‘engagement’ concrete substance—and they will rightly point out that Islamists themselves can sometimes be unsure whether they wish to accept European support. But in such a sensitive area, perceptions matter, and such abiding scepticism on the part of a large segment of North African society must give cause for concern. If European governments have pretensions to influence the evolution of

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Islamist opinion, the abiding policy of ‘keeping a distance’ would seem to offer little prospect of success.

Morocco as microcosm

If the general political and transformative Euro-Med vision was going to succeed anywhere, it was in Morocco. But the evolution of European policy in Morocco is symbolic of a move from aspiring to foster democratic governance to supporting more efficient decision-making. The Moroccan regime has successfully charted a path of limited reform that is meaningful but also deflects the nominal EMP–ENP aim of far-reaching political modernization. Morocco’s ‘smart authoritarianism’ has not been matched by a smarter European strategic policy.

Three issues demonstrate this. The first concerns EU reactions to Morocco’s September 2007 elections. Numerous observers raised suspicions about electoral engineering in the face of the surprisingly weak results of the PJD, which did not gain the place in government that polls had universally predicted it was well on course to attain. European reactions to the elections were highly positive. The EU praised Morocco for the election’s transparency and for admitting the first ever delegation of international election observers. The popular dissatisfaction reflected in the low voter turnout was disregarded. The PJD’s failure to get into government provoked an almost audible sigh of relief on the northern shores of the Mediterranean.

Second, implementation of the EU–Morocco ENP action plan has in practice been increasingly depoliticized. This action plan’s list of priorities was presented as a road map towards a comprehensive political, social and economic reform programme. However, measures envisaged under the political reform chapters are increasingly devoid of reformist content in practice. Most projects have concerned the modernization of infrastructure, capacity-building and the rather imprecise ‘exchange of experience’. For this reason the plan’s implementation has been criticized by the European Parliament,12 and also by a number of Moroccan human rights NGOs consulted by the Commission in 2007.13 European diplomats point out that as implementation of the plan has progressed, reformist aims have been increasingly hindered by the requirements of consensus-building and common ownership. These latter principles are, of course, vital, and it is important for the EU to have a mutually agreed plan of reform priorities to which it can officially hold the Moroccan government accountable, including through the monitoring of specific legal, fiscal and auditing commitments. An April 2008 ENP progress report on Morocco included surprisingly explicit criticism of the lack of movement on democratic reform.14 However, the increasingly technocratic approach is a source of dismay to Moroccan democrats. One exhaustive study concludes that Moroccan...
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reformers (in the administration, parliament, judiciary and civil society) think EU pressure for reform has been too little rather than too great.15

Third, debates afoot within negotiations for a new ‘advanced status’ agreement between the EU and Morocco reveal political caution. The EU and Morocco officially agreed on the establishment of such an upgraded relation in October 2008, adopting a framework document on the basis of which details are currently being hammered out.16 The mandate foresees a number of short- and medium-term measures aimed at the strengthening of EU–Moroccan ties in all sectors of cooperation, in practice amounting to a status similar to that accorded to an accession candidate country, but excluding institutional integration. It plans a step-by-step integration of Morocco into the European internal market, including ‘appropriate financial support’. Measures listed as areas of strengthened cooperation cover political, economic, financial and social dimensions, as well as Morocco’s participation in a number of Community programmes and agencies. The EU promises to lock onto and ensure implementation of the Moroccan government’s own reform commitments, in particular in relation to the recommendations of the Moroccan truth commission, the Instance Equité et Réconciliation (IER), the National Human Rights Strategy and the National Equality Strategy.17

Significant steps towards Morocco’s further political integration with the EU have already taken place in a number of areas, including Morocco’s alignment on a case-by-case basis with EU Common Foreign and Security Policy statements and the participation of Moroccan troops in the European Security and Defence Policy operation ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also witnessed in recent months is a strengthening of political and strategic dialogue; parliamentary cooperation, including more frequent exchanges among parliamentarians and political parties, and observer status for the Moroccan parliament at the Council of Europe; security cooperation, for example Moroccan participation in EU police training; and judicial cooperation on Morocco’s gradual adhesion to Council of Europe conventions.

It remains highly uncertain, however, whether the advanced status will represent anything more than simply another name change in agreements. Preparations so far do not suggest that a qualitative gear change in European strategy is likely. Morocco has been granted €50 million under the 2007–2013 European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument for governance reforms—not a particularly sizeable sum—and most projects funded are highly state-oriented. The US has doubled aid flows to Morocco, and now provides more funds than the EU for democratic reforms. The UK has withdrawn from any significant pro-reform funding. Many of the areas of cooperation mentioned in the statut avancé are in fact already included in the ENP Action Plan, but fall short of full implementation. For

example, the demand for full implementation of all the recommendations made by the IER is already included in the Action Plan, but has been given no meaningful follow-up. The new agreement will have very limited impact unless the EU seeks to use it to encourage genuinely democratic reform in Morocco. Another collection of good intentions that fails to assist specific reforms will harm rather than strengthen Moroccan democracy, in sending the signal that it is possible to obtain a very privileged political and economic partnership with the EU without being required to move beyond liberalized autocracy.

**Authoritarian forbearance**

A cursory look at trends elsewhere in North Africa reveals a similar dilution of the Euro-Med vision’s ostensibly political nature. In Egypt the Mubarak regime has skilfully appropriated a reformist discourse to mask a tightening of political control since 2005. European policy has been left floundering. A European Parliament resolution of January 2008 drew a critical picture of both the situation in Egypt and the EU’s utter failure to uphold human rights and democracy as an essential element of bilateral cooperation. The text of the resolution was developed in close cooperation with Egyptian human rights activists. It is still held up by Egyptian civil society representatives as the kind of explicit political support they need and expect from Europe. Egyptian civil society was outraged when the European Commission delegation in Cairo issued statements questioning the resolution’s critique of political developments in Egypt. Some blame such status quo thinking for a rise in radical Salafism in Egypt, as frustration grows that the apparent window of opportunity for reform in 2003–2005 has slammed shut. Egypt’s current position as a stalwart critic of Hamas and its role in monitoring the Gaza border has won further plaudits from Europe.

Egyptian human rights and advocacy NGOs have been scathing of the European Union. In April 2009, on the occasion of the EU–Egyptian Association Council meeting, European and Egyptian human rights organizations issued an open letter to European governments and EU institutions exhorting them ‘to deplore the hesitant and incoherent approach adopted by the EU towards the human rights situation in Egypt’. The letter ‘calls for a concrete and complete assessment of democratic reform initiatives and human rights in Egypt before engaging in closer relations’ and asks the EU to make a further strengthening of relations conditional on a visible improvement in Egypt’s human rights and democracy record. However, European aid to Egypt continues to rise, while new energy and security cooperation intensifies. Diplomats point out that the Commission now does little to control where aid ends up. The UK runs a number of small programmes on vocational training and company law, but its role is hardly commensurate with its status as largest investor in Egypt.

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18 Authors’ interviews with Egyptian human rights activists in Cairo, spring 2008.
Tunisia is the region’s most overlooked dictatorship. Its relatively successful social and economic development makes it less dependent on foreign aid. Asked why the EU’s modernization theory of democratic change does not seem to be working in the country, local activists point out that the growing Tunisian middle class focuses not on politics but on consumption—and that its prosperity depends on high levels of corruption and patronage. Preparations for the October 2009 presidential election show no sign of the regime allowing meaningful political competition.

The Commission praises the ‘impressive achievements’ of the Tunisian government in health, education and gender equality. The contrast between the relatively good and stable levels of economic and social development on the one hand, and the harsh political conditions on the other, has led the Commission towards greater passivity in the political field. European diplomats judge that the EU lacks leverage to put pressure on the Tunisian government. Commission staff admit that they are ‘increasingly inactive’ on the issue of political reform. The Commission has stopped trying to channel funds directly to Tunisian NGOs because of obstacles imposed by the Tunisian authorities. Until recently, the Commission funded NGOs and unions directly, but this has now ceased. All funds have to go through the central bank, which is able to block anything at all at odds with regime interests. The Human Rights Subcommittee for Tunisia held under the ENP has remained cautious and exploratory.

On a visit to Tunisia in 2008 Nicolas Sarkozy pondered gushingly: ‘What other country can boast of having advanced so much in half a century on the road to progress, on the road to tolerance and on the road to reason?’ Overall amounts of European aid to Tunisia have increased, from around €70 million a year in the early 2000s to €100 million a year under the current European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument. Any ‘reform’ effort here now entails support for the regime’s economic programmes. In some senses the ultra-cautious position is surprising. Given its levels of economic development, relative social harmony and low geostrategic profile, Tunisia might be a case where political liberalization could be relatively smooth. Yet EU diplomats define their goal as seeking to ‘construct an overall atmosphere of trust and confidence’.

Political reform has also atrophied in Algeria. Elections on 9 April 2009 returned Abdelaziz Bouteflika for a third term with a reported 90 per cent of the vote. Algerian civil society organizations complained of the regime’s strategic aim to ‘constitutionalize authoritarian rule’. Power has been transferred from the national assembly to the president. Control over the media has been tightened; three French weekly newspapers were banned on the eve of election day. More and more of the political elite has been co-opted; even the Islamist Movement de la Société pour la Paix (MSP) supported Bouteflika’s revision of the constitution to allow himself a third term. The Interior Ministry inflated the turnout,

fearful that a high abstention rate would be the only means possible of registering dissatisfaction. Bouteflika has wrested the reins of power from the grip of the military, only to monopolize it for himself. His triumph ‘has come at the expense of a sound foundation for civilian-led politics in the future’. The EU made no serious effort to prevent the repeal of the term limit; issued only bland reactions to the elections; and has offered Algeria increased security cooperation. With Algeria rejecting the offer of an ENP Action Plan, the EU is now demandeur on a range of energy and counterterrorist concerns.

Finally, new negotiations for a trade and cooperation agreement with Libya appear bereft of all the principles ostensibly guiding Euro-Mediterranean relations. However strongly this deal might be justified in short-term strategic terms, it undoubtedly sits uneasily with the region- and values-based logic of the Euro-Mediterranean vision. As Libya has little need of EU funds, the negotiations are set to be long and arduous. Meanwhile, more ad hoc arrangements for deepening economic and energy cooperation are being prioritized with Libya. At the beginning of September 2009, during the festivities marking the fortieth anniversary of the coup that brought Colonel Qadafi to power, rumours (at the time unsubstantiated) swirled that the British government negotiated commercial gain in return for releasing convicted Lockerbie bomber Abdelbasset al Megrahi on compassionate grounds.

Conclusions

Jealously guarding its own complex and confusingly overlapping institutional initiatives in North Africa, the EU is failing to move with the times. A genuine commitment to multilateralism in North Africa would require a far more open position on cooperation with Gulf states, rising powers and the United States under the Obama administration. The EU’s internal institutional dynamics still seem to militate against such adaptation. An exclusionist approach to security increasingly prevails in European policy towards North Africa. This is matched by a persistent political exclusion of Islamists. Efforts to nest North Africa within a broader regional strategy have weakened. The focus on human rights and democracy has likewise been watered down. European policy has moved from aspiring to foster ‘good governance’ to supporting ‘good enough governance’. European governments value regimes’ supposed stabilizing influence in the region, and are reluctant to risk this for the sake of optimizing democratic standards. Northern European states such as the UK, the loudest in advocating holistic approaches to security, have exerted little restraining influence against such trends in North Africa. The EU’s ‘ring of friends’ is in truth a ‘ring of citadels’, with few friendly views of European policies among North African citizens.

European policy undoubtedly faces increasingly complex challenges. The North African problems that motivated the creation of the EMP in 1995 have only worsened in the last decade and a half. The critique offered here is not meant to

23 Jacob Mundy, ‘Bouteflika’s triumph and Algeria’s tragedy’, Middle East Report Online, 10 April 2009.
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hold the EU to an unrealistically pure standard of idealism. But current policy does not constitute a sustainable, forward-looking strategy. It underplays growing instability at the local level and protest against regimes in North Africa. It underestimates the fragility of the relationship between populations and regimes; this is not the dramatic conflict that attracts policy-makers’ attention elsewhere in the Middle East, but portends much future trouble.24 The EU has reacted to the cluster of current strategic, economic, political and energy challenges by fleeing from its own policy prescriptions, just when these are ever more necessary. Which will the 2010 Spanish presidency prefer: comfortable continuity or a bumpy, but overdue, rethink?
