

## **Session II      Developing EU Strategies towards Middle East Reform**

**Emma Bonino**, reiterated that many of the policies adopted toward the MENA region have been based on stereotypes that needed critical examination. Highlights of Ms Bonino's speech include:

There are initial signs of open discussion in the form of a frenzy of conferences that may not be coherent, but are certainly positive. Open discussion not limited to academics and there is general agreement that change must be from the inside and not externally imposed.

The Arab world distrusts western policy, viewing US and European approaches, as being essentially the same. Democracy is at the top of everyone's agenda, but their view is flawed, and generalisations, on the part of both the Arabs and the West, are simplistic.

The Middle East itself aspires to freedom, and as such there is no need to impose it. Governments in the region are aware of this and choose to suppress this aspiration because they know what it would entail, and portray it as Westerners meddling in their internal governmental affairs, thus propagating further misunderstanding.

Democracy and human rights have not been a priority of western policy – they may have been part of the agreements, but they have tended to be trumped by other policy considerations. Evidence from USAID: out of over 1.4bn USD, 1.09% has been dedicated to Democracy issues. Even the instruments we possess for promoting democracy are not employed. Banking and Customs protocols, which were to be updated, have not been.

The Ten Point Plan and Jack Straw's speech, are a good starting point, but 50% of 800m Euros budget is not spent, procedural changes are necessary. More resources should be dedicated to the Mediterranean and Arab world.

Jack Straw claimed we should engage with Islamists; the problem is how to identify Islamists? How can we engage in them? Why do we not engage with the liberals, who are numerous, but poorly organised?

Bonino made two recommendations: pooling resources and appointing a commissioner for the Mediterranean who would be responsible for the issues at hand and accountable to public opinion and confrontational towards member states.

## **Session III      Political Reform in the Middle East: Can Positive Engagement Work**

**Gilles Kepel**, CERI, Paris

"We are at a crossroads. The EU must define its singularity and uniqueness vis-à-vis a region that is not only its neighbour, but which is also part of us, and which we are part of".

Professor Kepel recommended niche engagement with and identified the following as being a potential means through which the EU can engage with the Middle East: "We should establish what we, as Europeans, are good at, education of the elite. Arab elites have tended to go to the US for their university education, but that many are no longer able to do so for various reasons. This is an opportunity and we must develop a vision to enable us to take advantage of this."

With regards to engaging with Islamists, he believes that European citizens should not subsidise any group's activities and that Europeans should be weary of defining themselves as Christians as opposed to Middle Easterners who are Muslim.

On the micro-projects that the EU can engage in, he stated that there is a pressing need to deal with education, migration, labour efficiencies and rule of law. We should, he said, concentrate on training journalists to be part of a free press. "We should use our unique situation as Europeans to build bridges with the Arab world, and focus particularly on the younger generation."

On the Civility Programme, Professor Kepel stated that "The initiative taken by Civility is certainly the right thing to do, and we should use meetings like this to set up a taskforce to implement changes at the EU level...I am confident that the time is right"

**Rosemary Hollis**, Head of the Middle East Programme, Royal Institute for International Affairs.

Rosemary Hollis provided a detailed review of the Civility Programme's publication, *European Policies for Middle East Reform: A Ten Point Action Plan*. Her comments included the following

This initiative, exemplified in the pamphlet, is based on the broad and possibly questionable assumption that democratization, as in the rule of law, accountability, participation and so on will be the antidote to anti-Western terrorism. She would caution that this assumption may be misplaced, despite the fact that all these are worthwhile causes in their own right, in much the same way that the Euro-Med Conference's assumption that you could reduce the number of North African immigrants coming to Europe by improving their lot at home.

Dr Hollis cautions that if conditionality was to be thoroughly implemented we may then load these agreements with political compliance requirements that would be detrimental to the economic reforms that are the basis of the agreements.

"If we are to engage with Islamist groups, I share Emma Bonino's concern about who to engage with, and what the subject of the conversation will be. If it is social issues, fine, but the idea is not to subsidise these groups' Islamist causes at the expense of their political competitors, who will not be receiving these subsidies."

Dr Hollis also reminded the audience that aid given to promote good governance in the economic sphere has in the past served in part to entrench existing autocracies. She suggested that perhaps more coordination and cooperation between EU, the U.S, Nato and G8 might not automatically result in better and speedier democratic reform in the Middle East.

In her address, Dr Hollis stated that working to deliver a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the creation of a Palestinian state, would be the largest contribution that the West could make to reform of the Arab world.

**Ali Rahnema, American University of Paris.**

Mr. Rahnema identified three issues that are relevant to the debate on political reform in the region:

The relationship between academic and political worlds. Reflection versus action. Action precludes hedging, reflection generates no responsibility. These two approaches to strategic dilemmas in the Middle East tend to be incompatible, but are often uttered by the same people, in the same breath. Firstly the claim that 'we will not proscribe', and secondly that we do have an agenda, that agenda of freedom. It is interventionist to impose a 'freedom' agenda such as we see in Iraq. Some people thought that globalization would provide the solution to this apparent dilemma, the free flow of goods and services is not the same as the free flow of ideas, which has been going on for far longer than economic globalization.

The position of EU States' relationship with Iran. How do the E.U's economic stakes in Iran weigh in comparison to the EU's concern about civil society? Depending on which is more important, the EU's policy will be different inasmuch as they will have to engage either with the State or with Civil Society. In the context of EU policy the choice is either/or and at present we are seeing conflicting signals. This will cause people to lose faith in what the EU can do.

With regards to the situation in Iran, Professor Rahnema believes that given the choice of religious zeal or social welfare, Iranians would undoubtedly choose the latter and they expect to have to do this themselves. He also argued that the state itself has chosen pragmatism over doctrine. This is attributed to the safeguarding of power by the ruling sections of Iranian society and thus it is rational for them to maximise that time by finding the reasonable balance. Khatami's election led to hope, excitement, and participation. The reverse has taken place with the most recent Iranian elections that have led to anger, dejection and fury.

There are two options open to Iranian society now: to engage or to reject. Iranians have chosen to engage, but they will do so in the non-political and/or economic field rather than in the political realm. What we have seen since the elections is the Conservatives trying to make changes that the reformists were not able to.

Professor Rahnema concluded by stating: "The litmus test is this: what will happen to the opposition and to intellectuals in Iran post elections? What will happen to the freedom of press and the freedom of speech? The economic interest of the West in Iran is far greater than its interest in democracy and freedom. As long as the West does not interfere in Iran's economic position, change will be possible."

**Fred Halliday**, Professor of International Relations, London School of Economics  
Professor Halliday had just returned from a tour to a number of countries in the Arabian Gulf including Bahrain, Qatar and Yemen. He briefed the audience about his impressions of opportunities for reform in the region based on his latest visit; he included the following observations:

There are significant changes taking place, although they cannot be described as wholly democratic. They are, rather, more akin to the process of liberalization. He proposed Bahrain, as an example, where previously people were being tortured and killed, in state sponsored violence for speaking against the regime. The situation is, however, changing: people are still not able to say 100% of what they think, but they can say 80% which is an improvement on how it used to be.

In Yemen, people accede to pluralism not because of their own ideological beliefs, but because they are told to do so by their governments. There is enormous suspicion of the U.S in Yemen where everything is blamed on the U.S. The roadmap is seen as nothing more than 'Peres recycled'. People have a strong conception of the Arab world and its leaders as innocent.

The human intelligence failures in Iraq were not due to an insufficient number of spies on the ground, but rather to do with having people with limited knowledge of the Middle East adjudicating on intelligence. The question was not 'what does Saddam Hussein have, or what does he not have?' Rather the question was 'what was he thinking?' The people in Washington simply did not have any idea of how Saddam Hussein thought, a matter, as Professor Halliday himself put it, 'which academics might have something to say about.'

On the issue of Arab reform, Professor Halliday stated that it is problematic because there is no freedom of the press in the region, or at least, it is limited by very tightly maintained red lines. Islamists control al-Jazeera and much of the apparently free media.

Professor Halliday went on to argue that there is no such thing as 'the Islamic World'. Indeed Islam is not relevant to the actual problem, which is corruption.

In conclusion he made two final points: "We should ignore what the US wants us to do. And we should be modest since we are not particularly impressive ourselves – we are responsible for the very problems we are trying to solve...lets stay engaged, but not overstate what we can do."

#### **Session IV: Member States' Evolving Strategies in the Wider Middle East**

**Volkmar Wenzel**, Head of the Task Force for Dialogue with the Islamic World, German Foreign Ministry

Mr. Wenzel informed the audience of the German government's engagement with the region. Highlights from his speech include:

Germany is trying to increase its aid to the MENA region from a relatively low base, in order to respond to the challenges faced and contribute its fair share to the solutions. About 25% of that aid is bilateral and 20% is to do with education. Political foundations face many problems in the Middle East such as being accused of and charged with espionage, and meeting with hostility.

The Foreign Ministry sees itself as becoming increasingly active in the region. This is to be achieved by the nomination of a Commissioner for Dialogue with the Islamic World, and greater importance placed on German embassies basing future projects on more definite knowledge. Public diplomacy is also relevant where there is a need to engage with people from all walks of society, and the Germans are pressing forward with this, even though there is not a large Arab world orientation in their present policies.

The Germans put great emphasis on the Internet, which they believe is an insufficiently employed resource in the Middle East. Germany spends about Euro100m a year on cultural issues. 200'000 students from the Middle East are studying in Germany and the German Foreign Ministry intends to use them as a resource.

Common workshops with Iranian judges and scholars from the Islamic World have been taken place, Germany and Europe now have a big opportunity, because of the Bologna Accord, which concentrates on developing European universities. Euro8-9m is spent on building infrastructure, funding democratic projects. The German approach is to use its society's associational life and cultural activities to integrate with other nations, but this is problematic since many civil society foundations in the Middle East are not allowed to take money from foreign donors. Also, donors are used to going through official channels.

Mr. Wenzel believes that we should speak to all political organizations, including Islamists. But those groups must be in some sense transparent to qualify for aid.

**Brigitte Curmi, Middle East and North Africa Dept, Quai d'Orsay**

Ms Curmi commented on the French perception of the Greater Middle East. In her speech she raised the following points:

The challenge is to bring the Arab world into the globalisation process, culturally, socially and economically, and to address local issues, the most important of which are Iraq and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The French government has begun high level consultations to better inform itself of the internal situation in each Middle Eastern country.

Immigration and social development are the French government's priorities, but it wants to tailor its activities specifically, on a country-by-country basis.

Security issues should be de-prioritised since they send out the wrong signals to the Arab world about what the West really wants, and generate distrust and suspicion.

She has serious reservations about the reduction of issues into religious/dogmatic questions. She believes that the EU should use its tools more efficiently.

**Peter Tejler, Head of the Middle East Dept, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Mr. Tejler stated that the Arab Human Development Report is a problem because it fails to take into account legitimate divergences between nations and states and cultures.

Northern Europeans have a credibility problem in the region, despite having no legacy of imperialism in the region, and this may in part be due to Western governments' policies towards the region.

He was also concerned that aid has come to be used as a means of gaining bragging rights in an intra-European beauty contest. Governments should be encouraged to address problems in the region. One issue relevant to this is related to the fact that MENA countries are not in fact that poor. How then do we tell Governments to redistribute their wealth, since it is not our role to do so. We can only encourage civil societies to pressure their governments to take those steps, and encourage governments to address the issues, but we must not participate.

Very little regional cooperation exists in the Middle East. Europe should be more involved in promoting bilateral and multilateral trade and economic agreements.

Mr. Tejler disagrees with Professor Kepel's position regarding elite education. He believes that everyone should be better educated to a basic level before we start thinking about promoting tertiary education of elites, since it takes more than elites for a civil society to function.

He went on to suggest that the EU must put pressure on Arab governments to commit politically to the liberalization/democratization processes. The EU must make it clear that it is Arab governments' economic responsibility (with EU help) to make sure that the situation improves, and must show them that it is in their benefit to do so.

### **George Joffe, University of Cambridge**

George Joffe outlined the arguments for engaging with the region from a European perspective. He also examined the issues that Europeans may have to be dealt with in the process.

Mr. Joffe argued that security is a primary motivation for getting involved in the region and there should be no illusions as to the reasons for European engagement with the Middle East.

Energy and oil were highlighted as another motivation. He noted that Europe imports 30% of its oil and up to 25% of its gas from the Mediterranean basin and the Gulf.

Europe's own minority communities were referred to as another factor which requires European policy makers to take an interest in their communities of origin, with whom they may retain atavistic links. The U.S does not have this problem, and although EU states may see these links as an asset, there are, nonetheless, security implications.

George Joffe then raised the following questions: whom should we interact with in the region, how, and why? He stated that:

'Intervention, pre-emptive or not, must be more than simply using unchecked force without thought of long term objectives. We must be mindful of enforcing of the ideas of liberal economies, good governance, democracy and stability are questionable, particularly when the implications are unknown.'

Europe is both a partner and a paradigm for inter-state cooperation. Social and cultural change should also be considered alongside economic and political reform, and as such Europe needs to consider the breadth of its own views on democracy before trying to export them.

The term 'Islamist' is too broad. He suggests that dialogue with a multiplicity of partners would be an important consideration.

Beyond intervention, interaction may take several forms: The Barcelona Process, a holistic process for solving the issues of the Mediterranean; the Wider Europe Initiative offers the same benefits to Middle Eastern states as are offered to Switzerland and Iceland, provided that they undertake certain reforms. Two American initiatives: Greater Middle East Initiative whose purpose is to encourage empowerment of women, democratic reform, liberal economic development in exchange for free trade agreement with the U.S.

In outlining some of the problems that may arise, George Joffe pointed out that these are contradictory initiatives and Middle Eastern States that do not like EU proposals can choose to adopt US initiatives. It should then be accepted that the EU and the U.S have distinctly different agendas, and the red lines mentioned earlier should be reconsidered.

He also argued that there has to be a fundamental acceptance of the problems faced by the Middle East, and it should be noted that the problems highlighted by the Arab Human Development Report have been known to Middle East scholars for 20 years. The report was significant only in that it was generated in the region.

The dislike of the U.S in the Middle East must be addressed, and this involves addressing the Arab-Israeli question. The solution to the problem requires an understanding that both sides are arguing a legitimate case, and the comprehension of both sides' position and argumentation.

"Until the question of the Arab-Israeli conflict is addressed, E.U statesmen may spend their billions of euros, they may engage in all sorts of discussions, projects, micro or macro and they will be a complete waste of time because they will carry no conviction in a complex and diverse region that is capable of its own intellectual analysis of the problems it faces; and if it is going to engage with Europe it needs to know that it will do so on the basis of equal partners."