Political Islam in Egypt

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Abstract.
Drawing on results from a survey among members of the Muslim Brothers and the Wasat Party, Emad El-Din Shahin, Professor at the American University in Cairo and Harvard University, looks at changes in Egyptian political Islam and examines the views of mainstream Islamists of the European Union polices and initiatives in the Mediterranean. The discussion focuses on the Muslim Brothers, the country's main opposition force, and the Wasat Party, as purporting to represent an evolving Islamic centrist orientation. Despite their seemingly different orientations, the commonalities between the two groups regarding their views of the EU far outweigh their differences. Their shared Islamic frame of reference and a perceived inconsistency of EU policies in the region largely explain this similarity.

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POLITICAL ISLAM IN EGYPT

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1. Changes in Egyptian Political Islam

The landscape of political Islam in Egypt has changed dramatically over the past decade and a half. Since the mid-1990s, the country's mainstream Islamic movement, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB, or Muslim Brothers), has undergone a significant transformation; an Islamist centrist party, *Hizb al-Wasat*, has emerged and for the past ten years has been struggling to acquire official recognition; and the country's radical movements, especially the *Jama`a Islamiya*, have reassessed some of their tactics.

The Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest grass-roots Islamist movement of the twentieth century (established in 1928) and perceives itself as "the mother of all centrist Islamist movements". It is an activist movement with a comprehensive reform message, combining multi-dimensional spheres that give the movement reasonable space for manoeuvre, even when it is severely constrained by the Egyptian regime. The movement is a synthesised version of earlier reform movements (such as *Salafi* reformism and Islamic modernism) and can claim to be the heir of 'reformist Islam'.[1] It has adopted a gradualist bottom-up approach to change that seeks to re-socialise society along Islamic lines: the individual, family, society, and then the state. The Brotherhood is also one of the most institutionalised movements in Egypt. Its structure has survived the lifetime of its founder, Hassan Al-Banna (1906-1949), despite suffering repeated phases of brutal regime repression. All this has generated a particular political orientation that is characterised by caution, gradualism, slow adaptation, and fear of experimentation and failure. In the movement's view, failure will not simply reflect on the leadership of the group at a particular moment, but on the entire movement. It could even affect the fortunes of political Islam as an alternative to post-independence foreign-inspired secular models. Therefore, preserving the survival and structural coherence of the movement has always been a top priority. It is an objective that for long has dominated the Brotherhood's political calculations and levels of interaction in the political process, and enabled the movement to exhibit a pragmatic attitude whenever the circumstances warrant it.

In recent years, the Muslim Brotherhood has revised its political strategies and policy orientations. To many observers, it seems as if it has made a clear and deliberate departure from its traditionally cautious approach. During the 1970s and early 1980s, the Muslim Brothers rejected the idea of getting directly involved in the political process, participating in the parliament, or taking part in the syndicates. Their attention was mainly focused on rebuilding the organisation's structures and avoiding confrontations with the regime that might have provoked repression of the movement. By the mid-1980s, they gradually began to participate in parliamentary elections in alliance with other political parties like the Wafd Party in 1984 and the Labour Party in 1987. They also contested elections in syndicates and succeeded in gaining control over many of the latter during the 1990s. After 2000, the Muslim Brothers adopted an increasingly assertive strategy in their relationship with the regime and a pragmatic reform

[1] The author refers here to the orientation of the movement's founder, Hassan al-Banna. For the reformist meaning of *Salafiya*, see Shahin (1995).

agenda. This change became more marked in early 2005, when the Muslim Brotherhood insisted on reasserting their presence in the political process, defied regime bans on their demonstrations and even threatened 'civil disobedience'. They also cooperated with other political forces that did not share their ideological perspectives and jointly formed reform-oriented fronts.

All these developments come against a long background of major revisions introduced gradually since the mid-1990s. These revisions were clearly reflected in the movement's documents in 1994, its electoral programme of 1995, its Reform Initiative of 2004, and its electoral programme of 2005. They are also reflected in a seemingly consistent vision among the movement's leadership towards reform and the means to achieve it. In essence, the documents and statements reassert a commitment to the civic nature of political authority, notwithstanding their adherence to the principles of the *shari`a* and respect for the basic values and instruments of democracy; respect for public freedoms; acceptance of pluralism; transfer of power through clean and free elections; sovereignty of the people; separation of power; rejecting the use of violence and adopting gradual and legal means to achieve reform; acceptance of citizenship as the basis for rights and responsibilities for Muslims and non-Muslims; and support of human rights, including those of women and the Copts.[2]

The changes could be ascribed to developments within the movement itself and in the Egyptian political process in general. By the end of the 1980s, the Muslim Brothers were able to rebuild their structures and better position themselves to engage in the political process and interact with other political actors. A relatively younger generation of Islamists with different political experiences and a more proactive political culture joined the movement and gradually managed to influence its orientations. In 1995 the Muslim Brotherhood experienced a split within its ranks, which underscored the need for change. Several young members, later to form the Wasat Party, broke away in protest at the movement's lack of ideological clarity and rigid leadership style. The ascendancy of Mahdi Akef as the General Guide in 2004 also contributed to changes in the movement's strategies and orientations. Akef does not shy away from politics and is known to side with the views of the movement's younger generation.

By the end of the 1990s, the MB had concluded that its policy of trying to accommodate the regime's restrictions and absorb its repression was not having the desired placatory effect, as the regime systematically continued to crack down on the movement and its active leadership and members. Within the larger political arena, Egypt was also changing. The regime's legitimacy and popularity was eroding. To contain increasing popular dissatisfaction with its performance and stagnation, it began to allow some political opening that generated pro-reform movements and new political actors. As the largest organised political force, the Muslim Brothers had to adapt quickly to this changing environment to safeguard their influence from newly emerging pro-reform groups (like *Kifaya* and others). The Brothers' adoption of a reformist agenda and a more pragmatic strategy paid off, as they emerged after the parliamentary elections of 2005 as the largest opposition force, capturing 20% of parliamentary seats. The Brothers' remarkable performance was a result of long years of reasserting their presence at the public level, their direct engagement with the people, an appealing and pragmatic reform agenda, and willingness to confront the regime and pay the price of their defiance.

At the same time, the MB had to contend with a new rival, in the form of the Wasat Party. Some observers suggest that if Wasat policies were combined with MB structures the century-old quest for a programmatic mainstream Islamic modernism could be resolved. The Brotherhood certainly has the numbers and discipline, while the Wasat has a centrist vision and a young

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[2] See the complete text of the Muslim Brothers Reform Initiative, 3 March 2004. For a critical discussion of the level of the Brotherhood's commitment to these issues, see Brown et al. (2006).

leadership, but without a wide following. The origins of the Wasat date back to the mid-1990s, when a group of young members of the Muslim Brotherhood split because of differences in orientations and in protest at internal organisational rigidity within the movement. They formed a party and applied for a licence three times, in 1996, 1998, and 2004, to the regime-dominated Party Formation Committee. Each time, the party's request was denied. The founders pursued their case through the judicial channels, which have also repeatedly denied them recognition; the reason given was that the party's programme was not sufficiently distinguishable from those of already existing political parties.

In fact, the Wasat's programme does present a new orientation. It is a civic political party with an Islamic reference that attempts to appeal to broad segments of the Egyptian population. The party makes a clear distinction between politics and religious proselytising (*da`wa*). It presents Islam as a cultural framework that can assimilate the religious aspirations of Muslim Egyptians and the natural cultural affiliations of the country's Copts. In fact, several founding members of the party were Copts. According to its programme, the party's vision of Islam is based on three fundamental pillars: citizenship that provides equal rights for Muslims and non-Muslims; the right of all citizens to assume all public positions; and coexistence with other cultures on the basis of respect for cultural specificities, justice and equality, interdependence and mutual interests. The Wasat has reconfirmed its unequivocal commitment to peaceful and legal change and to the fundamental democratic principles of: sovereignty of the people; separation of powers; transfer of power; citizenship; freedom of belief; political and intellectual pluralism; full equality between men and women; freedom of expression; and respect for human rights. The Wasat also seeks through democratic means to implement the principles of the *shari`a*, through a selective and modernist process that, while achieving the objective of the *shari`a*, would lead to the development and progress of society.[3]

2. The Islamists and the European Union

In order to ascertain the views of the Muslim Brothers and the Wasat Party of European Union policies, questionnaires were sent to 20 members in Cairo from September to October 2006 with the leadership of the two movements, along with a number of rank and file members. The questionnaire, in Arabic, appears in annex to this document. Members of the Muslim Brothers consulted included Deputy General Guide Muhammad Habib; members of the Guidance Bureau Abd al-Moneim Abul-Foutouh, Mahmud Ghozlan and Muhammad Sami; member of the Press Syndicate Board Ali Abd al-Fattah; Ibrahim Houdaiby, a Western-educated and active member; and a member of the Political Office who wished to remain anonymous.[4] Members of the Wasat Party included Abul-`Ula Madi, representative of the founders; and leading members Amr Farid and Hossam Khalaf.[5]

2.1 Europe's Democratic Model

There is a diversity of opinion amongst Egyptian Islamists regarding the West and Europe as democratic models, but it is still possible to discern common elements. Recently, many leading Islamists have explicitly declared their commitment to democracy, but they frequently

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[3] The Wasat Programme, available at http://www.alwasatparty.com.

[4] It is regrettable that Isam al-Iryan, an articulate leading Muslim Brothers member who participated in discussions with European ambassadors in 2003, could not be interviewed, as he was detained in May 2006.

[5] Translation of written replies to the questionnaire carried out by the author, except for Ibrahim Houdaiby's, who preferred to give his feedback entirely in English.

distinguish between democracy as a system of values and democracy as a policy instrument. Most Islamists have no problem with the latter; the issue is with some of the values on which the Western model of democracy rests.

On the one hand, there seems to be agreement on recognising European democracy as a model, but one that is particularly for Europeans. There is also a feeling that the democratic values in this model are often contradicted by European practice and policies in the region. Muhammad Habib, Deputy General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, views Europe as representing a model of democracy which "is particular to European societies only. This model is often disregarded when Europe interacts with the Arab and Islamic worlds". It is driven by "the interests of European states that do not object to supporting repressive regimes and do not accept the outcomes of democracy [in the region]". For Abd al-Moneim Abul-Foutouh, member of the Guidance Bureau, "Europe presents a model of democracy from a Western perspective". He also identifies a number of positive elements in this model: "the freedom of expression is guaranteed, in general. Human rights are respected. There is also a genuine respect for the opinion and will of the people. In most cases, the people elect the government they want to represent them. And they can hold that government accountable". Muhammad Sami, also member of the Guidance Bureau, agrees, "Yes, for its own citizens in their respective countries. As for us and for our Arab and Islamic causes, it does not represent a reference; their model has no democracy or justice for us". Ibrahim el-Houdaiby, a Western-educated active member, views Europe as presenting a model of democracy:

> In the sense that the people do choose who rules in free, fair, and democratic elections. These elected governments are, for the most part, accountable to the people who elected them. Furthermore, there is a general respect for human rights, at least within the Union, and there are real, pro-democracy movements that work to overcome the problems of democracy. Yet, most important is that the EU has one of the most significant benefits of democracy which is the self-reforming system that allows those who see real problems with the system to change it from within. Nonetheless, the EU is not the only model of democracy, as there are different models in the world. As the Middle East takes other steps towards democracy there could be more models. It is important to understand that the real tenets of democracy are accountability and answerability. That is: a democracy is real when it is governing on behalf of the country's people, according to an agenda they accept, and is accountable to and removable by these people.

Some views are more qualified. In the words of Mahmud Ghozlan, member of the Guidance Bureau, Europe "does not present a model of democracy for me". Similarly, Ali Abd al-Fattah, member of the Press Syndicate Board, qualifies his answer by saying that "Europe does not present an *ideal* model for democracy".[6]

Wasat views of Europe as a democratic model were largely positive. Abul-`Ula Madi, representative of the Wasat founders, responded with an unqualified, "Yes"; Amr Farid, "Yes, with some reservation"; and Hossam Khalaf, "Yes, with regards to the electoral system and the transfer of power".

2.2   Reservations on Europe's Democratic Model

All Islamists expressed some reservations about the European model of democracy, especially the relationship between the latter and Islamic precepts, as well as to some European policies that violate democratic practices. For Abul-Foutouh, "the West is preoccupied with material issues. Its democracy looks at the human being as a material entity. It overlooks the spiritual

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[6] Emphasis in original.

aspects that are there and cannot be denied". He also expresses reservation about the state-money-media nexus,

> the exploitation of the government and economic institutions of the media to influence public opinion in a specific direction. As was the case in Britain during the war on Iraq, when they convinced the public of the weapons of mass destruction issue and that Iraq represented a danger to world security and stability (…) In some cases, this democracy is marred by issues such as discrimination against some segments of society, despite the fact that this contradicts the democratic principles that stand against discrimination.

Ghozlan is more explicit about the philosophical differences between the European and Islamic models. For him,

> ultimate sovereignty in Western democracy belongs to the people, and that gives them the right to legislate anyway they want, regardless of what is considered from a *shar`i* point of view as *halal* (licit) or *haram* (illicit), or even if it contradicted moral principles, such as not to commit adultery, homosexuality, alcohol, and gambling (…) All these are deplorable issues, but still are considered legal in the West.

Habib explained that "The EU places freedom before justice. We try to balance the two. We want to strike a balance between the rights of the individual and the rights of society". Most of the interviewees pointed to issues where Islamists and the EU differ on human rights, such as female inheritance, the rights of homosexuals and sexual freedom. Ghozlan opines that,

> Our vision of human rights is based on Islam which, centuries before Europe knew human rights, has approved these rights in the most perfect way and to the largest extent. Whereas Islam approved the rights of the individual, it did not consider them as absolute. It balanced between those rights and the rights of the society. Europe's vision of human rights, on the other hand, is based on the philosophy of individualism which takes the side of individual interest over society's interest.

Egyptian Islamists also invariably think that European democracy is compromised by the nature of some EU external policies. Ghozlan, for instance, refers to certain European policies that for him contradict democracy:

> Its [European] unjust policies towards popular resistance movements, such as Hamas and Hizbollah, and [constitutes] them terrorist movements, in a clear contradiction to international law double standards. While the West supports the Zionist entity and overlooks its possession of nuclear weapons and avoids a confrontation with North Korea, it besieges Iran for trying to develop a nuclear programme for peaceful purposes, and not nuclear weapons. [It] supports dictatorial systems in the Arab world, while besieging the government of Hamas, which has been democratically elected, in order to bring it down (…) Western democracy works for the dominance of one people over others or the control over the markets, or the seizure of land, or the monopoly over the oil resources. For all this, it wages wars, spills blood under false pretexts. The best evidence for that is what is happening in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Lebanon, and the sanctions that the Congress and the House of Commons issue to punish certain states.

Similarly, Muhammad Sami's reservations focus on policies. Europe lacks a normative influence "because of the double standard through which Europe addresses our just causes in Palestine, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and others. Europe stands with the aggressor and does not defend the wronged. It wrongly takes the side of Israel. It does not seriously advocate human rights". The latter point is shared by the member of the Political Office who points to the "discrimination against Muslims in European countries". According to Houdaiby:

> The intellectual and philosophical pillars of democracy… are not the same in the EU and the Middle East…. For instance, democracy in the West in general, or at least as I regard it, is a problem-solving mechanism that aims at resolving the problems between different

individuals in society by guiding them to form alliances based on interests, and then to compete for power to protect or pursue their interests. This creates an interest-based society where people pursue the interests of their ethnic, religious, economic or social groups rather than the interests and well-being of the society as a whole. Democracy, or 'Shura' in the Islamic philosophy, is not merely a problem-solving mechanism that is used to prevent conflicts within society. Rather, it is an ethic that consultation should take place before taking any decision. Therefore, the mindset of the voter is different, as he seeks the well-being of the 'umma' at large, even if that runs against his own personal interests or objectives. This means that votes going to different groups is not due to differences in interest, but due to different understandings of what best serves the interests of the society as a whole….[and]… there is a balance between the interests of the individual and the society'.

2.3 Comparing Europe and the United States

Egyptian Islamists perceived there to be major differences between the European and American models of democracy. They invariably favoured the European model, mainly because of the influence of money and the media over American democracy. Habib saw the major differences as lying in "the use of money, corporate politics, and the media. All play a major role in American democracy. Furthermore, the average American is not politicised in general". Abul-Foutouh considers "the American model, in general, to be very pragmatic and more materialistic than the European model". Despite the fact that Ghozlan saw "no difference between the two models with regards to their philosophical basis", he claims that

> the difference I see is the greater influence of money and media in the American model. This is clearly perceived in the impact of lobbies that finance election campaigns, the policies followed by the administration, and especially the fact that the American people are not politically aware.

Houdaiby makes a rather detailed comparison between the two models of democracy:

> The US model of democracy is inefficient, and maybe designed to be so. It is a model in which the checks and balances within the system, as well as the relationship between the federal government and the state governments, prevent any government from making any acute change in policy… The US President does not need to have the approval of the people in many cases… He is not elected directly by the people in many ways, and can hardly be removed by the people, or even their representatives in Congress. Most of the systems in the EU … tend to be more representative. People directly elected the government… Different governments, in such systems, can implement significantly different policies if they enjoy enough public support to come to power with a fundamentally different agenda, as has happened in Italy and Spain lately. This is partially because of the differences in party systems in the US and the EU. In the United States, there are no clear cut differences between the ideologies of Democrats and Republicans on most issues….In the EU, the situation is different as there are different political parties with clear differences in agendas and priorities. Most of these political parties have well-developed ideological and philosophical frameworks within which they move, but they continue to uphold their principles. In the US, political parties tend to be more pragmatic, and care less about ideology.

Most interviewees clearly favoured the European model. Ali Abd al-Fattah, characterises the European model as "less unfair and less discriminatory than the American model. The unfair characteristics of the American model appear clearly in Iraq, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and the unequivocal support for the Zionist entity".

All the Wasat members articulated preference for the European model. For Madi, "the European model is more pluralistic and more profound than the American model". Amr Farid explained that, "the European model is more credible than the American one. It is not based on excessive

fundraising during election time, as is the case in the US for example". As for Khalaf, he sees the European model to be, "based on a more cultured people than that of the US".

2.4 Muslim Minority Rights within Europe

The interviews carried out with Egyptian Islamists revealed that concern has grown over what is perceived to be discrimination in at least some member states against Muslim minorities. Habib asserted that on this issue "each European state is different. However, there is clear racism in dealing with certain issues as in the case of France and Britain". Ghozlan, on the other hand, attested to clear violations of Muslim rights throughout Europe,

> It is clear that they are treated in a discriminatory way not only when it relates to their political, social, and economic rights, but also as they are widely exposed to securitisation and detentions merely on suspicions. Above all, there is suppression of their religious rights as they ban Muslim women and girls from wearing the veil and dismiss them from their jobs and schools, and attack their beliefs.

The issue of the veil evokes immediate criticism. Muhammad Sami contends that, "Europe does not tolerate seeing a veil on the head of a Muslim girl in public schools". For him this is an indication that "Europe's democracy lags behind [in terms of] Muslims' rights". Abd al-Fattah also does not consider Muslims in Europe to enjoy equal or full rights. "Their conditions run contrary to the principles of human rights", he asserts.

Abul-Foutouh expressed some degree of optimism: "The West and democracy have adopted citizenship as the basis for rights and responsibilities. Therefore, the crisis of minorities, Muslims or non-Muslims, should presumably dissipate. What is happening otherwise is the result of [mistaken] practices". Madi makes clear distinctions between European countries on this issue. "There are differences in the positions of European countries with regards to the rights of Muslim minorities. The United Kingdom is better than the Netherlands. Germany has not recognised Islam as a religion until now". On the other hand, another Wasat member, Farid, links certain European policies to racism. "Racism continues to dominate European policies. This is evident through the rights of Muslim minorities in Europe (Germany, France), and the countries that have a high percentage of Muslims. It is also clear in the way Europe handles the Turkish case and its application to join the EU". Khalaf shifts the focus to the Muslims themselves. "There are rights that might be threatened, but I am not sure whether this is because the Muslims are reluctant to request them or because they cannot request them".

3. Islamists and EU Policies in the Mediterranean: Where is the EU?

It is strikingly evident that the majority of Islamists have no strong awareness of EU policies and initiatives in the Mediterranean. The following reasons were emphasised by different Islamists for their lacking a clear idea of the EU's Mediterranean policy:

- The EU's policy itself is not clear or transparent;
- the EU does not have a strong enough political presence or an influential role in the region;
- the diversity and inconsistency of European policy towards the Mediterranean;
- there have been no tangible results or benefits from the 10-year old Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP);
- EU interests to regain its lost power in the region undermine enthusiasm for Europe;
- the dependence of European policy on the US's agenda, even if this agenda is against the people's preferences, the examples of Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon being good cases in point;

-   the EU's association of Islam and the Islamists with terrorism and extremism;
-   Europe's position towards the Muslim minorities in their countries and neighbouring states;
-   the EU has so far thought little of the Islamists: they claim to stand for democracy while excluding the Islamists;

A general complaint was that Islamists had not taken interest in EU policy because of, what they judged to be, the lack of vision on the part of the EU towards Islamists. A common line was: 'When they make up their mind that they want to include us, perhaps we can crystallise our views of Europe'.

Additional reasons attribute this unclear vision to the conditions of the Islamists themselves. One respondent listed the problems as,

> The Islamists are not a monolithic entity; they are not yet in a position to make decisions and formulate concrete polices; there is a scarcity of intellectuals and strategists among the Islamists; weak institutionalisation within the Islamic movements; failure to include this issue on the agenda of priorities; and the regime's ban on the Islamists having contacts with the outside.

Egyptian Islamists admit that they have little idea of the details of specific EU policies. They show negligible understanding of or interest in the details of the Association Agreements or the way in which the EMP is being supplemented by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Commenting on the main features of EU policies in general, Habib thinks that "the European Union seeks to have its special policies with the Arab and Islamic worlds, but the lack of transparency and its susceptibility to US policy constitute an obstacle to the [promotion] of solid and correct relations". Abul-Foutouh contends that "as a member of the MB and as a political activist, I do not know much of the policies of the EU. This is because of the authoritarian regime in Egypt which attempts to prevent contacts between the national forces in Egypt and any outside parties in order to circumvent any cooperation between the two. They also try continuously to prevent outside parties from having a direct knowledge of us, so that the regime can be the only source for the image that Europeans have of these national forces". Ghozlan considers the main feature of EU policy to be its "dependency on US policy, and lack of independence in its decisions". Abd al-Fattah thinks that "EU policy has exercised a marginal role in the Palestinian problem and a marginal role in Lebanon and Algeria". Houdaiby also criticises EU policy for its lack of autonomy from the US:

> EU presence and policy in the region has hardly been autonomous from that of the US. Therefore, there has been only a minimal need to study it. Nonetheless, and since the war on Iraq, the EU has been more outspoken in its refusal to blindly adopt US policies in the region. It started formulating its own agenda, based on its own interests, and not those of the US. I still do not think that the EU's policy in the region is fully developed. This is because the EU has not yet fully developed internally, and therefore has not been able to synchronise the foreign policies of its members. Also, the EU has neither identified clearly its interests and strategic alliances in the region, nor has it fully developed political stances on different issues. This is because the EU is not yet well acquainted with the major political and social players in the region and does not yet fully understand the internal dynamics of its societies.

From Wasat, Madi believes that "Europe tries to play an important role in the region, but the US restricts and limits this role, despite the importance of the region for Europe as a neighbourhood, interests, and source for migration". Farid considers the European Union to be "very sympathetic towards Israel; dependent in most cases (especially the large European states) on US policy". It is also characterised by "racism towards Arab and Muslim minorities, even with their neighbours, such as Turkey, and ambitions regarding Arab natural resources". Khalaf

realises that EU policy "focuses on economic cooperation, which in the end produces a greater benefit for the EU because of the economic underdevelopment of the Middle East".

The perception is strong that the EU is essentially divided. For Abul-Foutouh, "we cannot talk about a consistent EU policy. Britain's position is different from France's. Germany sometimes differs from both". He considers this to be a weakness.

> There is a trend currently underway trying to formulate its positions and policies away from the influence of the US. This is very important. Some EU politicians are beginning to realise that they are closer to the Middle East than to the US, because of history and culture… The problem I still cannot understand is the slow pace of this move inside Europe. I cannot understand why many European states have not objected to US policies. I cannot understand it when our regimes follow US policies, because they are corrupt, repressive, authoritarian, and weak systems. They largely depend on the US. Some European states fear steering away from US polices, even if this runs against the interests of their people.

Habib considers "the willingness of some European countries to stand up for Arab rights" as a strong point in EU policy. Ghozlan identifies the weak points in EU policy in "following US polices; the unjust stands towards the causes of Muslims in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Iran; hostility towards a real democracy in Palestine; their support of dictatorships in the Arab world; and their harmful position towards Islam and Muslim minorities in Europe". Sami feels that some EU states "are expressing a willingness to defy US pressures, but the weak point is that they submit to secular extremists that agitate against Muslims in Europe". The member of the Political Office sees a number of strong points: "availability of financial support; stability of these programmes and clarity of their objectives; and good experience of the Europeans about the region". For him, the weak points are: "internal competition among the members over the Middle East region; competition with the US; and weak political stability in the region". For Abd al-Fattah, the strong points of European policies are: "dialogue with various partners; not giving in to the idea of a uni-polar system". The weakest point for him is the "EU's submission in the end to US policies".

Madi regards European policy as "more supportive than the American one of the issues of human rights, freedoms, and democracy". Its weakness, however, is that it exhibits "some degree of dependence on the polices of the US, especially in the Middle East, taking the side of Israel in its polices in most cases". Farid thinks that European policy "does not believe in cultural dialogue, but in exporting European culture" and that "the points of strength show only in individual cases, such as Spain's withdrawal of troops from Iraq, but does not come as a consistent collective policy as expected from a union". Khalaf believes that European policy "respects public opinion inside, except for the United Kingdom". Its weakness is the "submission to the agenda of the US in some cases as a result of US pressures and not out of persuasion".

Despite their reservations about EU policy, Egyptian Islamists view clear distinctions between the policies of the EU and the US. They see US policy as seeking domination and control, exhibiting a high propensity for the use of force; and not respecting international law. The European Union's policy is – they perceive – more understanding of the conditions and needs of the region and pays more attention to human rights and political freedoms. However, for some Islamists the lines that demarcate the two policies are sometimes blurred and narrow. Habib maintains that, "at least EU policies do not exhibit hegemonic practices and attempts to dominate the world such as those of the US". For Ghozlan, "The US seeks to build a universal empire in this century. It uses its striking military power – disregarding the freedoms, lives, and properties of the people. The EU's policy is based on relinquishing the idea of a universal empire of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries". The member of the Political Office considers EU policy to be "more understanding of the conditions and needs of the region. It is more calm

[peaceful]". Houdaiby believes that the "US no longer cares about international law and pursues its illegal interests causing so much global violence, while the EU still tends to abide by international law".

Madi also makes a distinction between EU and US policies. He sees "room for difference and manoeuvrability regarding some issues such as Palestine, Iraq, and Iran's nuclear issue". The EU pays "more attention to the issues of freedom and human rights". Farid thinks that these differences have narrowed over the past two decades. "There were differences during the 1980s and 1990s, but now there seem to be similarities after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At present, the EU's policies follow those of the US in most cases – except in some manoeuvres that Russia undertakes for material gains and not out of support for the Arab states". Khalaf considers that "US polices are based on total domination in the name of its interests and those of Israel. For European countries, their main concern is perhaps economic interests, not total domination".

4. How Europe can Support Democracy

Egyptian Islamists are clear that they are not looking for preferential engagement from the EU, but rather that European governments act in a way that is more consistent and faithful to their commitment to defend democratic values. Abul-Foutouh believes that the EU should begin to 'put some pressure on regimes to stop their repression and to start respecting the human rights of the Islamists and the national opposition". Ghozlan asserts that the "Islamists are not expecting much from the EU in terms of support of their political rights. All they hope for is that Europe stops supporting the despotic regimes in the Arab and Muslim worlds". The member of the Political Office believes that "the EU can defend the political rights of Islamists as individuals and give the regimes incentives to adopt democracy and respect human rights". Houdaiby does not expect the European Union to do anything specific for the Islamists, he claims however that "it could serve its strategic interests in the region by promoting real democracy. That means that the EU should stop supporting the tyrannical, authoritarian, corrupt regimes in the region politically and economically, and pressure them to move towards democracy regardless of the outcome. It is important to understand that Islamists do not live in isolated islands in their societies, but they are living, integral parts of these societies. The only way to defend their political rights is to defend the political rights of the societies [as a whole]". Abd al-Fattah thinks it would be useful if "the EU supported the cases of public liberties and the detainees; the cases of freedom of opinion, expression, and association; and the freedom to form political parties".

Wasat members also see a possible role for the EU within the larger framework of promoting democracy in Egypt. Madi thinks that the EU could "push the issue of freedoms, human rights, democratic transformation, and independence of the judiciary for all citizens and not only the Islamists". For Farid, the EU's policy towards the Islamists needs to be reconsidered: "Not to deal with them as terrorists, as the Euro-American media portrays them; not to pressure them to fail as they did with Hamas, but to allow them the opportunity to govern; and to respect the international conventions and the resolutions of the UN Security Council, especially regarding the Palestinian issue". Khalaf thinks that the EU can do more to "encourage the integration of the Islamists into the political process".

At present, Egyptian Islamists perceive that the EU continues to prop up authoritarian regimes in the region, and only supports democracy in principle where it does not threaten to bring Islamists to power. At the forefront of their minds are the concrete cases where the EU stood against democracy (Algeria and the election of Hamas) and Europe's silence towards the frequently fraudulent elections in the region. Abul-Foutouh slightly qualifies his critique of the EU, "*Until now* it still supports authoritarian regimes, but certainly not as much as the US does.

But so far we cannot say that it supports democracy".[7] Houdaiby laments the EU's inability to devise a clear strategy regarding democracy in the region: "It is clear that the EU has not yet formulated a well-developed vision and strategy for dealing with the dynamic political situation in the Middle East. Therefore, it seems the EU has decided to take the easy way, and follow the American strategy of supporting tyrannical regimes, and allowing only minimal margins of freedom that hardly allow for the people's will to be manifested".

4.1 Collaboration with Europe?

Islamists acknowledge the lack of any meaningful levels of cooperation so far between their organisations and the European Union. At most, Egyptian Islamists have occasionally participated as individuals in workshops or conferences on democracy and inter-faith or cultural dialogues with independent European counterparts, but not with the EU as such. They have no links in their social welfare activities to any EU programmes and initiatives in the country. In principle, they welcomed the prospect of greater collaboration, but insisted that this should take place on the basis of equality, transparency and respect for independence and cultural specificities. Abul-Foutouh asserted that, "As Muslim Brothers we reconfirm our rejection of receiving financial assistance (…) However, we do not object to cooperation as long as it takes place with transparency and clarity and on the basis of the existence of common interests for our country and for the Union".

Reconfirming their rejection of the possibility of receiving direct (financial) assistance or grants, the Muslim Brothers and the Wasat suggest many areas where cooperation could take place, including assistance; educational and cultural areas; media and tourism; support for non-governmental organisations and civil society institutions; industrial cooperation; trade and industry, research and professional training; vocational movement; the transfer of experiences of democratic transitions and ways to build serious and effective parties; commercial cooperation; and transferring experience of successful administrative systems.

Asked whether an Islamist-oriented government in Egypt would be likely to close off trade and investment to and from the EU, members of the MB and Wasat rejected this possibility. Abul-Foutouh insisted, "On the contrary, we will seek to open new channels for trade with everyone. The problem is that the Egyptian regime deals with the West as a follower, an approach which we reject. We cooperate and interact on the basis of equality". For him, equal trade relationships should be based on fair terms of trade and a fair market price. Ghozlan explains that "there is no need for more caution as long as investments achieve the interests of both sides'. Sami also agreed, "There is no need for more caution or objection. Free interaction with all is the essence and within the framework of mutual respect". From Wasat, Khalaf specified, "we encourage [more trade and investment] as long as it is in the interests of our country and is not based on domination and monopoly".

5. Conclusion

At the level of declaratory policy, the EU seems to realise the importance of engaging with moderate Islamists in Egypt, and in the region as a whole, for obvious reasons. Political Islam is one of the realities of the region and will not dissipate in the near future. It might even play an increasingly influential role in future years. The Islamists are major political actors in the political process of their respective countries, as demonstrated by the performance of the Muslim Brothers in the 2005 parliamentary elections and by their strong social presence in

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[7] Emphasis in original.

Egypt. The Muslim Brothers are potentially a major factor for the political stability of the country, especially given the looming succession crisis in Egypt. The EU's declared policy of democracy promotion in the region and respect for human rights as a means for achieving stability cannot be credible unless the EU supports the integration of the Islamists into the political process. Excluding and not recognising mainstream Islamists discredits democracy policy and will not promote stability.

Over the past decade and half, the Muslim Brotherhood has experienced a remarkable change in its orientation, discourse, and strategies. It seems to be gradually moving towards a mainstream orientation, yet clearly Islamic in outlook. Both the Brotherhood and the Wasat adhere to Islamic frameworks as the main source for their policy orientations. However, they have been trying to create a platform that could appeal to a wider audience, by committing themselves to: a reform agenda that is shared by the main pro-reform actors; the civic nature of authority; citizenship as the basis of equal rights and responsibilities, democratic principles and practices; and transfer of power, pluralism, and legal means for bringing about change. The leadership of the Muslim Brothers is aware of the domestic, regional, and international constraints surrounding them, to the extent of admitting publicly that their possible coming to power at present would not be in the interests of Egypt.[8] Before the parliamentary elections of 2005 were over, Khayrat al-Shatir, the second Deputy to the General Guide, tried to allay Western fears, urging the West that there was, "No need to be afraid of us".[9] Other leading members conveyed a similar message.[10] Reassurances were also given to the Copts and secular elites. Of course, the Islamists will remain the 'usual suspects'. In other words, their 'intentions' and commitment to democracy and reform will always be questionable to some. But perhaps this issue has already gone beyond intentions. The Brothers' new orientation has been included in the movement's main documents and reiterated in its leadership's public discourses. Through direct engagement, among other measures, the level of this commitment can be discerned.

In their views of the EU and its policies and initiatives in the region, it is clear that the MB and Wasat formulate these views on the basis of their Islamic framework and in response to their experience of EU policies on the ground. At the theoretical level, they acknowledge the different philosophical and moral basis behind the European model of democracy and they disapprove of some of its aspects. Yet, they are willing to accept it as reflecting Europe's particular historical and political evolution. Nevertheless, they clearly view this model as containing many positive aspects and they readily express preference for the European model compared to that of the US. The Islamists, in turn, expect the EU to look at their Islamic model as reflecting a particular historical and cultural experience and to coexist with it as a different model. At the level of policy, several issues stand out: the EU's position towards Israel and the Palestinian conflict; EU policy towards the freely elected government of Hamas; the situation in Iraq; the EU's continued support for autocratic regimes; and the rights of Muslim minorities in Europe. Almost all of these issues, regardless of Islamists or political Islam, need to be redressed at some point if the EU and the US want to ensure stability in the region. Despite the criticisms, the leadership of both the Muslim Brothers and the Wasat are still hopeful for better cooperation with the EU, at almost all levels, and expect this cooperation to increase if they come to power. To what extent are these expressed wishes genuine? This question is significant enough for the EU to take its declaratory policy a step further and engage with the Islamists at practical levels.

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[8] See Abul-Foutouh and al-Moneim (2005).

[9] al-Shatir (2005).

[10] See Habib (2005).

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Annex 1: Questionnaire submitted to the Muslim Brothers and Wasat party

السيد: _____ ،
_____

رؤية الإسلاميين لأوروبا كنموذج للديمقراطية:

1- هل تمثل أوروبا أو بعض الدول الأوروبية نموذجا للديمقراطية بالنسبة إليكم؟
_____
_____

2- إذا كانت الإجابة بـ(لا)، ما هي الأسباب التي لا تجعل منها نموذجا للديمقراطية؟
_____
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3- كيف تنظرون إلى مسألة حقوق الأقيات المسلمة في أوروبا؟
_____
_____

4- ما هو الفارق بين النموذج الأوروبي والنموذج الأمريكي للديمقراطية من وجهة نظركم؟
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_____

روية الإسلاميين للسياسة الخارجية للاتحاد الأوروبى (بما فى ذلك سياسة الشراكة الأورومتوسطية وسياسية الجوار الأوروبية)

1- هل تعتقدون أن لديكم فكرة واضحة عن السياسة الأوروبية تجاه منطقة البحر الأبيض المتوسط؟
_____
_____

2- ما هي في وجهة نظركم طبيعة أو أهم ملامح هذه السياسة؟
_____
_____

3- كيف تقيمون معرفتكم بالسياسات الأوروبية (من 1 إلى 5 مع كون 1 الأقل معرفة و5 هي الأكثر معرفة)
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4- ما هي ـفي وجهة نظركمـ أهم نقاط القوة والضعف في هذه السياسة؟
_____
_____

5- ما هو الفارق الرئيسي ـفي وجهة نظركم ـ بين سياسة الاتحاد الأوروبي وسياسة الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية؟
_____
_____

6- ما الذي يمكن للاتحاد الأوروبي القيام به للدفاع عن الحقوق السياسية للإسلاميين؟
_____
_____

7- من وجهة نظركم، هل يدعم الاتحاد الأوروبي الديمقراطية أم أنه يدعم النظم التسلطية؟

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_____

8- ماذا يعني لكم الانتقال من مرحلة سياسة الشراكة إلى سياسة الجوار؟

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_____

9- ما هي أهم أسباب عدم الإحساس بأهمية السياسة الأوروبية بالنسبة لكم كإسلاميين؟

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إمكانات التعاون مع الإتحاد الأوروبي:

1- هل هناك مجالات للتعاون مع الاتحاد الأوروبي بدأ العمل فيها بالفعل؟

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2- إلى أي مدى لديكم رغبة في نيل مساندة من الإتحاد الأوروبي (لوجستي- تدريب- تقني...إلخ)؟

_____

_____

3- هل هناك أي صلات بين أنشطة الحركة الاجتماعية وأي من برامج ومبادرات الاتحاد الأوروبي الموجودة في مصر؟

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_____

4- ما هي في وجهة نظركم أفضل مجالات التعاون مع الاتحاد الأوروبي؟

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_____

مناطق الإختلاف مع أوروبا

1- في حالة وجودكم في أماكن صنع القرار ووضع السياسات (سواء عن طريق الوصول للحكم أو المشاركة فيه)، ما تأثير ذلك على التعاون مع الاتحاد الأوروبي؟ هل ترون فرص التعاور أكبر أم أقل؟

_____

_____

2- هل ستكونون أكثر حذرا من فتح مجالات التجارة والاستثمار مع الاتحاد الأوروبي؟

_____

_____

3- كيف تختلف رؤيتكم لحقوق الإنسان عن رؤية الاتحاد الأوروبي؟ ما هي قضايا حقوق الإنسان التي يختلف فيها موقفكم عن موقف الاتحاد؟

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_____

4- لماذا لم يبلور الإسلاميون إلى الان رؤية وموقف واضحين من الاتحاد الأوروبي؟

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مع جزيل الشكر

Annex 2: Workshop programme – Political Islam and the European Neighbourhood Policy

Political Islam and the European Neighbourhood Policy

Workshop organised by CEPS, Fundación Tres Culturas and FRIDE
Seville, 24-25 November 2006

The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) the Fundación Tres Culturas and the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) are embarking on a project to strengthen the understanding of Islamist parties' perspectives on *concrete and specific areas of European policy*. Most work on political Islam has remained focused on relatively abstract questions, while it is widely agreed that the focus of enquiry needs to be more practical, with a view to understanding more about Islamist parties' policy goals and aspirations. The core aims of this project are to link more general debates over political Islam specifically to the content of European policy in the region and to develop coherent policies to relate to these parties. CEPS the Fundación Tres Culturas and FRIDE are organising a workshop in Seville on 24-25 November 2006 in order to initiate the first phase of this project. This first workshop will involve analysts and experts, not themselves directly politically active, but known to have a certain orientation towards and access to Islamist parties.

In recent years an enormous amount of research and analysis has been undertaken on the issue of political Islam. It is widely agreed that it is desirable and indeed necessary to engage with moderate Islamist parties to a greater extent than hitherto. Yet uncertainty remains at both the conceptual and policy-making levels over how to do this. This issue needs to be addressed more systematically with greater urgency. In most southern Mediterranean Arab states Islamist parties are enjoying increasing support. This has been witnessed in recent months in particular in Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and the Palestinian Territories, while the prohibition of Islamist parties in Syria and Libya threatens to become an increasingly divisive issue. There should be an engagement with moderate Islamist parties and organisations that are currently enjoying a rise in support. For the moment it seems that there has been hardly any engagement even in less politicised areas at the grassroots level, as proposed by many analysts.

Given the more pragmatic approach recently adopted by many of the moderate Islamist movements, it is a propitious time to take advantage of their relative openness towards engaging Western countries more openly by reaching out to them and establishing strategic links. Additionally, what should be done in terms of dealing with the less moderate Islamists who have political branches, but yet have not officially renounced violence, especially in light of Hamas's recent legislative victory? What of secular-religious national alliances?

The workshop will lead to the publication of a book collecting all the findings from research in the field and the conclusions derived from discussions at the workshop. For this purpose the programme is organised following the structure of the book's contents.

Friday, 24 November, 2006

15:30-16:00   **Introduction and Overview:**
                 State of the Art in the Analysis of Political Islam and the West
                 Richard Youngs, FRIDE
                 Michael Emerson, CEPS

16:00-18:00   **Case Studies 1-3: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia**
                 Samir Amghar, Algeria
                 Amel Boubekeur, Morocco
                 Salah Eddin al-Jourshi, Tunisia
                 Discussant: Mohamed Ennaji, Tres Culturas, Morocco

20:00- 22:00   **Dinner**

Saturday, 25 November, 2006

9:00-11.00   **Case Studies 4-6: Egypt, Lebanon, Syria**
                 Emad Shahin, Egypt
                 Talal Atrissi, Lebanon
                 Salam Kawakabi, Syria
                 Discussant : Nathalie Tocci, IAI, Rome

11:00-11:30   **Coffee Break**

11.30-13:30   **Case Studies 7-9: Turkey, Palestine, Jordan**
                 Senem Aydin, Turkey
                 Mustafa Abu Sway, Palestine
                 Mohamed al Masri, Jordan
                 Discussant: Abdeslam Maghraoui, USIP

                 13:30-15:30   **Lunch Break**

15:30- 17:00   **Conclusions and Wrap Up**
                 Robert Springborg, SOAS, London
                 Discussant: Neil Melvin, SIPRI

20:00- 22:00   **Dinner**

Participants

Samir Amghar, EHESS

Talal Atrissi, Lebanese University

Senem Aydin, Free University of Brussels and CEPS

Ester Borrás Andreu, Spanish Foreign Ministry

Amel Boubekeur, EHESS

Ana Echague, FRIDE

Salah Eddin al-Jourshi

Michael Emerson, CEPS

Mohamed Ennaji, Fundación Tres Culturas

Salam Kawakibi

Abdeslam Maghraoui, USIP

Francois Massoulie, European Comisión, DG External relations

Mohamed al Masri

Neil Melvin, SIPRI

David Mepham, IPPR

Enrique Ojeda, Fundación Tres Culturas

Daniella Pioppi, IAI, Rome

Emad Shahin, American University Cairo

Robert Springborg, London Middle East Institute

Mustafa Abu Sway

Nathalie Tocci, CEPS

Richard Youngs, FRIDE