
External actors and democracy in the Middle East

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Recommended minimum time required: 2 hours



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Introduction

While in the past studies on democratisation focused exclusively on domestic factors, they have now incorporated the external variable, which is nowadays understood as a factor that might explain the particular evolution of politics in one country. Gleditsch & Ward, for instance have proven that

“the prospects for democracy are not exclusively related to domestic attributes but are also affected by external conditions and events.”

and that

“international events and processes appear to exert a strong influence on democratization.”

According to these authors,

“domestic political processes are deeply affected by what goes on in neighbouring societies, even if the specific ways in which external events influence transitions vary from context to context. Diffusion processes among states influence the distribution of democracy in the international system and there is a strong association between a country's institutions and the extent of democracy in the surrounding region. Not only are regimes generally similar within regions, but there is also a strong tendency for transitions to impart a regional convergence. A history of prior regional conflict decreases the likelihood that a country will be democratic.”

On top of it, a growing number of authors have studied the strategies of specific actors (mainly Western countries and international organisations) as democratising agents. They have explored whether these actors have sound strategies to promote democratisation in other countries, whether democratisation is a goal in itself or a means to achieve other foreign policy goals and which are the preferred and more effective instruments to promote democracy in third countries.

While the first module revealed that the Middle East has been absent from the most important works on political transitions, in this one we will see that it occupies a prominent and central space in the literature on democracy promotion and democracy assistance. This is because the US and the EU, the two actors that have developed more robust democratisation strategies and democracy assistance programmes, have identified the Middle East (and North Africa) as a priority. Yet it is key to take into account one of the points raised by Whitman and Sika when re-evaluating democratization in the MENA region. That is, the fact that the populations in Arab countries and particularly many opposition movements are suspicious of the motives of Western powers (and even more so for the United States) when these outsiders offer or attempt to meddle in political transitions.

Background readings

Grugel, Jean (1999). *Democracy without Borders*. London: Routledge.

Smith, Hazel (ed.) (2000). *Democracy and International Relations*. Basingstock: MacMillan.

Pridham, Geoffrey (2000). *The Dynamics of Democratization: A Comparative Approach*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Burnell, Peter (2005). “Political Strategies of External Support for Democratization”. *Foreign Policy Analysis* (Issue 1, pp. 361–384).

Gleditsch, Kristian Skrede; Ward, Michael D. (2006). “Diffusion and the International Context of Democratization”. *International Organization* (Vol. 60, Issue 4, pp. 911–933).

Jung, Dietrich (2006). *Democratization and Development. New Political Strategies for the Middle East*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Magen, A.; Morlino, L. (Eds.) (2008). *International Actors, Democratization and the Rule of Law. Anchoring Democracy?* New York and London: Routledge.

Nye, Joseph S. (2019). “The Rise and Fall of American Hegemony from Wilson to Trump”. *International Affairs* (Vol. 95, Issue 1, pp. 63–80).

Schmitter, Philippe C.; Sika, Nadine (2017). “Democratization in the Middle East and North Africa: A More Ambidextrous Process?” *Mediterranean Politics* (Vol. 22, Issue 4, pp. 443–463).

As Peter Burnell writes,

“realists have no difficulty in arguing that democratisation support should (continue to) prioritize those countries/regions where there are important security or other national interests that would be advanced by political change. Indeed, the United States’ ‘Greater Middle East democracy initiative’ delineated that region more in terms of its relevance as a ‘security region’ for the United States than in terms of any shared potential for democratic progress. For the EU, in contrast, a (continuing) focus on its near abroad (Balkans, southern Mediterranean, and eastern Europe as far as the Urals) could well be the obvious strategic choice.”

This module will focus on the democratisation strategies and the instruments of democracy assistance in the Middle East of two classical actors: the US and the EU. Next to these two cases, the module also explores the role of Turkey as a potential democratisation agent in the region. The literature on this topic is not as developed as in the case of the other two actors. Yet, its inclusion in this model is justified by Turkey’s rising profile in Middle Eastern affairs as well as the growing discussion on the attractiveness of the Turkish model for those Arab countries that are undergoing political transitions.

Background readings

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Magen, A.; Morlino, L. (eds.) (2008). *International Actors, Democratization and the Rule of Law. Anchoring Democracy?* New York and London: Routledge.

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Smith, Hazel (ed.) (2000). *Democracy and International Relations*. Basingstoke: MacMillan.

Objectives

- 1.** To introduce students to the debates on the capacity of external actors to promote democracy.
- 2.** To familiarise students with the role that the democratisation agenda plays in the policies of the EU, the US and Turkey in their respective Middle Eastern policies.

1. European policies towards the Middle East

The literature on EU's democracy promotion strategies often recalls that the EU treaties mention democracy as a principle that should guide the EU's external actions. In fact, the Treaty of the European Union, in 1993, stated that development and consolidation of "democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" are objectives of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. That is why all the association agreements with third countries since 1990s have included a democratic clause that allows for unilateral suspension of the agreement if there are serious violations of fundamental freedoms and human rights. Since the 1990s, the EU has also established several mechanisms to promote democracy worldwide, namely, the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and, more recently (as an outcome of the Arab Spring), the European Endowment for Democracy.

The emphasis of the EU on democratisation became particularly strong after the end of the Cold War, although it can be argued that, even before the fall of the Berlin Wall, some policies of the EU and particularly the Mediterranean enlargement (Greece's accession in 1981 and Spain's and Portugal's in 1986) were already driven by the EU's willingness to consolidate democracy in Southern Europe. Michelle Pace in an article published in *Democratization* in 2009 described the situation as follows:

"since the 1990s, in the post-cold war context of the collapse of communist rule, the EU has been pursuing an almost messianic quest for the internationalization of liberal democracy abroad, as a key foreign policy instrument in its external relations. The European model of liberal democracy has been taken as a necessarily 'good' thing and its pursuit supposedly as a primary goal in and of itself. The often cited argument is that processes of political liberalization and democratization have served to bring about peaceful co-existence within Europe and that these successful processes can be emulated elsewhere."

Several authors (e.g. Olsen, 2000) have also analysed democracy promotion as a Foreign Policy instrument that attempts to cause political changes in countries or regions that are vital for the EU interests.

When analysing EU's policies in the field of democracy promotion, most articles refer to the concept of 'the normative power of Europe', popularised by Ian Manners since the year 2000. Manners, in his well-known article in *The Journal of Common Market Studies* of 2002, defined normative power as the ability to shape conceptions of the normal in such matters as peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, human rights and norms like social solidarity and antidiscrimination. It has been put forward as the EU's distinctive contribution to strategic support for political change. Norms are diffused by contagion (unintended), informational diffusion (strategic communications), procedural diffusion (agreements), transference (such as technical assistance), overt diffusion (the

EU's presence in organisations or third states) and by a cultural filter (interplay between the construction of knowledge and the creation of social and political identity). From that point of view, Manners argues in his *Journal of Common Market Studies* article that

“the most important factor shaping the international role of the EU is not what it does or what it says, but what it is.”

In a later article, published by Manners in *International Affairs*, he states that

“simply by existing as different in a world of states and the relations between them, the European Union changes the normality of ‘international relations’. In this respect the EU is a normative power: it changes the norms, standards and prescriptions of world politics away from the bounded expectations of state-centricity.”

However, a significant number of scholars have started to challenge the concept of Normative Power Europe, arguing that other concepts such as hegemony (see for example Diez, 2013) or normative empire (Del Sarto, 2015) better capture the EU approach to democratic change and better reflect the EU attempts to reconcile values and interests.

The Middle East, as part of a wider Mediterranean region, has been one of the areas where the EU has projected this normative power. It is also one of the spaces where the literature has analysed the validity of this concept and the contradictions in the design and implementations of policies. On the one hand, it has backed regional integration in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). On the other hand, it has promoted reforms through harmonisation in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which was offered to both Eastern European Countries and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean partners.

Unlike the EMP, which emphasised multilateralism and region-building, the ENP was characterised by differentiation and bilateralism, which sought to promote EU cooperation with southern Mediterranean countries individually. Instead of addressing these issues in multilateral forums, the EU turned to instruments called action plans, which were prepared through consultation with Mediterranean states. Among the many areas included in these action plans, we can find political dialogue and reform.

The EU's supposed normative approach has been widely questioned by many authors. For instance, Michelle Pace argues that

“in seeking to claim the status of a ‘normative power’, the EU's democracy promotion efforts follow a (mistakenly) sequential logic.”

That is,

“democracy in itself is not envisioned as an ultimate goal in EU eyes, but as one of the means to another objective –stability and prosperity. This EU narrative constructs a relational triad between economic prosperity, stability, and peace.”

Recommended readings

- Del Sarto, Raffaella A.** (2015). “Normative Empire Europe: the European Union, Its Borderlands, and the Arab Spring”. *Journal of Common Market Studies* (Vol. 54, Issue 2, pp. 215–232).
- Diez, Thomas** (2013). “Normative Power as Hegemony, Cooperation and Conflict”. (Vol. 48, Issue 2, pp. 194–210).
- Kelley, Judith** (2004). *Ethnic Politics in Europe. The Power of Norms and Size*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kubicek, Paul J. (ed.)** (2003). *The European Union and Democratization*. London: Routledge.
- Manners, Ian** (2002). “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?” *Journal of Common Market Studies* (Issue 40, pp. 235–258).
- Manners, Ian** (2008). “The normative ethics of the European Union”. *International Affairs* (Vol. 84, Issue 1, pp. 45–60).
- Olsen, G.R.** (2000). “Promotion of Democracy as a Foreign Policy Instrument of Europe: Limits to International Idealism”. *Democratization* (Issue 7, pp. 142–167).
- Pace, Michelle** (2007). “The Construction of EU Normative Power”. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, (Vol. 45, pp. 1039–1062).
- Youngs, Richard** (2001). *The European Union and the Promotion of Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pace affirms that

“The EU’s so-called democratization agenda for the MENA region is flawed on at least two counts: its ultimate objective not being clearly and explicitly democracy in itself (that is, rather than having political transformation in the MENA as the core objective of EU policy, there is most concern with stability and security goals) and the timing of the democratization efforts.”

In a similar vein, Bilgin, Soler i Lecha and Bilgiç argue that

“reformists and critics now feel that, from EMP to ENP and beyond (such as the new scheme called the Union for Mediterranean), a rug is being pulled out from under them. The point here is that the implications of policies adopted to secure the EU may have adverse implications for the very values they have set out to protect, such as individual rights and freedoms, and fundamental rights.”

Recommended readings

Adler, E.; Crawford, B. (2006). “Normative Power: The European Practice of Region-Building and the Case of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership”. In: E. Adler; F. Bicchì; B. Crawford; Del Sarto, R. A. (eds.). *The Convergence of Civilizations: Constructing a Euro-Mediterranean Region* (pp. 3-47). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Barbé, Esther; Herranz, Anna (2010). “Dynamics of Convergence and Differentiation in Euro-Mediterranean Relations: Towards Flexible Region-Building or Fragmentation?” *Mediterranean Politics* (Vol. 15, Issue 2, pp. 129-147).

Bicchì, Federica (2006). “‘Our size fits all’: Normative power Europe and the Mediterranean”. *Journal of European Public Policy* (Vol. 13, Issue 2, pp. 286-303).

Bilgin, Pinar; Soler i Lecha, Eduard; Bilgiç, Ali (2011). “European Security Practices vis-à-vis the Mediterranean. Implications in Value Terms”. *DIIS Working Paper* (2011:14).

Del Sarto, R. A.; Schumacher, T. (2005). “From EMP to ENP: What’s at stake with the European Neighbourhood Policy towards the Southern Mediterranean?”. *European Foreign Affairs Review* (Vol. 10, Issue 1, pp. 17-38).

Pace, Michelle (2007). “Norm shifting from EMP to ENP: The EU as a norm entrepreneur in the south”. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 20, Issue 4, pp. 659-675).

Pace, Michelle (2009). “Paradoxes and contradictions in EU democracy promotion in the Mediterranean: The limits of EU normative power”. *Democratization* (Vol. 16, Issue 1, pp. 39-58).

The capacity of the ENP to promote reforms has captured the attention of several scholars, who have mainly studied the effectiveness of the EU’s conditionality. Many of them have highlighted the fact that this conditionality is heavily inspired by the EU’s successful eastern enlargement in 2004, which showed that right incentives could lead to major political and economic reforms. Several authors have coined concepts such as external governance, policy convergence and even Europeanisation to describe the desired outcome of the EU policies in the neighbourhood.

The fact that two different realities (Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean countries) are included under the same policy has allowed for some comparative exercises. This is the case of Frank Schimmelfenning’s and Hanno Scholtz’s work published in *European Union Politics*. They conclude that

“the EU accession conditionality proves to be a strong and significant factor in the democratization of the European neighbourhood –even if the entire region is taken into account and if core alternative explanations are controlled for. Yet the effects become weaker and inconsistent if the EU offers less than membership or association that might lead to accession in the future.”

Conditionality is not the only mechanism of the EU to promote political change. In an article focusing on the EU’s policies towards the Mediterranean and specifically analysing the cases of Tunisia and Algeria, Melanie Morisse-Schilbach lists three mechanisms: political conditionality, economic and financial incentives and socialisation. The latter is closely linked to the concept of normative power as socialisation implies

“a strategy of active diffusion of European ‘moral’ norms” which in the case of the Mediterranean has been translated into “promoting the idea of (liberal) democracy within MENA civil society, on the one hand, and by developing shared beliefs and understanding about appropriate (democratic) behaviour through a system of dialogues among political and bureaucratic elites, on the other.”

Recommended readings

Barbé E.; Costa, O.; Herranz, A.; Johansson-Nogués, E.; Natorski, M.; Sabiote, M. A. (2009). “Drawing the neighbours closer... to what? Explaining emerging patterns of policy convergence between the EU and its neighbours”. *Cooperation and Conflict* (Vol. 44, Issue 4, pp. 378-399).

Delcour, Laure; Soler i Lecha, Eduard (2018). “European Neighbourhood Policy Mechanisms: Conditionality, Socialisation and Differentiation”. In: Tobias Schumacher, Andreas Marchetti and Thomas Demmelhuber (eds.). *The Routledge Handbook on the European Neighbourhood Policy* (pp. 445-455). London/New York: Routledge.

Escribano, Gonzalo (2006). “Europeanisation without Europe? The Mediterranean and the European Neighbourhood Policy for the Mediterranean”. *EUI-RSCAS Working Paper 19*. San Domenico di Fiesole: European University Institute.

Kelley, Judith G. (2006). “New Wine in Old Wineskins: Promoting Political Reforms through the New European Neighborhood Policy”. *Journal of Common Market Studies* (Vol. 44, Issue 1, pp. 29-55).

Lavenex, Sandra (2004). “EU external governance in ‘wider Europe’”. *Journal of European Public Policy* (Vol. 11, Issue 4, pp. 680–700).

Lavenex, Sandra; Schimmelfennig, Frank (2009). “EU Rules Beyond EU Borders: Theorizing External Governance in European Politics”. *Journal of European Public Policy* (Issue 16, pp. 791-812).

Morisse-Schilbach, Melanie (2010). “Promoting Democracy in Algeria and Tunisia? Some Hard Choices for the EU”. *European Foreign Affairs Review* (Issue 15, pp. 539-555).

Natorski, Michal; Soler i Lecha, Eduard (2014). “Relaciones de la UE con sus vecinos”. In: Esther Barbé (dir.). *La Unión Europea en las Relaciones Internacionales* (pp. 194-218). Madrid: Tecnos.

Schimmelfennig, Frank; Scholtz, Hanno (2008). “EU Democracy Promotion in the European Neighbourhood. Political Conditionality, Economic Development and Transnational Exchange”. *European Union Politics* (Vol. 9, Issue 2, pp. 187-215).

Withman, R.G.; Wolff, S. (eds.) (2012). *The European Neighbourhood Policy in Perspective. Context, Implementation and Impact*. MacMillan Palgrave.

Youngs, Richard (2009). “Democracy Promotion as External Governance?” *Journal of European Public Policy* (Vol. 16, Issue 6, pp. 895-915).

Next to the literature that analyses the EU policies towards the whole Mediterranean area, or even more, to the so-called neighbourhood of the EU, we should note the existence of valuable contributions that have focused on spe-

cific partner countries. This is the case, for instance, of the Palestinian territories. It is a particularly relevant one because EU countries are the main donors of the Palestinian National Authority but also because the controversial decision to freeze cooperation with the Hamas-led Palestinian government following the 2006 elections raised doubts about the coherence and consistency of the EU as a democracy promoter in the region.

North African countries, because of the proximity and special relations with the EU and some member states (mainly Spain, France and Italy) have also been studied as cases that reveal that the ultimate goal of the EU policy has been securing stability in its Southern vicinity. Comparisons among North African cases also shed some light on the existence of different EU strategies that are very much linked to the strategies of international legitimisation of the incumbent regimes in those countries.

Vera van Hüllen, in an article published in 2012 in *West European Politics* describes the situation as follows:

“The respective degrees of political liberalisation, capturing the role of participation and contestation in domestic politics, can account for the diverging quality of EU cooperation on democracy and human rights with Morocco and Tunisia, granting the EU more or less influence on domestic institutional change in the two countries.”

She concludes by depicting the situation in each of these countries:

“the Moroccan monarchy has early on chosen co-optation and selective political inclusion to moderate oppositional movements, but it has neglected economic inclusion. Especially since the 1990s, a strategy of –limited and controlled– political liberalisation has generated ‘fake’ input legitimacy, allowing political competition without exposing the regime itself to contestation and touching upon the distribution of real power. So the implementation of political dialogue and democracy assistance fits well into the pluralist organisation of political life and it might even generate additional legitimacy for the regime, demonstrating its willingness to further liberalise without necessarily having to democratise. In addition, the regime faces serious challenges and needs external support, in particular to hold up its position in the Western Sahara conflict and to generate socio-economic development to fight poverty and social disparities. Ben Ali’s regime in Tunisia, by contrast, continued to rely on a combination of political repression and output legitimacy generated through successful socio-economic development. Thus, the implementation of political dialogue and democracy assistance would have been much more costly for the Tunisian regime than for the Moroccan one. Allowing even for a small political opening could have had disruptive effects on the tightly controlled political life.”

The eruption of massive protests in Arab countries in the first few months of 2011 and the ousting of long-lasting rulers forced the EU to assess why its efforts to promote democratic transformation and good governance among its southern neighbours had failed. This assessment inspired a review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). This materialized in two different communications, one of which was released in March 2011 reviving the concept of partnership on the basis of democracy and prosperity as the main goals, and another published two months later, intended to make the ENP more effective.

Reinforced conditionality was one of the main prescriptions put forward in the review. According to the two communications released in March and May 2011, the EU aimed to promote deep and sustainable democracy. It also identified incentives in terms of financial assistance, access to markets and promotion of mobility. The May 2011 communication specified that, in countries where reform did not take place, the EU would reconsider funding and that it would uphold its policy of curtailing relations with governments engaged in violations of human rights and democracy.

Stefan Füle (2011), at that time Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), expressed an explicit *mea culpa* when he stated:

“The EU has always been active in promoting human rights and democracy in our neighbourhood. But it has often focused too much on stability at the expense of other objectives and, more problematic, at the expense of our values. Now is the time to bring our interests in line with our values. Recent events in the South have proved that there can be no real stability without real democracy”.

This is a circumstance that pushed many scholars to critically assess the change in discourse (see Teti, 2012) but also in practice. Balfour *et al.* (2016), for instance, reached five conclusions after assessing the EU programs in some of the countries that had undergone significant political changes since 2011:

- the EU did react to the Arab Spring with meaningful increases in aid;
- governance aid increases are now being threatened by the switch of resources to humanitarian assistance and funds to help manage the flow of refugees into European states;
- the channels through which EU aid is delivered remain largely the same, albeit with a modest tilt towards support for new civil society organizations;
- the EU has worked hard to tailor the conditionality it attaches to its aid, with a trend towards a lighter and more flexible use of conditionality; and
- the EU has had to get used to *de facto* differentiation.

Some years later, the EU reviewed the ENP again. There was a substantial change of approach, which reflected how instability in the region had pushed the democratization agenda to the sidelines. The joint communication about the ENP review published in 2015 did not mention conditionality at all. Stabilization became the key word. Similarly, the European Global Strategy released in 2016 put the focus on fostering resilience.

The EU thus recognized the limitations of its “more for more” approach and its miscalculation of the democratic potential of the Arab uprisings, stating that differentiation and greater mutual ownership will be the hallmark of the new ENP along with the recognition that not all partners aspire to EU rules and standards. The rather enthusiastic welcoming of the events of 2011 was replaced by a pervasive sense of threat fed by multiple crises, including mi-

grants and refugees, terrorism and energy. We observe a pragmatic or even realistic turn on the basis of the acknowledgement that the EU alone cannot solve the many challenges of the region, and there are limits to its leverage.

Throughout this period we have seen how some dilemmas have taken on a life of their own and have impinged on the EU's ability to realize its full potential. As such, the promotion of democracy has been perceived in opposition to the stability and security of the MENA countries and ultimately of the EU; the need to cooperate with the MENA governments has come at the expense of true engagement with their societies; and multilateralism and bilateralism have often been portrayed and pursued not as complementary but as alternative choices.

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Cavatorta, Francesco (2005). "The international context of Morocco's stalled democratization". *Democratization* (Vol. 12, Issue 4, pp. 548-566). **Gillespie, R.; Youngs, R.** (eds.) (2002). *The European Union and Democracy Promotion: The Case of North Africa*. London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass.

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EU's reaction to the Arab Spring

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Balfour, R. et al. (2016). "Report on Democracy Assistance from the European Union to the Middle East And North Africa". EUSpring. <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/irs/euspring/euspring_eu_demo_assistance_on_template.4.pdf>

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Van Hüllen, Vera (2015). *EU Democracy Promotion and the Arab Spring: International Cooperation and Authoritarianism*. London: Springer.

Youngs, R. (2008). *Is the European Union supporting democracy in its neighbourhood?* Madrid: FRIDE.

Youngs, R. (2014). *Europe in the New Middle East: Opportunity or Exclusion?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2. The democratisation agenda in the US Middle Eastern policy

While we have seen that the EU approaches in the field of democratisation are very much linked to the EU's conception as a normative power, in the case of the US, the policies and instruments designed to promote democracy are to be understood in the framework of the international status of the US as a superpower. Together with those articles that have focused specifically in the US policies, we can find a growing literature that compares the US policies and instruments with those of other international actors and particularly with the EU.

This is the case of Daniela Huber's article published in *Mediterranean Politics* in 2008, which identified similarities as both US and EU initiatives support similar institutions, NGOs dealing with similar topics and both also devote more resources to countries that have a strategic status and are already committed to liberalisation. Yet, she also noted some striking differences, mainly the absence of specific programmes to finance political parties in the case of the EU, as well as a top-down approach on the part of Europeans compared to a more bottom-up strategy in the case of US assistance. Besides the existence of different targets and instruments, the biggest difference is that compared to the United States

“most European countries have a more marked pattern of supporting development goals separate from a geopolitical security framework. European democracy assistance thus belongs more to a larger development framework of engagement than to a geostrategic framework of the kind that encases much of US foreign assistance.”

A more recent comparison was established by Michelle Dunne and Richard Youngs; they appeared to have found many similarities between the EU and the U.S. policies in this particular domain. They argued that their impact has been relatively marginal and that the change towards a more pro-reform direction coincided with a moment in which their own power had begun to diminish more notably. Moreover, they point at the fact that where and when reform remained blocked, they played a very modest role in tempering repression. According to these two scholars, the EU and the U.S. share a “preference for very carefully-managed processes of ‘liberalisationlite’ rather than democratisation, where the latter is not already unequivocally unfolding”.

Thomas Carothers, in his article published in *The Journal of Democracy*, considers that

“as an assertive superpower for more than sixty years, the United States has a long-established habit, rooted in the belief that political outcomes in countries all around the world will have a direct bearing on U.S. security, of viewing the developing world (in fact, the whole world) as an arena for direct U.S. political engagement. Promoting democracy, through democracy aid and other means, is an important form of such political engagement, one way of trying to shape political outcomes favourable to the United States. These goals have included anticommunism during the Cold War and other U.S. security interests since then, from peace to antiterrorism. US foreign policy has always contained a powerful idealist element, and promoting democracy abroad has been one of its goals, in one way or another, since the time of Woodrow Wilson.”

In other words, both values and interests drive the US policies in this particular field. Carothers himself, in his 2012 report dealing with Obama’s democratisation policies, points to the fact that

“in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, for example, the United States saw helping those countries complete their attempted democratic transitions not just as a worthy ideal but as crucial to ensuring a successful endgame to the Cold War.”

While Central and Eastern Europe was a top priority for US democratisation programmes in the last quarter of the 20th century, nowadays the Middle East has become a major area of concern and a field for all sorts of actions. Two episodes mark a before and after in the US democratisation policies in this region. The first is the spillover effects of September 11 and the US-led intervention in Iraq in 2003. The second is the wave of popular protests and political changes initiated in 2011.

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Katerina Delacoura in an enlightening article presents the impact of September 11 as follows:

“after 11 September 2001 the US administration focused on promoting democracy in the Middle East especially and with unprecedented forcefulness.”

According to her there were ideological and practical reasons behind this decision. Ideological as far as

“democracy is a key principle in the neo-conservative world-view which has come to dominate the Bush administrations of 2000 and 2005.”

and practical because the Bush administrations assumed that

“fostering democracy in the Middle East would drain the pool from which terrorist organizations draw recruits in their ‘global struggle’ against the US.”

and that

“it would also contribute to the peaceful resolution of disputes in the region because democracies do not go to war with one another.”

Thomas Carothers agreed in 2007 in identifying September 11 as creating the momentum for more determined democratisation policies. According to him

“in the wake of September 11, the idea of a sweeping democratic transformation of the Middle East appealed strongly to Washington as a means of eliminating the root causes of Islamic radicalism.”

The multiplication of US initiatives, programmes, agencies and funds to support democracy worldwide and particularly so in the Middle East, coincided with a growing interest of the academic community on this particular topic. This interest materialised in four different kinds of researches: (1) those that focused on the pre-requisites for democratisation and the resilience of authoritarianism (see the first module), (2) those that evaluated the impact of different instruments of democracy promotion and democracy-assistance, (3) those that analysed democracy-promotion as a foreign policy instrument and (4) those that have focused on particular case studies, Iraq being the one that has captured the attention of most scholars.

Delacoura’s article combines the second and the third approach and stands out as a critical and exhaustive analysis of the different components of the US democratisation policy in the Middle East. The first level comprises several initiatives and projects to support civil society and promote institutional reforms. This materialised in the creation of a specific instrument, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), together with the prioritisation of democracy-assistance in the agenda of USAID and the launch of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) Partnership Initiative, announced in June 2004, as an attempt to foster cooperation among G-8 members, Middle Eastern governments and some international partners (such as Turkey) to promote democracy in the region. The second level, according to Delacoura, consisted

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in traditional and public diplomacy, which through all sort of declarations emphasised that democratic reform in the Middle East had become a core objective of US policy in the region. The third and probably the most controversial democratisation strategy was an interventionist US foreign policy, epitomised in the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Regarding the Arab Spring, several articles have been published analysing the role of US policies in favouring the emergence of protest movements in the region and how the US has adapted its policies and instruments in light of the new regional conflict. F. Gregory Gause, III and Ian S. Lustick, in their article published in *Middle East Policy* in 2012, affirmed that the US was well-placed to have a positive impact in the field of democratisation compared to alternative regional powers, which

“seemed particularly awkward in their responses to regime transformations and continuing turbulence.”

According to Gause and Lustick, if the United States

“continues on the flexible and prudent path that the Obama administration has set out, could see new opportunities to secure its interests without the over-commitment of military force that has characterized American policy since 9/11.”

Thomas Carothers, analysing in 2012 the reaction of the Obama administration to the Arab Spring concludes that

“in each of these countries the administration took steps to support democracy but avoided getting out in front of the roiling wave of political change. The U.S. intervention in Libya was a partial exception, but even in that case the administration only acted after pressure from other international actors and a clear humanitarian crisis. This cautious response reflected several legitimate concerns: 1) an uncertainty about the value of political change for some U.S. interests in the region; 2) a desire to avoid situations where the United States would break all ties with a leader buffeted by protests but then have to get along with him if he survived in power; and 3) the instinctive belief on the part of President Obama that the United States should avoid putting itself at the center of potential political change in other countries, out of concern both over discrediting those pushing for democracy and assuming a level of responsibility for events that the United States might be unable to fulfil.”

It is commonplace to highlight the ideological and strategic differences between the Bush and the Obama administration in this field. Gause and Lustick, for instance, argue that the Bush administration

“made the Middle East the front line of its freedom agenda, reflecting the close tie it draws (at least in theory) between the war on terrorism and democracy promotion.”

In contrast, in 2012, Thomas Carothers argued that Obama

“responded at first by stepping back from the issue, softening U.S. rhetoric on promoting freedom abroad, and taking steps to rebuild America’s democratic standing. Starting in the second half of 2009, the pendulum swung toward greater U.S. engagement on democracy.”

Katerina Delacoura is also critical with the Bush administration policies and identifies three core reasons that explain the limited impact of US democracy promotion policies in the region:

(1) the fact that “democracy is part of a wider set of US interests and policies with which it is frequently in contradiction, and US credibility is so low in the Arab Middle East that the US message of democracy is often rejected together with the messenger”; (2) the conception of democracy as a “a panacea”, overlooking “the problems its implementation may cause”; (3); the fact that “neither a politically neutral nor a more forceful approach can initiate reform if it is not already under way for domestic reasons”. She goes a step forward by stating that “a forceful approach could even be counterproductive for the weak liberal movements in the Arab Middle East.”

One of the peculiarities of the US policies in the Middle East, particularly under the Bush administration, has been the justification of military actions as a mean to spread democracy in this region. Iraq is a case in point. Carothers, in his article *Democracy assistance: political vs developmental* explains that the

“Bush administration’s emphasis on the Iraq intervention as the leading edge of its efforts to promote democracy caused many people around the world to conclude that forcible regime change had become the main U.S. method of democracy promotion.”

Laurence Whitehead, in an article devoted to the impact of the war on Iraq for the US democratisation policies, explains that

“both US President George Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair sought to justify their military operations in Iraq by arguing that the eventual result would be to trigger a new surge of democratization in what was referred to as the ‘Greater Middle East.’”

He argues that

“Western reliance on ‘hard power’ or coercive methods of democracy promotion (and the use of the most ‘undemocratic’ methods to pursue the war on terror).”

dealt a blow to the Western reputational advantage in the field of democracy promotion.

Even authors such as Larry Diamond express that

“it is still possible that Iraq could become a democracy if a political agreement can be reached that enables the elections to go forward with the broad participation of all major ethnic, religious, political, and regional groups”, also underlined that the US committed many mistakes such as “failing to plan and prepare adequately for the postwar reconstruction of Iraq and in imposing a political occupation upon a proud and nationalistic people, suspicious of the West.”

With the eruption of the Arab Spring in 2011, the Obama administration faced one of the most significant challenges to democracy. As much as political change was the popular demand of the protests and the movements were a watershed moment for authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, some key interests of the US in the region (e.g. oil and security) were threatened, which, in turn, brought forward a mixed policy response by the country to the Spring, both supporting democracy in cases where it was more likely to succeed, and an openness to maintain existing relations with authoritarian regimes that

were stable. Examining US responses to a variety of Middle Eastern states affected by the Arab Spring, Thomas Carothers argued in his 2012 Carnegie Endowment report that

“Overall, since the start of 2011, it has been hard (for the US) to escape the impression of a policy apparatus frequently behind the curve of events, soft on old, backward-leaning friends in the region, and unable to connect well to the new currents of political thinking and action among young Arabs.”

In his 2013 article for Chatham House, Fawaz Gerges states that

“Obama’s foreign policy in the Middle East has demonstrated more continuity with the past than real change. While shifting his approach significantly from Bush’s, Obama has adopted a centrist-realist approach towards the region, consistent with the dominant US foreign policy orientation.”

He continues his argument by claiming that

“More than in any other region in the world, presidential policy in the Middle East is hampered by institutional, bureaucratic and domestic politics. Despite his lofty rhetoric about a new start in relations between the United States and Muslim countries, Obama has been shifting US foreign policy priorities away from the Middle East to the Pacific and Asia where he and his aides believe that America’s future lies.”

Emiliano Alessandri *et al.* (2016) explain that, prior to the Arab Uprisings, the Obama administration had already started a policy review. These authors go on to say that the starting point was that increased repression was a destabilising factor for the region and that the U.S. could be negatively affected if associated with this repressive turn. However, the 2011 uprisings forced the administration to translate those thoughts into practice. These authors also argue that the U.S. was forced to make serious choices over whether to support democracy and potentially break with important strategic partnerships or attempt to hold on to the status quo and conclude that the response was characterised by its pragmatic nature:

“The Obama administration for the most part supported democratic transitions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Yet this was done through cautious, restrained and careful strategizing. But as with other strategic partners, the U.S. was silent even as protests took shape. This was particularly notable as criticism of Bahraini human rights abuses were muted, as were commentaries on Saudi Arabia’s attempts to quell protests in the Eastern Province. Similarly, the U.S. remained a very supportive partner of King Mohamed VI’s monarchical rule in Morocco, preferring constitutional referendum and top-down reforms that promised to be limited and gradual at best, to upheaval in this fairly stable and relatively liberal longtime ally. In retrospect, the Arab Awakening provided significant opportunities that the administration seized only cautiously and largely reactively, gaining ground on some but missing others.”

The Arab Spring drew the Obama administration to engage with Middle Eastern politics closer than expected. However, the support for the popular demand of democracy was vague and selective. Being the most influential external power in the Middle East, the vigilant but contradictory policy responses of the US limited its power to shape the outcomes of the Arab Spring.

The election of Donald Trump was seen as a blessing for authoritarian regimes, particularly in the Middle East. Analysts highlighted the decision to visit Saudi Arabia, one of the least democratic countries in the region, for his first international trip as president and, on several occasions, Trump has praised the ‘strongman of Egypt’, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Moreover, programmes supporting the promotion of democracy abroad have been significantly cut, while defence cooperation is on the rise. This has led well-known scholars to wonder whether U.S. democratization policies will survive Trump (Carothers and Brown, 2018).

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3. The Turkish model and Turkey's new Middle Eastern policy

Turkey's Middle Eastern policy has become a major area of interest. Turkey has become an influential regional power in this area. In this section we will explore, first, the pillars of Turkish policy towards the Middle East as the clearest example of what many experts have described as a new Turkish Foreign policy designed and implemented by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2002. Second, the idea of the Turkish model for democratisation in the Middle East will be further discussed, analysing which are the main elements of that model, which actors have promoted this idea and how it has been received in the Arab countries.

The AKP government and Ahmet Davutoğlu himself have popularized the idea of the “zero problems principle” as a flagship of their Turkish foreign policy vision and a necessary step to upgrade Turkey to the category of a central state (that is, a state that is more than a regional power as it belongs to different regions, in fact, as it is at the meeting point of different regions and thus in a central position in global affairs). Two of the most important areas of progress were the boosting of political and economic relations with Syria and Iraq, including with the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in Northern Iraq.

Less successful were, nonetheless, the attempts to reunify Cyprus and pave the way for reconciliation with Armenia. From 2011 onwards, new conflicts aroused between Turkey and its neighbours: unremitting tension with Israel, new disputes with Cyprus on offshore gas drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean; cross accusations between Erdoğan and the Iraqi Prime Minister, the condemnation of Al-Asad's mass repression against protesters in Syria; the deterioration of relations with Iran as a result of Turkey's participation in NATO's missile shield and conflicting strategies regarding Syria and Iraq.

For a decade, the AKP government tried to leave behind the days when Turkey regarded its neighbours through a security lens and therefore redefined these relations in terms of opportunity and mutual interests. Turkey presented itself as a benign power, making use of trade, investment, cultural and educational cooperation, public diplomacy and even visa liberalisation to multiply its influence. The centrality of the economic agenda in Turkey's Middle Eastern policy led some authors such as Kemal Kirişçi to label the country as a trading state.

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This policy has been challenged by the irruption of the Arab uprisings in 2011. Turkey, which used to act as a status quo power and refused to intervene in the internal affairs of third countries, was faced with a situation in which keeping such an approach would automatically mean to side with autocratic regimes. Yet, as explained by Soli Özel and Gencer Özcan, Turkey started to refashion this approach already in 2010, that is, before the Arab Spring. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the Presidential office started to introduce democracy and human rights in the foreign policy agenda. Thus, according to Özel and Özcan

"when the Arab revolts of 2011 came, the ground had already been prepared for Turkey's foreign-policy discourse to shift radically –even if selectively– in favor of human rights and democracy."

The article by Özel and Özcan is one of the few contributions that tackle Turkey's Middle Eastern policy from the lens of democracy promotion. This is probably because such an approach is a novelty in Turkey's foreign policy design, but also because analyses of Turkish foreign policy tend to overemphasise the peculiarities of the Turkish case rather than establish comparisons with other actors' policies. In that sense, their article constitutes an interesting reflection on the debate of whether young (and unconsolidated democracies) can promote democracy in third countries.

A clear example of the approaches that tend to put emphasis on Turkey's peculiarities are the dozens (or hundreds) of articles on the applicability of the Turkish model in the Middle East. This is not the first time that Turkey is presented as a model for neighbouring countries. Meliha Benli Altunışık, in an article published in 2005, underlines that Turkey was already presented as a model for the Middle East in the framework of George W. Bush's democratisation agenda and even before then, in the early 1990s, it was also perceived as an inspiration for the newly independent Central Asian republics.

Following the Arab Spring, Turkey has been presented as an example of coexistence between democracy and Islam. As Nathalie Tocci notes,

“rather than a black-and-white model of a pro-Western Muslim secular democracy, Turkey may offer a number of different models and ideas to inspire change in its southern neighbourhood.”

The AKP is said to have been a benchmark for the leaders of the Ennahda party in Tunisia and the Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt. Some actors, particularly in the ranks of the Arab security establishments but also among some secular circles, also viewed Turkey as a case in which the army has had a strong influence on domestic politics and has acted as a guarantor of constitutional principles. Large segments of Arab society were also fascinated by Turkey's successful economic performance and several opinion polls conducted after the Arab Spring showed that Turkey enjoyed a very positive image in most Middle Eastern countries. Moreover, not all but a significant proportion of these countries perceived Turkey's involvement in the region positively, also agreeing that Turkey could be a model for their countries.

The literature on the Turkish model has also tried to identify what the limits of this model were. Meliha Benli Altunışık, in an article published in *Insight Turkey*, affirms that the limits stem from Turkey's ability to solve its own internal problems (e.g. the Kurdish issue), the stagnation of the reform process (which has implications for Turkey's soft power) and, finally, increasing polarization and radicalization in the Muslim world in general and the Arab world in particular that might limit the appeal of a Turkey that has long represented cooperation and harmony rather than conflict between the West and the East. In that respect, elements such as the violent crackdown of the Gezi Park protests, the increasing levels of violence in Syria, Libya, Yemen and Egypt and the end of the peace process between the Turkey and the PKK have all diminished Turkey's capacity to play a more active role as a transformative agent in the Middle East.

The failed coup attempt on 15th July 2016 was also a turning point, not only for Turkish politics but also for Turkey's Middle East policy. With the deep involvement of the government particularly in Syria, even a small shift in Ankara's Syria policy could have important consequences for the war. The post-coup attempt crackdown on the military and policy apparatus brought forward the questions on the stability of Turkey domestically, and how the ramifications of this event would translate into Turkey's policy decisions mainly on Syria, Iraq, the Kurds and the refugee issue, as well as the wider Middle East. It also moved Turkey closer to Russia and further from both the US and the EU.

Another important evolution in Turkey is that, after the 2017 constitutional referendum, the Presidency has become even more powerful. There is a process of centralisation in Turkish policy making which is also affecting foreign policy. Thus, and similar to the Trump effect, we may need to look for the impact of Erdogan's effect on Turkish choices in this particular region.

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Summary

This module presents the policies of democracy promotion and the programmes of democracy assistance of three actors: the EU, the US and Turkey. It analyses to what extent, with what aims and with what results these three actors have introduced democratisation as an element of their Middle Eastern policies. The module shows that the EU has presented itself as a normative power, that the US democratisation agenda has been part of a wider set of US interests and policies and, finally, that Turkey is a newcomer in this particular field but one that once tried to take advantage of the fact that it was perceived by many as a model or a source for inspiration in many Middle Eastern countries.

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