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The chances for democratization in the Middle East in the 21st century

Introduction

One of the fundamental dilemmas of order in the new, post-cold war international system is how the domestic political structures of states influence the foreign policy of the given country.[1] Following the collapse of the Berlin wall, the universality of liberal democracy became a popular hypothesis among experts[2] anticipating its diffusion across the developing world hitherto characterized by authoritarian regimes. The liberal school of international relations holds the view that democracies do not fight wars against each other (democratic peace), and thus with the triumph of democracy the armed conflicts which have been plaguing developing countries for decades will disappear and the emergence of failed states which are seen as endangering democracy can also be prevented.[3] Though the theory has been widely criticized in recent years, interest in the prospects of democratization has not abated, and it has even intensified following the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

In considering the assumption about the universality of liberal democracy the sharp rise in the number of electoral democracies[4] over the past two decades (according *e.g.* to Freedom House) has to be accounted for. This increase is not due exclusively to the East European transitions following the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also to the

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[1] This research was carried out with the support of the Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Collecting literature for this article ended in December 2009. This paper does not deal with the so-called Arab Spring as it reflects political development in the pre-Arab Spring era. The original version of this paper appeared in an edited volume (CSICSMANN, László ed.: *Iszlám és modernizáció a Közel-Keleten. Az államiság eltérő modelljei*, pp. 85-142.) in Hungarian.

[2] The notion of liberal democracy is subject to heated debates in the scientific literature. This study does not mean to summarize the relevant special literature, but applies the definition given by Robert Dahl, with all its limitations, which establishes the following seven points as necessary but insufficient conditions of democracy: 1. Elected representatives. 2. Free and fair elections. 3. Universal suffrage. 4. The right to be elected. 5. Freedom of speech. 6. The possibility of access to alternative information. 7. Freedom of association. cf.; DAHL *Democracy and its Critics*, p. 221.

[3] See the critics of this approach DIAMOND, "Promoting Democracy in Post-Conflict and Failed States. Lessons and Challenges", pp. 93-116.

[4] Freedom House summarizes the conditions of election democracy as follows: 1. Competitive, multi-party political system. 2. Complete rights of voting accessible for every adult citizen. 3. Pure, free and secret elections held at regular intervals. 4. Access to the media open for every political party, the freedom to organize political campaigns. See *Freedom in the World, 2009. Methodology.*

political transformation discernible in regions beyond Europe. The phase labelled by Huntington as the third wave of democratization (after 1974) has spread to Latin America, Asia and the African continent as well. There are, however, two regions unaffected by the otherwise worldwide trend of democratization: the Middle East, broadly understood, and China.[5] The current paper seeks to explore the causes of one of the above two peculiarities: the absence of democratic transformation in the Middle East.[6]

The three Middles Eastern states with democratic traditions include Israel, Lebanon and Turkey. Israel, a non-Muslim country with a non-Arab majority population, is the most developed democracy in the region. Several analysts point out, however, that it does not live up to the same political standards as the democracies of Western Europe, primarily because of its self-definition as a Jewish state and the discriminatory practices against minorities.[7] On the other hand, it is also obvious at first sight that the level of development and maturity exhibited by Israel's election and party system cannot be compared with the political structures of any other state in the region.

Lebanon, brought into being by the decision of great powers, was established as a denominational democracy, or, in other words, a confessional state, observing the stipulations of the so-called national pact signed during World War II. The different religious denominations are accorded a pre-determined proportion of Parliamentary seats each and they also share the political positions among each other.[8] Yet the denominational model has not proven viable: Not only have demographic proportions shifted over time, but Arab revolutionary ideology has also penetrated the country. These, together with other factors, have contributed to the eruption of a lengthy civil war. After a decade and a half of fighting, the denominational model was finally restored, but its Lebanese incarnation cannot be regarded as a true democracy. Elections, for example, have been controlled by a few clans since the declaration of

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5 HUNTINGTON, *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century,* and *The Arab Human Development Report 2002: Creating Opportunities for Future Generations,* p. 2.

6 The current research is primarily focusing on the Muslim Countries of the Middle East, *i.e.* on the Arab world, Turkey and Iran. The Israeli political system, though the most democratic of all Middle-Eastern regimes, is beyond the scope of the current research.. The author, however, finds it essential to build the political development of Israel in his later Middle-Eastern research. The study deals with the following countries: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, the Palestine Authority, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar , United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

7 *US State Department Reports 2007: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Israel and the Occupied Territories.*

8 The Parliamentary seats were first distributed between Christians and Muslim 6:5, then, in the wake of the Taif Treaty putting an end to the civil war, it was changed to 6:6, *i.e*. equal shares. The commander-in-chief of the army and the president of the Republic are traditionally Maronite Christians, the Speaker of the Parliament is Shia Muslim Arab, the prime Minister is a Sunni Arab, the Vice president is Greek orthodox, while the Defense Minister comes from the Druz community. For a detailed introduction to the Lebanese political system see PICARD, *Lebanon. A Shattered Country,* p. 70.

independence. Freedom house characterizes contemporary Lebanon as a partially free country, or, in another terms, as an illiberal democracy.[9]

Turkey, a non-Arab state in the region, set off on the long road to democratization following the Second World War. Ataturk's deep social and political reforms, carried out in a top-down manner, did not require democratic political structures: on the contrary, the success of the transformation was promoted by authoritarian stability. Turkey nevertheless has social characteristics different from neighbouring Arab states (*e.g.* it has a developed middle class), which have contributed to its democratic development. Turkey does not meet the standards of Western-type liberal democracies either, as the military has been historically dominant in domestic political processes – in the field of human rights, and, within that, minority rights (especially with regard to Kurds), it also lags behind Western norms. Scholarly works often raise the question of the exportability of the Turkish model to the Middle East, yet such suggestions are also met by scepticism due to the particular patterns of social development conducive to democratization in Turkey and not found elsewhere in the region.

During the third wave of democratization none of the Middle Eastern states switched to a democratic political system. In the early 1990s several experts noted the exceptional character of the Middle East, as a whole series of different theories were proven wrong in the region, and no successful democratic transformation took place in any single state. One of the characteristics of the non-democratic systems of the Middle East is in fact their longevity. In Middle Eastern states, power is closely associated with dynastic legitimacy, and, even in republics, a leader may remain in power for decades. According to the 2009 Freedom House report, of the 18 countries listed as Middle Eastern, one (Israel) is considered free, six are partially free, and 11 states are deemed not free. According to this evaluation, the situation in the Middle East has not changed, and, if anything, the events in Gaza in late 2008 and the presidential elections in Iran in 2009 have signalled a retreat from elements of democratic politics previously established in the respective countries.[10]

The picture, however, is more complex than some Western analyses make it appear. During the past two decades the region has undergone significant changes, as much in domestic politics, as in its international position. As in other parts of the developing world, demand for change is getting stronger in the lower rungs of society. Responding to these changes, Middle Eastern leaders have launched limited reforms aimed at preserving the power of the political elite both in the republics and the monarchies. These political experiments, however, cannot be regarded as real reforms, since they have left the foundations of the political structure unchanged and far-reaching changes have not been foreseen even in the long term. On the other hand, pressure from the external players, particularly from the United States and international organizations, has been pushing Middle Eastern leaders to move towards

[9] The concept of illiberal democracy was made popular by ZAKARIA in 2003, in his book *The Future of Freedom. Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*. By illiberal democracy Zakaria means political systems which formally comply with the minimal conditions of democracy (*e.g*. elections are held regularly), but civil rights do not prevail (*e.g*. opposition leaders are imprisoned before the elections).

[10] *Freedom in the World 2009.*

the adaption of some features of liberal democracy. The picture is further complicated by the asymmetric embeddedness of the region into the world economy, which has put the transformation of the economy on the agenda in states which are not exporters of oil. In oil-producing countries, the diversification of the economy has been identified as a major challenge, yielding dual political and economic reform agendas.[11]

In the course of two decades since the collapse of the Berlin wall, the states of the Middle East have gone through significant changes. Particularly the last five years have brought advances in the area of political structures. To mention just a few examples: in Egypt direct presidential elections with several candidates were held in 2005, municipal elections were held in Saudi Arabia in 2005, while in Kuwait women were given the right to vote in 2005. However, the positive changes have not affected the foundations of the respective political systems *i.e*. in most states reforms were meant to ensure the survival of the regime, and were not seen as goals in themselves.

On the one hand, this paper offers a static picture of Middle Eastern political systems, pointing out the similarities and differences between the political structures of the individual states. On the other hand, it summarizes the political changes of the past two decades, trying to grasp the dynamics of the political processes. Transitology and comparative political science have been focusing primarily on East Central Europe and Latin America, while the Middle East has often been thought of by theorists as an anomaly where it is not democratic changes, but weapons that determine what will happen next. The current research wishes to break with the theories emphasizing the exceptional nature of the region, but at the same time it is pessimistic as to the consequences of US involvement.

Western analyses also often fail to acknowledge that while there are several similarities between the countries of the region, there are also equally numerous differences. A case in point is Libya, which, according to the definition of its leader, Moammar al-Qaddafi is in fact an ultra-democracy in which power is directly exercised by the people. Libya is certainly in a category of its own, at least in the region. At the same time, it displays similarities with the states where the revolutionary ideology of Arab nationalism has been determinative with regard to evolutionary trends in the years following the Second World War. If a general picture of the political trends of the Middle East is to be outlined, the experiences and particularities of no single country should be used to engage in rash generalizations. A scholarly enterprise needs to present the general characteristics of the Middle Eastern states, and, proposing a typology of these regimes, point out the differences, as well.

The applicability of theories of democracy for the Middle-East

Of the theories examining the democratic transformation of the developing world, it is modernization theory, transitology and Orientalism that are most commonly

[11] BRYNEN, KORANY and NOBLE, "Introduction: Theoretical perspectives on Arab Liberalization and Democratization".

mentioned. All three theories, however, elude the question of the causes of the failure and/or absence of political transformation.

Modernization theory holds that simultaneously with development (industrialization, urbanization, etc.), Western institutions also develop in a given state and democracy automatically becomes the rule of the game. According to modernization theory, achieving medium income levels across broad segments of society provides the economic preconditions of democratic transformation. Under the theory, the primary goal of those in power should be eliminating poverty and illiteracy. Several, mainly South-East Asian politicians argue however, reversing the thesis, that economic prosperity makes 'heavy-handed' leadership necessary as democracy may lead to anarchy.[12] In pre-modern societies democracy is not viable, as the sufficient condition of democratization is a minimal level of development. It is development that leads to the formation of a middle class interested in political reforms capable of efficiently demanding democratic transformation. This above model does describe the West European experience quite well, but, as argued in the paper, it is totally inapplicable in the Middle East.

The economic and social development levels of Middle Eastern states are not that different from those of any other developing macro region, and these countries certainly have indicators better than Sub-Saharan states. According to modernization theory, especially the Gulf monarchies, whose GDP per capita is on par with that of Western European countries, are ripe for democratization. Still, these oil-producing states are *de facto* absolute monarchies, in which power has been concentrated in the hands of ruling families for centuries. Inverting the question, modernization theory does not offer any explanation why, in spite of the economic development levels sufficient for democratization, authoritarian regimes are so persistent.[13]

Those criticizing modernization theories, however, often succumb to the intellectual temptations of a competing theory. Orientalism focuses on culture and religion as factors impeding development.[14] As to the Middle East, it has become a generally accepted view that Islam has a negative effect on development, and it is incompatible with modernity. The best-known advocate of this view is Bernard Lewis, the doyen of Orientalists. In one of his works Lewis discusses the 'clash' between Islam and modernity, asking the question *"What went wrong?"* in the title. Islam, in his opinion, has a poor track record, when compared with Western democracies, and finds itself unfavourably compared to Christianity, which he considers a positive cultural factor. "There is nothing in the history of Islam that would be reminiscent of the emancipation, acceptance and integration of people of different faiths and non-believers common in the West…" – Lewis believes.[15]

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[12] The relationship between the so-called developing state and democracy is analysed by CSICSMANN, "A fejlesztő állam különböző társadalmi-kulturális viszonyok között".

[13] HINNEBUSCH, "Authoritarian Persistence, Democratization Theory and the Middle East: An Overview and Critique", pp. 11-13.

[14] SAID, *Orientalism.*

[15] LEWIS, *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East,* p. 114.

The theses of Orientalist theory are, however, not supported by empirics either, as more than half of the 1.5 billion Muslims living in the world today live in democratic political systems. In a number of countries with large Muslim populations, far-reaching political changes have started, which have also affected the structures of authoritarian systems. In the most populous Muslim state, Indonesia, the Suharto-regime was overthrown in the wake of the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, and free presidential elections were held. Besides developments in politics, the so-called theory of Islamic democracy, which has recently been proposed, also weakens the theses on which Orientalism rests. It has been formulated by Muslim theoreticians (living mostly in Western states and having dual identities), who have sought to construct a notion of democracy immanent in Islam. Muslim democracy theory therefore tries to explain notions and practices like elections, liberalism, tolerance, human rights etc. with reference to their roots in Islam.[16] Proponents of the theory are seeking to avoid the impression that democracy appeared in the Muslim world as a result of Western imperialism only, and that consequently it is an alien political idea forced onto the region. (At the same time, one must note that Muslim democracy theory is still in its infancy.)

The third theoretical framework on offer is transitology, *i.e.* the theory of democratic transition, arguing that the transformation of an authoritarian system can be started under any economic and cultural conditions. Transitology rests on observations made in the contexts of the East European and Latin American experiences of democratization, and it has become a distinct field of research in political science.[17] Researchers of democratic transitions claim that the dissolution of authoritarian regimes has identifiable stages that every democratizing country has to go through. Transition itself is an open-ended, reversible process, *i.e.* the formation of a consolidated democracy cannot be guaranteed, and, under the worst-case scenario, even regression toward autocracy may follow initial steps of democratization.

In his controversial study, Thomas Carothers has summarized the major theses of democratic transition in five points: 1. Every country moving away from dictatorial structures has entered the phase of democratic transition. 2. The process of democratization consists of three stages: the political opening, the collapse of the regime, and consolidation. 3. Organizing the first free elections is a cornerstone of democratization. 4. Input conditions do not matter as to the success of the democratization process. 5. Democratization postulates a viable nation-state.[18]

Experts dealing with transitology have, in the past years, ignored the Middle Eastern region, saying that democratic transition has not occurred there. This exactly is the most serious fault of the theory: It is trying to make generalizations based on empirics from East European and Latin American states, ignoring that in different parts of the world there are divergent political structures. The main critics of transitology are experts who specialize in area studies (including the Middle East), and tend to highlight the importance of knowing the local context of the given region, as its absence might lead to misunderstanding political processes.

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16 See SACHEDINA, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism.*

17 WHITEHEAD, *Democratization:Theory and Experience*.

18 CAROTHERS, "The End of the Transition Paradigm".

The three theoretical frames introduced above do not provide sufficient explanation as to why the worldwide wave of democratization has not affected the broader Middle Eastern region. The region counts as an exception from the aspect of any of these theories, and this (too) demonstrates the need to gain a deeper insight into the structural layout of the Middle Eastern states.

Common characteristics of Middle Eastern states

The borders of the Middle Eastern states discussed in this study were drawn as a result of bargaining by European colonial powers in the 19th and 20th centuries. The formation of North African states was historically different, as French (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria), Italian (Libya) and British (Egypt) expansion had started well before the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. The end of the First World War, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East signalled the beginning of the mandate system, which placed one-time provinces of the defunct state under the tutelage of European powers. At the same time, some countries gained a chance to develop while keeping their independence and hence with a greater degree of autonomy (*e.g.* Persia[19], Oman). Still, most states in the Middle East have not gone through an organic national development in the European sense of the word, but were formed artificially. In spite of this artificial national development the system of states formed by Europeans has survived into the present, although border disputes still cause tensions between Middle Eastern states.

Historical events played an important part also in the development of political structures. In the countries under European influence for shorter or longer periods, the political institutions were also established following European patterns (if to varying extents) The only exceptions to this trend are Oman and Saudi Arabia, where European structures were not copied but the traditional tribal and religious functions were transformed into the state. In the case of other Gulf States we come across so-called hybrid structures, partly following Western patterns, partly preserving traditional institutions.

In most Middle Eastern and North-African states political life was organized following Western patterns in the 20th century. The political elites learned the art of modern policy-making and European life-styles in European capitals, and thus became the carrier of modernity. The Middle Eastern political elite of the early 20th century saw the key to successful modernization in imitating Western Europe, even though it was fighting for independence at the same time. The political institutions that came into being as well as the established ideologies were considered historically alien to the region, while considerations of democracy rarely emerged as subjects of public discussion. Also, the political institutions copied did not operate according to European

[19] The country adopted the name Iran in 1935. Though in the 19-20th centuries Great Britain and Russia were competing for the influence on Iran, and for shorter periods of time the country became occupied by foreign powers, it eventually managed to keep its independence. Morocco also succeeded in avoiding Ottoman authority, but the case was different with Europe's gaining ground.

mechanisms, but were constructed following the centuries-old tribal and social system.[20]

Middle Eastern political systems in the early 21st century are, at first sight, similar to the political layout of modern European states. Apart from a few countries (*e.g.* Saudi Arabia), almost each state has a written constitution, there exist one or more political parties and civil associations and elections are held at regular intervals (even if the democratic character of these elections is sometimes doubtful). Looking at it from another angle, however, it does not take long to realize that Middle Eastern political regimes only formally take after their European counterparts. Political parties and civil society are weak, the text of the constitution is not complied with in practice, there is no civilian control over the military, and (the most conspicuous difference to the European eye) the states of the Middle East have not been secularized, and Islam plays an important part in the functioning of every state (Turkey, being a secular state, is an exception).[21] In sum, Middle Eastern political systems are characterized by a certain duality: formally they are similar to European structures, but considering their internal operational mechanisms they are built on the principle of traditional group solidarity.[22]

The *shared characteristics* of the Muslim states in the Middle East may therefore be summarized as follows:[23]

1. The role of Islam. One of the main differences between Middle Eastern and European states concerns the question of secularization. The separation of state and church has been closely linked to European development. In the Muslim countries of the Middle East, with the exception of Turkey, secularization in the European sense does not exist. Turkey is the only state in the Middle East where any reference to Islam has been deleted from the constitution. As a religion, a legal system and as culture and civilization, Islam fundamentally influences the political structures of every state. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the so-called modernist tendencies, which sought to modernize the Middle East following Western models, attempted to push Islam into the background, but these efforts remained unsuccessful.[24] From the 1960s-1970s of the lure of Islam and the prospect of Islamization in previously secularized Middle Eastern countries became apparent once again.

In his writings, Egyptian expert Saad Eddin Ibrahim points to the fact that the Middle Eastern states never had to tackle the problem of religion *versus* secularization understood as a dichotomy. This stands in stark contrast with Europe, where these questions were raised in a completely different manner.[25] In Ibrahim's view, nationalism and religious identity in the Middle East did not exclude each other, they were even complementary, and almost built on one another. This is even true of a secular, revolutionary system as *e.g.* Nasser's Egypt in the 1960s. The difference between the individual Middle Eastern countries lies in the degree to which Islam

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[20] LEWIS, "Freedom and Justice in the Modern Middle East".

[21] On the question of secularization see the study *From "totalizing Islam" to "secular Islam"* by Zsolt ROSTOVÁNYI in this volume (editor).

[22] Until the 19th century European concepts like constitution or party had been unknown to the population of the region.

[23] Cf. LUCIANI, ed., *The Arab State*, pp. xxvii-xxx.

[24] LEWIS, *What Went Wrong?,* p. 112.

[25] IBRAHIM, E*gypt, Islam and Democracy. Critical Essays*, p. 190.

determines the political system. (This question will be discussed in more detail later.) Looking over the tendencies of the past decades it can be stated that no weakening of the positions of Islam, and no chances for secularization, which Western experts consider a precondition of Western liberal democracy, can be expected to take place.

The notion of secularization cannot be interpreted with regard to the Middle Eastern countries, as in Islam there is no religious structure that could be separated from the state. Islam is religion and state all in one (*din wa-dawla*), which further underscores that the presence of Islam in the region must be taken into account, in the long term as well. Other authors[26] are admittedly of a different view, arguing notably that the formation of the secular state is unavoidable, and talk about the need for adaptation. Globalization, as a process, also suggests that certain changes will inevitably occur.

2. *The significance of etatism.* Ever since their respective declarations of independence, the state has played a decisive part in the economic life of Middle Eastern countries. The state as the redistributor of income and as the largest employer has largely determined the limits of the economic development of Middle Eastern countries.[27] By the 1970s the Middle Eastern state had "overgrown" itself, it extended too far, which led to a decrease in competitiveness and efficiency, and eventually produced economic crises.[28] In the 1970s, the wave of economic liberalization, sparked by the failure of the state-driven process of modernization, did not affect the dominant position of the state in the economy. The *Arab Human Development Report* published in 2004 and analysing the democratic deficit of the region compared the authoritarian states of the Middle East to black holes. The Middle Eastern state 'swallows' everything and nothing can 'escape' from under its control.[29]

3. *The decisive role of ruling families and charismatic/authoritarian leaders.* Both in the republics and the monarchies, government is concentrated in the hands of a narrow layer of the society. Within the political elite there are a few outstanding persons, or groups of persons, who make the decisions themselves, and exercise the right of veto over other organs of the state.

The caliph's position becoming an inheritable institution can be dated back to the Umayyad dynasty. In the age of the prophet Mohamed and during the reign of the four Rashidun caliphs, the leader of the community was elected on the basis of suitability, which contradicts the traditions commonly followed in later times. In the Middle Eastern states that emerged after the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, the leader's position became markedly authoritarian. The most prominent example may well be that of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who enforced compliance with Westernizing reforms. The Turkish political system was only democratized in the years following the Second World War, after Atatürk's death. While in the monarchies members of a few ruling families (Al Khalifa in Bahrain, Al Maktum in Dubai, Al Sabah in Kuwait, Al Saud in Saudi Arabia, etc.) occupy a hegemonic position, in the republics authoritarian leaders govern the country, theoretically on a non-dynastic basis.

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[26] AN-NA'IM, *Islam and the Secular State. Negotiating the Future of Shari'a,* pp. 1-144.

[27] In detail see RICHARDS and WATERBURY, *Political Economy of the Middle East*.

[28] AYUBI, *Over-Stating the Arab State. Politics and Society in the Middle East,* pp. 1-37.

[29] *The Arab Human Development Report [2004]: Towards Freedom in the Arab World,* p. 126.

4. The domestic political role of the armed forces. The army has been performing and still performs a decisive role in every Middle Eastern country, a phenomenon which can be explained by the following facts: a.) Very high military expenditure (compared to other countries of the globe), which is made possible by the very considerable revenues of Middle Eastern regimes.[30] b.) The military has played a significant part in the formation of national identity. c.) Interpenetration between the political elite and the military, especially in the republics. d.) The military has a remarkable prestige, military career is a possible form of social mobility. e.) Armed conflicts occur in the Middle Eastern region with an exceptionally high frequency, and these are much more lasting than the wars of other regions (consider e.g. the Arab-Israeli conflict).[31]

In Turkey, generally thought of as democratic, the army held the constitutional role of safeguarding democratic institutions and Kemalist principles, as long as until the millennium. Since the victory in the 2002 elections by the (moderate Islamist) Justice and Development Party (AKP), besides the constitutional court and the Kemalist elite, the military has also been trying to counterbalance the Islamist governing party in the Turkish political system. In other Middle Eastern countries the role of the military is even stronger, particularly in the republics, in which the military is the main guarantor of power of the authoritarian leader. It is rather common in the Middle East for the head of the executive power to emerge from the ranks of the military (see *e.g.* Egypt).

The typology of Middle Eastern regimes

The Middle Eastern regimes are not as uniform in reality as they might appear based on the above description. A political typology of Middle Eastern political systems according to several criteria will be attempted below.

One of the most trivial aspects, popular in Western political science, is dividing the states of the region into republics and monarchies. Of the twenty states of the Middle East, eight have a monarchic structure, eleven are republics, while one, Libya, (officially called the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) is a special type in itself. Four countries initially becoming monarchies after their respective declarations of independence (Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Libya) eventually turned to become republics through a revolution. In three of them the monarchy was overthrown by a revolution inspired by nationalism, while in one it was the Islamic movement that subverted the monarchy. The monarchies can be further classified with regard to whether or not they have a written constitution. From this point of view we can distinguish between constitutional monarchies and absolute monarchies (see **Table 1**).

Analysing the table according to the level of democracy, we can come to the conclusion that two of the republics (Turkey and Lebanon) have democratic traditions, while in two of the monarchies (Jordan and Morocco) positive changes have taken place in the past two decades.

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[30] This is cause and effect at the same time.

[31] PICARD, "The Role of the Military".

The distribution of republican and monarchic structures across states is also explained by the history of a given country. While British colonists usually preferred the person of a powerful king determined to defend British hegemony (see *e.g.* Iraq), the French usually favoured the republic, in harmony with their historical traditions (see Syria, Lebanon).[32]

On the basis of Freedom House's annual reports, according to the effectiveness of civil and political freedoms, Middle Eastern regimes can be grouped into categories of free, partly free and not free states (see **Table 2**). The major deficiency of the Freedom House system of categories is that it does not consider the regional context, sticking narrowly to the Western interpretation of democracy and human rights. The reason why, despite its shortcomings, the Freedom House reports are relied on in this paper is that Western-type democracy has become a sort of self-imposed point of reference even in the Middle Eastern region.

Table 1

Monarchies and republics in the Middle East and North Africa

Monarchies		**Republics**	
constitutional	**absolute**	**autocratic/secular**	**Islamic**
Bahrain[33]	United Arab Emirates (emirate)	Algeria	Iran
Jordan	Oman (sultanate)	Egypt	Sudan
Qatar (emirate)[34]	Saudi Arabia	Iraq	
Kuwait (emirate)		Yemen	
Morocco		Lebanon	
		Libya (*jamahiriyya*)[35]	
		Palestinian Authority[36]	
		Syria	
		Tunisia	

[32] OWEN, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East,* p. 16.

[33] In Bahrain the constitution of the country was passed in 2002.

[34] In Qatar the first written constitution of the country was drafted in 1999.

[35] For the sake of simplicity we have grouped Libya among the republics, which was to emphasize that the political structure of the North African country is rather similar to that of the other states in this category.

[36] For the time being the Palestine Authority cannot be considered an independent, sovereign state, at the same time its political structure carries characteristics of the other states in this group.

Considering structural aspects as well as historical development, Roger Owen distinguishes three types of Middle Eastern states. The so-called colonial states were established following the First World War, in the framework of the mandate system, and were characterized, aside from a centralized administration, by a high degree of external influence. Such states are Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria etc. The second type of Middle Eastern states includes those founded in the years following the declaration of independence and characterized by etatist modernization, mainly adopting West European governmental patterns. The reforms made possible by independence were often buttressed by leftist ideologies, relying on local traditions as well as on external influence (a case in point being the phenomenon of Nasserism in Egypt). The third type of development is the model of the authoritarian state, which is characterized by the hypertrophization of state institutions (military, police, the mass of public servants, state investments etc.), a one-party system and strong leadership by a single person (see the presidency of Hafez al-Assad in Syria).[37]

Table 2

Groups of Middle Eastern regimes according to the degree of democracy[38]

Free	Half-free	Not free
	Bahrain	Algeria
	Jordan	United Arab Emirates
	Kuwait	Egypt
	Lebanon	Iraq
	Morocco	Iran
	Turkey	Libya
	Yemen	Mauritania
		Oman
		Qatar
		Saudi Arabia
		Sudan
		Syria
		Tunisia

While Owen emphasized external influence in the formation of Middle Eastern states, Iliya Harik explains the development of Middle Eastern regimes with reference to domestic peculiarities when he mentions the traditions of the pre-colonial times as

[37] OWEN, *op. cit.,* pp. 5-22.
[38] *Freedom in the World 2009, l.c.*

the source of legitimacy for the Middle Eastern governments, and rejects the view that exclusively blames foreign influence for problematic aspects of state formation in the region.[39] Harik distinguishes five types of Middle Eastern states: (1) In the so-called imamates the imam himself controls the state. The author classifies Oman and Yemen as belonging to this group. (2) Saudi Arabia is the textbook example of a state built on the alliance of tribal chiefs and imams, where, since the 18th century, the power of the Saud family has been legitimized by the Wahhabite doctrine. (3) Traditional secular regimes, in which the ruling family or the state has no religious legitimacy (Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Lebanon). (4) Bureaucratic-military regimes, where power is centralized and power-enforcement organizations play a decisive role in domestic policy as well (Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia). (5) States created by the colonists, which do not represent the survival of traditional structures, and are constructed around the power of a local leader equipped with the instruments of exercising power largely by one or more European powers active in the region (Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Palestine).[40] The classification, as it deals only with the Arab states, does not include either Turkey or Iran. A much more significant shortcoming, however, is that it all but ignores the role the West had played in shaping contemporary Middle Eastern borders. The logic of the nation-state was totally alien and without antecedents in the Middle East from a historical point of view, and the territorial principle underlying it was new and foreign, as well.[41]

Raymond Hinnebusch, based on structural considerations, distinguishes post-populist regimes from the monarchies dependent on rent seeking. While the first category resulted from the merging of indigenous traditions and reforms carried out following Western patterns, the latter is built on a set of intimate linkages between the oil-based economy and tribalism. Post-populist republics, after the crisis of Arab nationalism in the 1970s, were forced to adopt economic liberalization (see the policy of *infitah* in Egypt), which, however, was not followed by real democratization. The economic reforms, just like the political reforms launched in the early 1990s, did not produce genuine structural changes, they only served the interests of the elite groups in power. So, in the short term, we cannot expect the democratization of post-populist states, though several factors, (*e.g.* economic aspects, external pressures) are pointing in this direction.

In rentier monarchies, the fluctuation of oil prices and the possibility of the exhaustion of oil revenues cause concerns among members of the ruling dynasty. The royal family usually recruits the armed forces, which are generally small, from its own ranks, and subordinates everybody to the economic interests of the monarchy. Democratization cannot be expected in the monarchies, in spite of the volatility of rental revenues.[42]

The analysis by Hinnebusch sheds light on the aspects of political economy, but it ignores that rent-seeking economies themselves are also very different, and that not every monarchy is based on such an economy. Furthermore, if we compare the

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[39] EDWARDS, *Contemporary Politics in the Middle East,* p. 13.

[40] HARIK, "The Origins of the Arab State System".

[41] Cf. BADIE, *The Imported State. The Westernization of the Political Order.*

[42] HINNEBUSCH, *op. cit*., pp. 21-24.

categories of rent-seeking and post-populist regimes with the tripartite classification by Freedom House, there seems to be no correlation between the two. It is apparent that rent-dependent monarchies, in which civil and political rights prevail to a certain degree, can be found in the partly free category in larger numbers than post-populist republics, which are more frequently classified as not free, *i.e*. non-democratic. This, however, is explained by the institutional and cultural characteristics of the individual regimes.

Mehran Kamrava's classification (see **Table 3**) relies on the distinctions presented by Hinnebusch, but it is much more sophisticated than the latter, as it also takes into account the differences between the individual states. Kamrava divides Middle Eastern states into two major groups, the group of democratic, and the group of non-democratic states. The category that he calls proto-democracies contains regimes in which civil and political rights prevail at least partially. The name proto-democracy suggests that Kamrava does not look at these states as static, but as political systems undergoing change. (However, grouping Yemen among the democratic states is at least questionable.)

What is most important for us about Kamrava's classification is the system of sub-categories for non-democratic regimes. Kamrava suggests that in *inclusionary-populist* regimes citizens have the opportunity to take part in politics, but not in key decisions. These regimes, like *e.g.* Iran or Libya, are inclusionary states rather on the level of rhetoric, while in practice they are exclusionary and are built around armed organizations and the monopoly of force. At the time of the writing of this paper, Iraq can rather be classified among proto-democracies, but it has not been crystallized during the seven years since the war what the future will bring along following the current withdrawal of the American troops. As a second subtype, Kamrava distinguish-es two groups of *sultanates, i.e.* states with a monarchic structure. A large part of the budget of the first type, which he labels oil monarchies, comes from crude oil and natural gas revenues, as a result of which the ruling dynasty is largely free of the duty to account of its expenditure vis-à-vis society. It follows from this that the possibility of political reforms is rather limited, since, as long as rent revenues ensure the regimes' economic foundation, far-reaching political reforms will lack incentives. The so-called 'civic myth' monarchies do not possess either significant oil reserves, or a social setting similar to those of the Gulf monarchies.[43] In Kamrava's view, it is due to this crucial difference that over the recent years important political changes have taken place in Jordan and Morocco. Recently, however, his claim has become more vulnerable to criticism because since the publication of these theses the trend has been reversed in both countries, with a series of government decisions limiting civil rights and freedoms once more. In exclusionary states, power is exercised by a narrow political elite with the vigorous support of the military. But, as to the role of the military, there are also differences. Algeria and Sudan can be regarded as a special group, as they can be considered *de facto* military regimes. In Egypt, Syria and Tunisia it is the secret services that play an important part in ensuring conformity with the political regime on the part

[43] This view gets partly questioned by the fact that in Moroccan economy the income derived from phosphorus sales should be regarded as rental revenue, while Jordan receives a considerable sum from the United States.

of the citizenry.[44] Political liberalization has very slim opportunities in these states in the near future.

Kamrava's classification undoubtedly highlights those aspects (rent seeking, the role of the military etc.) that are missing from other categorizations, but it can be criticized from several points of view. For example, the oil monarchies themselves also differ from each other. In Kuwait, the last two decades have witnessed significant changes, even if the basic structure of the system has not been transformed, while in Oman the political system has remained nearly unchanged.

There are three directions from which incentives for change may impact Middle Eastern political regimes. Firstly, there are experts who believe that grassroots social initiatives will be the key to the political development of Middle Eastern states. Secondly, according to other experts, political reforms will likely be launched from above, controlled by the ruling elite. Thirdly, in the age of accelerated globalization, some analysts underline the significance of external pressures as incentives for political liberalization. The following section gives a brief overview of each of the three aspects.

Table 3

Kamrava's typology of Middle Eastern regimes[45]

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">Non-democratic regimes</td><td>Democratic regimes</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Inclusionary-populist</td><td colspan="2">Sultanistic</td><td colspan="2">Exclusionary</td><td rowspan="2">Proto-democracies</td></tr>
<tr><td>Oil monarchies</td><td>Civic myth regimes</td><td>Military states</td><td>Mukhabarat regimes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Iraq (1981-2003)</td><td>Bahrain</td><td>Jordan</td><td>Algeria</td><td>Egypt</td><td>Israel</td></tr>
<tr><td>Iran (1979)</td><td>United Arab Emirates</td><td>Morocco</td><td>Sudan</td><td>Syria</td><td>Yemen</td></tr>
<tr><td>Libya (1969)</td><td>Qatar</td><td rowspan="4"></td><td rowspan="4"></td><td>Tunisia</td><td>Lebanon</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3"></td><td rowspan="2">Kuwait</td><td rowspan="2"></td><td>Palestine Authority</td></tr>
<tr><td>Oman</td><td>Turkey</td></tr>
<tr><td>Saudi Arabia</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

[44] KAMRAVA, "Non-democratic States and Political Liberalisation in the Middle East: a Structural Analysis".

[45] KAMRAVA, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

The role of Muslim public opinion

In recent years several valuable opinion surveys have tried to assess the commitment of the Muslim public to democracy. One of the most significant among them is the survey done in the framework of the *World Values Survey,* which resulted in comparative data. Of the 14 countries with dominantly Muslim populations under survey, seven are located in the Middle Eastern region. **Diagram 1** shows the comparative data from the 2002 *World Values Survey* focusing on Muslim countries.

The vertical axis locates individual countries along the traditional versus secular-rational values continuum. Traditional values like religion, family and national pride are characteristic primarily of rural societies. Secular values are typical of industrialized societies, and are often the opposites of traditional values. The horizontal axis illustrates the comparative role of materialistic and post-materialistic values in a given society. Materialistic or survival values (economic safety, refusal of homosexuality, preferential treatment given to male candidates for a post, etc.) tend to characterize countries at lower stages of economic development, while post-modern or welfare values usually emerge along higher income levels.

The data support the hypothesis that Middle Eastern countries have a preference for traditional values as opposed to secular values, whiles materialistic values dominate post-materialistic ones. Israel, not included here, is located in the middle of the diagram, close to France if with a stronger societal commitment to material values, which justifies the conclusion that the Jewish state is similar in its system of values to the Western societies. Inglehart's analysis has also pointed out that there are differences between Middle Eastern states in terms of value systems. The societies of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are not as conservative as *e.g.* Moroccan or Jordanian society, and they place greater emphasis on "self-realization" and other post-materialistic values.[46] This contradicts the common belief that Saudi Arabia has the most conservative population and the society which is most committed to Islamic traditions. In the case of Jordan and Morocco, which are usually thought of as developed among Middle Eastern countries, it is probably the high rate of rural population and large income inequality that explains their higher than average conservatism, and that these societies place great emphasis on acquiring material goods.

Inglehart and his co-authors have also set up nine civilizational-cultural zones on the basis of the data from the countries surveyed, and compared levels of societal commitment to democracy in the different regions. Data from the five Arab countries included in the research (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan Morocco, Saudi Arabia) show that 61% of those asked agreed with the statement that although democracy has its shortcomings, it is still the best form of government. In West European countries the corresponding value is 52%. It is ironic that according to these values the population of Egypt (98%), Morocco (96%), Jordan (90%) and Algeria (88%) support democracy more than Hungarian society (80%) does.[47]

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[46] INGLEHART, "The Worldviews of Islamic Publics in Global Perspective", p. 33.

[47] INGLEHART, *op. cit.,* p. 42.

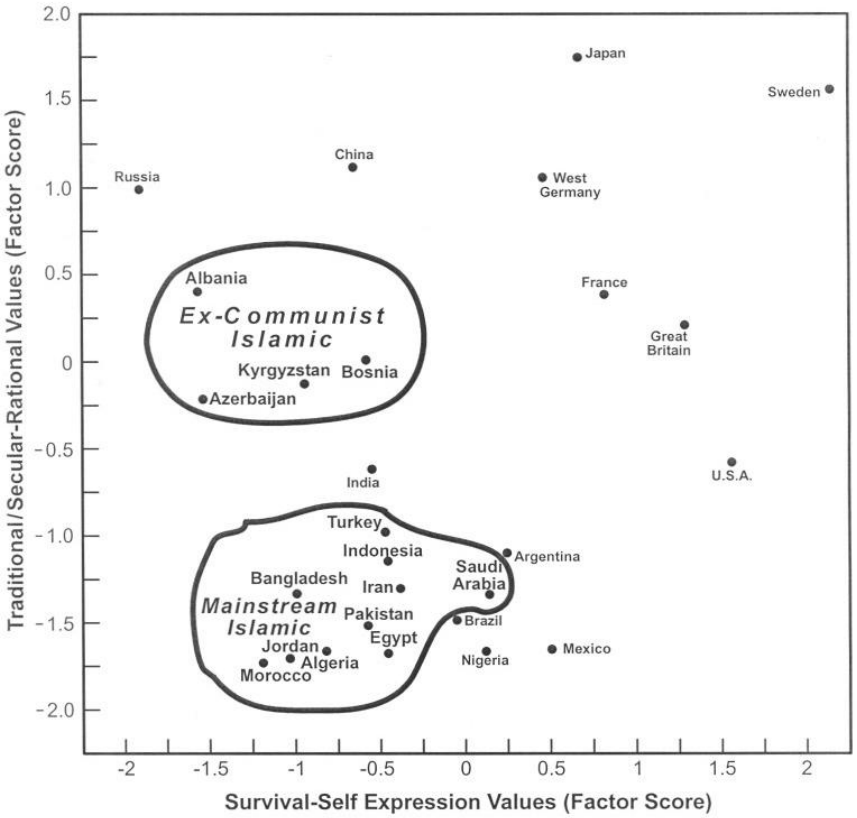


Diagram 1

Systems of values in Muslim societies[48]

Is there a contradiction between the above-mentioned Middle Eastern societies demonstrating a preference for democracy and the above diagram showing their commitment to traditional and materialistic values? Inglehart, on the basis of the modernization theory, comes to the conclusion that with the standard of living rising, most Middle Eastern states will gradually be moving toward the top right corner, much as it happened in the experience of Western European states. However, the data should be interpreted more critically, and the cultural-historical context should also be taken into account. In fact the case is not that Middle Eastern societies consider the introduction of Western-type democracy an utmost priority (a claim the research quoted above does not make either). What the survey reflects is the majority of the people expressing their dissatisfaction with the existing system. Democracy itself is a foreign notion for the population of the region, and people are either unable to interpret its substance, or, at the very least, to interpret it the way a Western European citizen does.

Dissatisfaction at the grassroots level is linked to several unsolved problems. In Egypt, where commitment to democracy was the highest, the war in Iraq and the unsolved Palestinian question have, in recent years, been interwoven with serious

[48] INGLEHART, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

economic issues (price hikes due to the lurking food crisis) and found their expression in criticisms of the regime. Despite such factors of instability, historical experience suggests that Middle Eastern political reforms, even when they do occur, produce new authoritarian structures rather than progress towards democracy.

The other key opinion survey is the *Gallup World Poll,* in the framework of which 35 countries with Muslim majorities were surveyed. The findings are similar to the data gained from the World Values Survey, i.e. democracy enjoys broad general support in the wider Muslim world, including the Middle East.[49] Research, however, has pointed out that respondents in the Muslim world do not want to adopt a Western political model, but wish to establish a kind of democracy based on local traditions, especially on the *shari'a*. The concept of Islamic democracy has aroused intensive interest among liberal Muslim theoreticians,[50] particularly since the early 1990s. Also, given that since the 2003 invasion of Iraq inhabitants of the region associate liberal democracy with US military intervention, theories seeking to infuse the concept of democracy with an air of authenticity have come to the fore.

Of the 35 countries, there were five in which the majority responded that *shari'a* should be the only source of law. In the region under discussion here, the populations of Egypt and Jordan, while in the wider Muslim world the societies of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan prefer a legal system exclusively based on *shari'a.*[51]

In close connection with the notion of democracy, Gallup also analysed the inequalities between the sexes, and concluded on the basis of the data that even in more conservative societies there is a social demand for strengthening women's social and political role.

Opinion poll data confirm the hypothesis that political reforms are not only encouraged by Washington, they also enjoy wider social support. But Middle Eastern societies are sceptical as to the American initiatives, and they equate the democratization attempts of the Bush administration with foreign influence. Middle Eastern leaders will have to face ever-growing pressure coming from below in the near future. It is much more likely that, in the event of any political change taking place in the Middle East, new authoritarian regimes will be formed (see below). The major actor of grassroots initiatives today is not the individual, but civil society. The activities of civil society organizations are, however, restricted by the existing political structures in manifold ways.

Civil society in the Middle East

Political scientists and sociologists tend to consider the emergence of civil society to be a precondition of democracy. Ernest Gellner is of the view that instead of the slogan of

[49] ESPOSITO and MOGAHED, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims really Think,* pp. 29-63.

[50] Cf. STEINVORTH and Bernard ZAN, "Parliaments, Kings and Tribal Councils. Does 'Islamic Democracy' Exist?"

[51] ESPOSITO and MOGAHED, *op. cit.,* p. 48.

democracy, the emphasis should rather be placed on the development of civil society, since lacking of a certain type of institutional system and a social context, the concept of political participation remains vacuous. Gellner suggests that the spreading of democracy is a universally desirable process, but in a considerable part of the world's countries it is not viable. As he argues, democracy is indeed necessary – but we should emphasize the system of institutions and the social context that makes it possible and necessary.[52] The theory of democracy is an ideal that is too abstract to be realized in every country, and as a result the emphasis must be placed on civil society. In our view, civil society plays an important part in the democratization of a country, but itself is not suitable to initiate political reforms.

There seems to be a consensus as far as the existence of the civil society in the region is concerned, a phenomenon evidenced by the various professional organizations, university clubs, human rights organizations and women's organizations, which have begun to mushroom since the 1970s. This process has taken place in every country under discussion here, as well as in Turkey and Iran, a fact that is also borne out by statistical figures. Statistics from 1991 show 13,239 civil organizations operating in Egypt, but there was also significant activity in the occupied Palestinian territories (in 1992 there were 444 organizations).[53]

The formation of civil society is closely linked to Western history, and there are views that hold that it is foreign to Muslim civilization. Most current research, however, disproves this claim, stressing that in the Muslim world such organizations have existed for a long time, partly independent of the state.[54] In the history of the Muslim world, there have been three institutions which have operated independently of the state: the *ulema,* the tribes and the group of traditional traders, the 'bazaar'.[55]

In her study Vickie Langohr pointed out the fact that the weakness of Middle Eastern political parties partly explains the increasing number of non-governmental organizations. While dictatorial governments usually place serious institutional and legal obstacles in the way of establishing political parties, NGOs are relatively easy to launch. The opposition elites, having lost their faith in politics, have relocated their activity to non-governmental organizations, which are more difficult to control.[56]

Before answering the question asked above, it is worth deciding what civil society as a concept should be taken to refer to. According to the definition of Mehran Kamrava and Frank O. Mora, civil society consists of self-regulating and self-governing organizations that have a group identity and are independent of the state. Furthermore, for them to have political weight, they have to meet three conditions: (1)

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[52] GELLNER, "Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals"

[53] *The Arab Human Development Report 2002*: *Creating Opportunities for Future Generations,* p. 161. More recent data have not been available, even 2002 ADHR uses ten-years-old statistics. The reason obviously is that the authorities refuse to publish statistics. As almost every country makes registration compulsory for civil organizations, and they are under ministerial control, we may suppose that the data exist.

[54] SAJOO, "Introduction: Civic Quests and Bequests", p. 15.

[55] KAMRAVA and MORA, "Civil Society and Democratization in Comparative Perspective. Latin America and the Middle East", p. 328.

[56] LANGOHR, "Too Much Civil Society, Too Little Politics? Egypt and Other Liberalizing Arab Regimes", pp. 194-195.

their functioning should be democratic, and they should promote the importance of democratic values among their members; (2) they should put pressure on the government within their own field of expertise, and thus directly or indirectly exert pressure in favour of more democracy; (3) they should establish horizontal linkages with each other, enabling them to act as an organized force in a given society.[57]

Robert Putnam's analysis drew attention to the fact that a broad definition of civil society is not sufficient to analyze the functioning of democracy. Can human rights organizations demanding the widening of women's rights, or militaristic organizations that function discriminatively, or religious sects be included in civil society? Civil society operating independently of the state does not necessarily help the development of democracy in a country, particularly, if it is itself anti-democratic in outlook or operational procedure.[58] Obviously, most of the civil organizations operating in the Middle East do not meet democratic criteria, but, in spite of their undemocratic nature, they must be regarded as the opposition of the current political systems.

Saad Eddin Ibrahim illustrates the relationship between state and civil society as is shown in the following table:

Table 4

The relationship between state and society in the Arab world[59]

		State	
		Strong	Weak
Civil society	Strong	A	B
	Weak	C	D

The ideal route of development in the Arab states would be (A), *i.e.* a strong state coupled with strong civil society, but at present not a single regime fits into this category. Though Ibrahim only analyses the Arab world, if we look at the Middle East, Turkey meets these requirements. The model of strong state and strong civil society handles the tensions between state and society in a democratic way, and it is not built on oppression. As the worst type represented among Arab states, *i.e.* weak state and weak civil society (type D), of which a convenient example is Sudan, where, besides the North-South fault line, the Darfur conflict causes difficulties for the regime. This category roughly corresponds to the notion of state failure. A strong state with weak civil society (type C) characterized in particular the age of Arab nationalism in the 1950s-60s, while the weak state and strong civil society (B) category prevailed

[57] KAMRAVA and MORA, *op. cit*., p. 328.
[58] Cited by HEFNER "Introduction: Modernity and the Remaking of Muslim Politics", pp. 16-17.
[59] IBRAHIM, "Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: an Overview", p. 37.

immediately after the declarations of independence, when the different interest-groups were supporting the state.[60] Over the 1990s, most Arab states were becoming weaker, as a result of various external influences and internal problems, while at the same time the gradual strengthening of the civil society has been a general tendency.

The majority of Middle Eastern and North African civil organizations perform public duties that the state should take care of, because the public sphere is incapable of fulfilling these functions. On the territory of the Palestinian Authority, the provision of public services is, on the one hand, restricted by the lack of statehood, more precisely its weakness, as well as the Israeli occupation and armed conflicts. In such a context, civil organizations gain a lot more ground than in states operating under normal conditions. Following the outbreak of the first *intifada*, the number of both religious and secular civil organizations multiplied, easing the burdens of the population caused by the war. The victory of *Hamas* in the January 2006 elections was, according to many observers, due to the fact that it was the only organization capable of performing public tasks efficiently.

Organizations operating on Palestinian territories have four distinct types: (1) political groups (*dakakin siyasiyya*), mainly linked to Jordan and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which have provided considerable sums for informal organizations, establishing a network of political clients; (2) voluntary associations and cooperatives that provide job opportunities for the population in times of need; (3) voluntary mass organizations (*e.g.* for the disabled, the orphans, health-care organizations, trade organizations, etc.), which are engaged in 'underground social work' because of the Israeli presence; and (4) Islamist organizations, of which *Hamas* and *Islamic Jihad* were outstanding representatives in the mid-1990s.[61]

In Egypt, the number of civil organizations increased starting from the 1950s and 60s, simultaneously with the spreading of mass education. Between 1976 and 1981, the number of registered organizations grew by 41%, then, with the 1980s, a period of decline set in.[62] The membership of trade organizations, chambers of commerce, voluntary organizations and traditional institutions grew in these years, which can be traced back to the wave of general dissatisfaction characterizing the 1970s, the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism and other social changes. The leaderships in the other revolutionary Middle Eastern countries were supportive of the founding of non-governmental organizations, which helped enhance the political mobilization of the population on behalf of the ruling ideology. Political participation also meant the opportunity of control, which led to the regimes establishing nominally non-governmental organizations themselves (*e.g.* in Tunisia, under Bourghiba's presidency).[63]

Non-governmental organizations in Egypt enjoy basic freedoms, while at the same time they are also expected to stick to the limits set by the Mubarak regime. During the 1990s the authorities interfered in the operation of the non-governmental organizations engaged in political activity or representing political ideologies.

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60 *Ibid*.

61 MUSLIH, "Palestinian Civil Society".

62 AL-SAYYID, "A Civil society in Egypt?", p. 273.

63 BELLIN, "Civil Society Formation: Tunisia", p. 128.

The imprisonment of Saad Eddin Ibrahim and the trumped-up charges brought against him were given international publicity, and this affair, in the end, led to non-governmental associations losing some of their room for manoeuvre. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, as leader of the Ibn Khaldun Centre in Cairo, took part in the preparations for the Parliamentary elections in 2000. He and his 27 co-workers were arrested by the authorities and found guilty of four charges, for which he was sentenced to seven years in prison. Ibrahim had allegedly given bribes to the Egyptian television for broadcasts about the activity of the Centre. He had received financial support from the European Union without the prior consent of the authorities. Also, he had construed a false image of Egypt abroad, severely injuring the interests of the nation, and, finally, in interactions with the European Union he had received reimbursements based on false invoices.[64]

During his visit to foreign countries, Ibrahim often talked publicly about the un-democratic character of Egyptian elections, which aroused the attention of Egyptian authorities. In the end, he spent 'only' three years in prison, as in 2003, largely due to pressure from the West, he was released. The case of the Ibn Khaldun Center is not an exception, but rather the rule. In Egypt, every organization that operates in the field of human rights or receives support from abroad is subject to very strict regulations. Act 153/1998 tightened the supervision of political organizations. At the same time, non-governmental organizations that make up the secular opposition of the Mubarak regime receive support from abroad, because they have no chance of securing funding at home. This is due to the fact that they operate in areas that are still considered unusual and foreign in Egypt (*e.g.* human rights, environmental protection, etc.).

Between 1976 and 2001 the United States (through USAID[65]) supported Egyptian civil society with $410 million.[66] The new law, however, prescribed that foreign financial support be accepted only upon the ministry's prior consent, which can ban the operation of the organizations receiving aid under various pretences. On top of that, the law forbids civil organizations to pursue political activity, further restricting the opportunity to exert pressure on the regime.

Civil societies in the traditional Gulf monarchies followed a different model from those in Egypt. In Kuwait, the sphere independent of the state is represented by the so-called *diwaniyya* system, deeply rooted in traditions. Members of influential families traditionally discuss political questions in private homes, which has helped them in the past to shun strict Kuwaiti laws. The *diwaniyya*, in session on Mondays in the 1980s, became an instrument of exerting political pressure, as when it demanded that the emir summon the national assembly. In the summer of 1989, members of the *diwaniyya,* mainly former representatives of the Parliament who were demanding a return to constitutional norms, got into a conflict with the Kuwaiti authorities. The police forces called to the street arrested several people, then released them without charges being brought, and thus the ruling Sabah family, facing this public defeat, was forced to resort to reforms. Owing to the lack of legal foundations, they could not ban

64 "Egypt's Best Known Activist on Trial".

65 *United States Agency for International Development* is an American organization in charge of non-military subsidies.

66 LANGOHR, *op. cit.,* p. 209.

the meetings held in private homes, so in the end they chose to listen to such "private" demands, and, following the interlude of Iraqi occupation, the regime carried out a limited political liberalization in 1992.[67]

In the above paragraphs, we used two contrary examples to demonstrate the opportunities and limitations of civil society in the Middle East and North Africa. The increase in the numbers of autonomous organizations is a promising tendency in the Middle east and North Africa, however, it is doubtful whether this will be enough to challenge the authoritarian systems, without efficiently political parties and the rule of law to support them. Non-governmental organizations, however are able to exert pressure even in a 'closed' monarchy (as shown by the Kuwaiti example), a capability which should not be either undervalued or overvalued.

Political reform as a survival strategy of the regime

In relevant literature it is generally accepted that Middle Eastern regimes constitute a distinct group of non-democratic political systems. There have been significant political changes taking place in the Middle Eastern states over the recent years. In Iraq, the elections of December 2005 put an end to the period of political transition, as the institutions of the nominally democratic regime had crystallized by that time, despite the unfavourable security environment. In Egypt, generally considered to be the spiritual and political centre of the Arab world, the first presidential elections with more than one nominee were held in 2005, and even some parts of the constitution were modified. In Syria, following the death of Hafez al-Assad, his son, Bashar initiated political reforms, yet these efforts soon faded. In Morocco, the young King Mohamed VI supported Western-type reforms that culminated in the passing of the new law on family relations. These changes did not avoid the Gulf region either, as in Kuwait women were granted full suffrage in 2006, in Saudi Arabia municipal elections were held in 2005, and in Qatar a new constitution was approved in 1995. In Lebanon, the 2009 parliamentary elections were won not by the governing coalition led by Hezbollah, but by the anti-Syria bloc led by Saad Hariri.

Aside from the elections, another positive development in the region has been the limited increase in the role of the civil society analyzed above, and the appearance of the new Middle Eastern media. The most important element of change could well be the launch of Qatar-based al-Jazeera, which began broadcasting in 1996. Some are of the view that al-Jazeera has contributed to the development of a more open society and a pan-Arab public opinion, which no government could ignore any longer. Al-Jazeera breaks taboos, and it often broadcasts live debates on questions of democracy or domestic reforms. The percentage of internet-users within the population has grown, representing another, if incremental change in the politics of the region.[68]

Despite the reforms welcomed and financially supported by the international community, Western-type democracy has not developed in the Middle East. According

[67] HICKS and AL-NAJJAR, "The Utility of Tradition: Civil Society in Kuwait", pp. 190-199.

[68] EICKELMAN, "New media in the Arab Middle East and the Emergence of Open Societies",p. 47-50.

to the transition literature criticized above, the process of democratic transformation has come to a halt in the Middle Eastern countries, as the deep-reaching transformation of the existing political structures has not taken place. The immediate goal of the political reforms was, indeed, not the broadening of citizens' rights and political freedoms, but preserving the power of the ruling elite. International organizations and the great powers have assessed the Middle Eastern political processes mistakenly, often considering them to represent radical changes. This should not be taken to suggest that there has been next to no change in Middle Eastern politics, as the above prove that such a position simply cannot be defended in the face of empirics. However, the recent political reforms are rooted in the economic and political crisis which is increasingly becoming permanent in the region. The minor gestures made toward citizens only served the purpose of relegitimizing the way the leader of the given country was exercising power. Easing control was also a way to meet the expectations of the international community. However, reforms are stopped or even rolled back at the moment when they jeopardize the political survival of the ruling class. Middle Eastern reform has followed the formula of 'one step forward, one step backward', *i.e*. the leadership widens the scope of action for citizens, but when the members of the elite feel their position threatened, they restore the old order with the help of the law enforcement organizations.

Daniel Brumberg has called Middle Eastern states "liberalized autocracies", as despite the cyclical succession of political liberalization and deliberalization, the political systems in the Middle East are rather stable and lasting.[69] Thus, the expression liberalized autocracy describes hybrid regimes in which elections are held at regular intervals, with the simultaneous restriction of the political activity of opposition actors. The concept is a particularly close fit with the group of autocratic republics, but it also describes a few monarchies (Jordan, Morocco) of the region.

In other words, the group of Middle Eastern states in which political reforms have started can be referred to as "showcase democracies" or "pseudo-democracies". In pseudo-democracies democratic institutions formally exist (*e.g.* a constitution guaranteeing basic freedoms), but at the same time the actual practice of democratic rights is severely restricted by certain laws (*e.g.* emergency decrees repealing certain passages of the constitution). Apart from absolute monarchies, where the democratic foundations of the regime are not even formally in place, it is the model of pseudo-democracy that prevails, with its restrictive laws, the limitation of the opposition, the increased role of secret services, control over civil society, etc. It must be noted, however, that the Middle Eastern subtype of non-democratic regimes is not a static category, but it is in the process of continual transformation under the influence of internal and external pressures. As a result of these adaptation processes, neither the emergence of a democratic political system, nor the return to a fully authoritarian system can be expected.

Major examples for pseudo-democracies in the Middle East are: Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. This is the case even if in Western European thinking, Tunisia is considered to be almost democratic, yet for instance in Freedom House reports it is classified among the non-free countries. To take another example, in Egypt, there

[69] BRUMBERG, "The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy".

exists a written constitution guaranteeing civil rights and political freedoms, but the state of emergency, in effect since 1981, imposes several restrictions on the citizens. In Jordan, the authorities manipulate the election system and tamper with constituencies, as well as deploy strict censorship to prevent Palestinians (accounting for about half of the population) and Islamists from electoral success. In Morocco, while the 2004 act on family relations brought significant changes, the key political decisions are taken by the *Makhzen,* the king and key personalities of his environment. The most conspicuous characteristic of liberalized autocracies is the underdeveloped system of institutions.

Underdeveloped political institutions: Parties and electoral systems

Some Muslim authors believe that Middle Eastern party politics can be traced back to the period following the death of the prophet Muhammad, when the religious community split in two over the question of succession. The differences between the Shia and the Sunni were of a political, more than of a religious kind. The first party-type organizations were established by the Shia and the Kharijites.[70]

The modern party structure in the Middle East developed as a result of colonialism. The colonizers, as mentioned above, introduced modern political institutions, among others political parties, to the region. From the point of view of the political development of the Middle East and North Africa, it is an important question what kind of party structure existed, and in which countries of the region, at the time of independence, because these structures have tended to determine party politics since. In three countries, Tunisia, South Yemen and Algeria, there was a single party with popular support at the time of the declaration of independence, which led to these states becoming one-party autocracies immediately in the wake of independence. Michele Penner Angrist mentions two factors as reasons for this. On the one hand, these were the three countries that Western influence reached first, and the colonial period was the longest in these places.[71] On the other hand, in none of these countries was there an elected Parliament that could have enabled the local elite to express their political preferences.[72] With regard to Algeria we may add that the special position of the country in the French colonial system, as well as the lengthy and bloody war of independence (1954-62) also contributed to the absolute power of FLN (Front de Libération Nationale). In Tunisia, the Neo-Destour Party was founded between the two World Wars as a popular party representing different layers of the society, and it had no rival at the time of the foundation of independent Tunisia.

Save the above-mentioned three Middle Eastern countries and Morocco, there existed a multi-party structure in the states of the region, with the necessary institutions, which made it possible for the political elite to take part in decision-making. The multi-party structure allowed limited political pluralism, and was also

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[70] The word Shia originates from the Arab word 'shi'at Ali', which means Ali's party. ABUKHALIL, "Change and Democratization in the Arab World: the Role of Political Parties", p. 153.

[71] In Algeria and South Yemen it was 129 years, while in Tunisia 76 years.

[72] ANGRIST, *Party Building in the Modern Middle East,* pp. 31-72.

manifested in the appearance of different ideologies on the political scene. What were the processes leading to the failure of nascent Middle Eastern democratization?

The character of the party structure can obviously answer this question only partially, as there have been other factors playing a part in what happened. In Middle Eastern and North African countries, simplifying things, there were two types of parties in operation, at the time of independence: Firstly, there were conservative parties, which were interested in maintaining the *status quo,* secondly, there were also parties, mainly organized on an ideological basis, which wanted radical changes to take place in the existing structures.[73] The membership of the conservative parties consisted of the economic and political elite, landowners and industrialists etc., who did not want to effect any fundamental changes in the social build-up of the colonial era, they favoured some sort of continuity, prolonging their own power. The political organizations refusing the *status quo* put forward radical demands, mobilizing mainly people in less favourable positions, *i.e*. the wider masses. These parties followed some kind of exclusive ideology (nationalism, socialism, Islamism) and became mass movements (The Organization of Muslim Brothers, Ba'ath Party etc).

The political rivalry between conservatives and pro-*status quo* parties was not observing democratic norms, which led to coups by the military (military takeover by General Nimeri in Sudan in 1969), and revolutions (see the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1972, the Revolution of Free Officers in 1952). The change of regimes often resulted in changing the form of state inherited from the colonial times (*e.g.* Iraq has been a republic since 1958, Egypt since 1953, Libya since 1969, while Iran became an Islamic republic in 1979, etc). The overthrow of the existing regime took place, in almost every country, with the approval of and support by the military, even if they did not take an active part in the events. In the above examples, with the exception of Iran, the army had a direct part in overturning the monarchy. In the previous chapter we discussed that the military was usually in favour of changes, and supporting radical political and economic turns (*e.g*. in Iraq and Syria, in 1963 the Ba'ath Party took over with the support of the military).[74]

The fragile Parliamentary systems of the colonial period, following the declaration of their independence, were not built on the principle of political competition, but yielded to an autocratic structure. During the 1950s and the 1970s, in certain Middle Eastern states one-party structures came into being, led by a charismatic leader.

Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran, Hafez al-Assad of Syria, Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Moammar al-Qaddafi of Libya represented ideologies that relied on the participation of wide masses of people. Parties in the Middle East, no matter whether in power or in opposition, were led by charismatic personalities, 'national heroes', who personified the hopes of ordinary people. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, with the exception of the oil monarchies, characteristic events were the

[73] ANGRIST, "Party Systems and Regime Formation: Turkish Exception in Comparative Perspective", p. 127.

[74] Turkey is an exception from the rule, as there had been a bi-party structure, and the military was pro-*status quo*. Furthermore, it can be said in general that the oil-monarchies in the Persian Gulf cannot be characterized like this, as their development followed a different pattern.

coups, or turns to dictatorship, by the military, leading to the gradual elimination of the initial restricted pluralism. In Egypt, Free Officers cooperated with the Organization of Muslim Brothers, then, in the mid-1950s, they turned against the Islamist organization. In Iraq, the Ba'ath Party became the dominant political party from the 1960s onwards, etc.

The 1970s, and especially the 1980s, brought the gradual opening up, so to speak, the liberalization of the authoritarian regimes, resulting from changes in the international environment (especially the 'pressure to adapt'[75] arising from the world economic crisis), and a wave of internal dissatisfaction.[76] In order to stop the further degradation of their political legitimacy and lengthen their power, Middle Eastern and North African leaders launched restricted political reforms, in the framework of which they also legalized political parties.

In Egypt *e.g*. following Nasser's death, President Sadat created a restricted multi-party structure in the 1970s. In 1971, within the undivided Arab Socialist Union, he authorized the operation of three different factions, then, in 1976 he founded three parties from the three platforms. The left wing of the Arab Socialist Union turned to be the Tagammu Party,[77] the right wing became the Liberal Party (al-Ahrar), while in the middle there was the National Democratic Party, which remained the party of the government and Sadat. In the late 1970s Sadat did not set any obstacles in the way of reorganizing the liberal Wafd Party, so it was refounded under the name of New Wafd Party. Later in the 1980s there was one more party, while in the 1990s eight further parties were involved in the Egyptian political processes. Thus, there are altogether 21 opposition parties operating in Egypt.[78]

Most of Egyptian opposition parties are consequently 'puppet-organizations' created by the Sadat regime legitimizing the power of the National Democratic Party. The Organization of Muslim Brothers, however, which can be regarded as the most significant opposition group of the system, has not been legalized.

Hosni Mubarak, who came to power in 1981, has not made any important changes to his predecessor's policy. Immediately preceding the 2005 elections, Mubarak modified Article 76 of the Egyptian constitution, thanks partly, to the pressure by the international community, partly to the effect of internal dissatisfaction. With the constitutional amendment, Mubarak agreed to a multi-candidate, direct Presidential election, which international experts explained in such a way that Mubarak, indeed, gave up power. This, however, turned out to be a hurried conclusion. Mubarak set strict conditions for the Presidential candidates, as following the 2005 elections candidates could only be put up by parties that have at least five years history and

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[75] International political organizations, apart from economic conditions, often also set political conditions that could be satisfied with cosmetically 'face-lifted' political reforms.

[76] The Middle-Eastern and North African public opinion, by the 1960s and the 1980s, got disillusioned with the charismatic leaders and the ideologies they manifested. In consequence of the dissatisfaction, the demand to remove the leaders perpetuating their power, and to correct the failure of etatist modernization, was increasingly coming from below, not from above. Grassroots initiatives did not necessarily refer to establishing a democratic political order, but undoubtedly contributed to it.

[77] National Rally for Unity and Progress.

[78] "Reforming Egypt: In Search of a Strategy", p. 14.

possess at least five percent of the seats in Parliament. This way he managed to exclude, in advance, from the next elections the Muslim Brothers, and other personalities with high reputation but not linked to any political party.[79]

A new phenomenon in Egyptian political life is the movement called Kifaya, established in 2004.[80] Kifaya organized street demonstrations before the elections, to call the attention to the need of political reforms and the excessive centralization of power. Kifaya had its social basis among the urban elite disillusioned with the Mubarak system, this is why it could not become a viable opposition popular party. Kifaya has in fact no program except removing Mubarak from power.[81] Active opposition parties, like New Wafd *and* al-Gad are unable to form a counter-weight opposing the National Democratic Party. In the last Parliamentary election the candidates of Muslim Brothers, who entered as independent nominees, gathered a quarter of all votes. So the constitutional amendment introduced by Mubarak has not brought ultimate political reforms in Egypt. The country can be considered a liberalized autocracy in the future, too.

Changes similar to this took place, with some difference in time, also in Algeria, Jordan and Morocco.[82]

The restricted opening, however, did not affect the core of the political regimes, as it was only a superficial modification that made both domestic political actors and the international public believe that there had been a drastic overhaul. Since the 1980s, experts dealing with the Middle East have increasingly used the terms 'pseudo-democracy', 'showcase democracy' or 'risk-free democracy', which drew attention to the contradiction that in several countries of the region elections are held regularly, like in real democracies, but in the general elections held at regular intervals the charismatic leaders (*e.g.* Saddam Hussein) won with a result much higher than 90%. [83] Elections were often characterized by low participation, compulsion and intimidation, and they were held in the absence of international observers. Candidates ran in the election either under the colours of the ruling political party or as independent nominees, because of the repression against opposition parties or the disillusionment with them.[84]

The core of pseudo-democracies is that the regime legalizes some parties more or less loyal to the power, and allows them to operate as long as they do not endanger the existing political structure. The international community often assesses these steps positively, even if there are no real reforms taking place. The political elite in the Middle East and North Africa possesses the legal instruments to force unwanted political actors or institutions underground, or to prevent the foundation of parties dangerous for the system. According to an overview by AHDR, it is currently possible to establish political parties in compliance with the constitutional norms and the relevant

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79 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
80 Its meaning is: 'enough' (of the Mubarak regime)
81 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
82 BRUMBERG, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
83 ESPOSITO, *The Islamic Threat. Myth or Reality?,* p. 244.
84 LANGOHR *op. cit.*, p. 205.

regulations in 14 Arab countries, plus Turkey and also Iran. In Libya and the oil monarchies founding political parties is forbidden, the report says.[85]

The structure of the Libyan political system is essentially different from all other countries in the Middle East, and, in our view, it is dissimilar to the structure of any other state. The 'third universal theory' laid down by Moammar al-Qaddafi in his *Green Book* determines in detail the role of political institutions. In al-Qaddafi's view modern political parties are not suitable to represent people's interests:

"Parties are the instruments of today's dictatorship, of modern dictatorial governance. Parties mean the power of the part over the whole… Parties are a means of dictatorial power that enables people with identical philosophies and interests to rule over the whole people…It is obvious that the party-game is a misleading comedy, which is disguised as democracy, but acts as an egoistic actor of power, based on manoeuvres, cheatings and games of power…Party is the tribe of the modern age, it is the sect. A society ruled by a single party is just like a society ruled by a single tribe or sect…"[86]

The *Green Book* admittedly refuses a fundamental principle of modern Western democracy, the principle of representation, and replaces it by direct democracy, based on the participation of the 'masses'. This is shown by the denomination of the form of state of the country (Great Socialist People''s *Libyan Arab Jamahiriya*).[87] The Libyan political system is formally dissimilar to the structure of any Middle Eastern state, at the same time it shows similarities to Arab socialism, inasmuch as al-Qaddafi used leftist rhetoric and called for the people's direct participation. In essence, the theory described in the *Green Book* can be considered to be the Libyan national type of Arab socialism.

The political structure of the oil monarchies does not support establishing political parties, as the articulation of the population's interests is carried out through traditional channels. Thus in the Gulf region, within the absolutist monarchies, political parties in the modern sense of the word, could not be established. But it would be a mistake to think that in these countries there are no opposition groups whatsoever.

Kuwait and Bahrain can be taken as examples of countries where there are active political factions, blocs operating in the national Parliaments, nearing the foundations of a Parliamentary system. In Kuwait, *e.g*. the so-called Popular Bloc is the major political opponent of the ruling family. In Bahrain opposition is closely linked to the religious division of the country. The ruling family is Sunni, while the majority of the population is Shia, which has led to serious political tensions. In the Bahraini Parliament (operating between 1972 and 1975, and since 2002) members of opposition alliances were Shia Muslims. In the Parliament elected in 2002, of the 40 members only 12 were Shia, as several Shia factions had been boycotting it. In Saudi

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[85] *The Arab Human Development Report 2004,* p. 110.

[86] In one of his speeches al-Qadhafi made an allusion that the expression democracy has an Arabic origin, as it was formed from the words *demos* and *kursi. Demos* in Latin means people, *kursi* in Arabic means chair. So in a democracy the representatives of the people are 'sitting on chairs' and making policies in Parliament. AL-QADHAFI, *The Green Book, pp. 17-21*.

[87] ROSTOVÁNYI, *Az iszlám világ és a Nyugat,* p. 132.

Arabia and the United Arab Emirates there are no political parties and there is no elected Parliament either, while in Oman and Qatar the Parliament has no real political weight.[88] The absence of formal political parties in Saudi Arabia or the UAE does not mean the non-existence of different political fractions. Different pressure groups, political wings and different opinions can be considered as part of the daily political life in those countries.

In the majority of Middle Eastern countries there is a multi-party system in operation (save the oil monarchies and Libya), but the regime is throwing serious obstacles in the way of their foundation or operation. In most of the constitutions of the Middle Eastern countries political rights include the right to establish parties and other political organizations. The constitution, however, is a basic document that may give rise to various interpretations, or its content may simply be ignored.[89] In Egypt, Yemen and Jordan *e.g*. founding a new party requires preadmission by the authorities, which can be refused referring to reasons of national security or endangering the unity of the nation. Syria does not acknowledge the multi-party system but maintains the exclusiveness of the Ba'ath Party, which is also guaranteed by the law.[90]

According to the *Arab Human Development Report* of 2002, the highest number of authorized parties operate in Algeria and Jordan (37 and 36), but in Morocco there are 22, in Egypt 22, and in Lebanon there are 18 parties operating legally, which shows a considerable step forward compared to the previous years. In almost every Arab country (but also in Turkey and Iran) there are illegal organizations, mainly consisting of Islamists today. [91]

The question arises here, what part political parties can play in the context of increasing political liberalization? Can they be the most important actors of the democratization process? In our view, considering the current conditions, they cannot, or, in other words, they are only capable of bringing about political changes to a very limited extent. Middle Eastern political parties are very weak, as they are represented in the elected Parliaments with a small number of representatives, and are only able to exert little influence on the process of legislation. Vickie Langohr attributes the slight opportunities of opposition organizations to three factors: On the one hand, in Middle Eastern countries building out a Parliamentary system was left unfinished, as non-elected bodies often have an excessive influence on politics. On the other hand, opposition politicians, in several cases, enter for the elections as independent candidates, not under the colours of one or the other political party, thus are unable to stand up in an organized way in favour of the change of regimes. Thirdly, it is essential

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88 HERB, "Princes, Parliaments, and the Prospects for Democracy in the Gulf".

89 The interpretation of the text of the constitution is usually carried out arbitrarily by the ruling elite and not an independent professional body (constitutional court). It has been mentioned already that in several countries there is a state of emergency in effect, in the framework of which the assertion of political and civil rights laid down in the constitution is limited.

90 *The Arab Human Development Report 2004,* pp. 117-118.

91 *The Arab Human Development Report 2004,* p. 161.

to emphasize the lack of financial means the opposition parties have to face, as the law often forbids them to accept support from abroad.[92]

In Morocco and Jordan there is a relatively large number of opposition parties, which requires special explanation. Both countries are monarchies, but from an economic point of view they are much more fragile than the oil-producing states. According to some opinions, in the monarchies the ruling family stands over the political processes, so they are more likely to legalize several opposition organizations. On the contrary, in the presidential systems, in the background of the President's power there is a ruling party, which is unfavourable for establishing opposition parties. The above examples prove the truth of this hypothesis, as in Syria, Egypt and other presidential countries the opportunities of opposition politicians are much more limited. [93]

Since the 1980s some Middle Eastern and North African countries have held elections with more candidates. The question is whether the above positive trends will eventually turn into gradual democratization.

First of all it must be pointed out that the elaboration of the election rules is part of the pseudo-democratic measures displayed for the international community and is an answer to the claims by the internal actors questioning the political legitimacy of those in power. Multi-candidate elections are primarily characteristic of the so-called liberalized autocracies, first of all Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, the Palestine Authority, Kuwait, Lebanon, Tunisia, Yemen and Algeria. In these countries the operation of more parties has been authorized, and the rate of those eligible to vote has been extended. However, the ruling elite manipulate the results of the elections held at regular intervals, applying various techniques, and so damaging its democratic character.[94]

In the above-mentioned countries the election laws passed by Parliament guarantee that the ruling party/ruler is able to control 'democratization' from above. In Egypt *e.g.* there has been a multi-party structure in operation since the reforms of the Sadat era (1976), though, as a result of different legislations and other means, the party winning the election always happens to be the National Democratic Party. Last year was the first time that a Presidential election with more candidates took place, but in the months preceding the short campaign most opposition candidates were in prison, which influenced election results severely. In Kuwait, general elections were held in 1992, following the Gulf war, and in 2006 women were also taking part in the event, but these events did not jeopardize the power of the Sabah family in any way. Iran last held Presidential elections in 2009, but the so-called Council of Guardians imposed serious conditions on the candidates entering for the elections, and the election results divided both the political elite and the population. In spite of this, Iran is considered to be one of the most democratic countries of the Middle East.[95]

Similarly to Iran, the results of the Palestinian elections (Parliamentary elections in January 2006) did not satisfy the expectations of the international community either,

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92 LANGOHR, *op. cit*., pp. 202-207.

93 LUST-OKAR, "Opposition and Economic Crisis in Jordan and in Morocco", p. 163.

94 POSUSNEY, "Multiparty elections in the Arab World: Election Rules and Opposition Responses", p. 95.

95 SOLINGEN, "Toward a Democratic Peace in the Middle East", pp. 46-47.

as the winners were the non-favoured political forces. While in Iran Ahmadinejad, known to be conservative, won the election, on the territory of the Palestine Authority Hamas was victorious, which, among Western politicians, questioned the success of the Americans' spreading of democracy.

We could dwell at length on the election experience of Middle Eastern states, it seems, however, more useful to enumerate their common characteristics. The electoral systems operating in several countries of the region help those in power in achieving victory. In Jordan *e.g.,* where Palestinians make up the majority of the population, during the 1990s liberalization, the monarchy attempted to 'neutralize' Palestinian votes by attributing larger weight to territories inhabited by 'natives' in determining electoral constituencies. In Tunisia those eligible have cast their ballots for parties since 1989, and the party given most of the votes in the given constituency won all the seats in Parliament.[96] Thus the ruling party has achieved a sweeping victory in every election.[97]

Besides the election law, there are other techniques in the hands of the government that often anticipate the results of the elections. It is common practice, *e.g.* to apply compulsion during the voting procedure, especially in the public sphere which demands loyalty from the employees. Sometimes votes are purchased, and multiple voting also occurs, in spite of the fact that the hands of those who have already cast their ballots are marked with a paint that will not wash off. Furthermore, intimidation, the unexpected modification of the rules of voting and cheating in counting the votes can all help ensure that the ruling party/person achieve results over 90%. Another question is, as we have mentioned before, how divided the opposition parties are, or whether they are able to form coalitions to achieve change on top of the power.

The above examples allow us to come to the conclusion that Parliamentary elections are nothing but a show put on stage by the authorities, as legislation often has virtually no significance against the despotism of the executive power.

Concerning elections, it is important to analyse the question of individual preferences, *i.e*. on what basis the eligible cast their votes. We have mentioned already that in the societies of Middle Eastern and North African states, group solidarity (*asabiyya*), *i.e*. tribal links and family relations, are decisive even in the age of globalization. The primary principle people follow while voting is loyalty to the given community, and their ideological preference remains secondary. Often tribal belonging and party preference exclude each other, an example of which can be the development of unified Yemen.[98] The tribal system plays an important part in Jordan and Morocco, and it is not negligible in the recent elections in Iraq. [99] Elections, even if they are held amid democratic circumstances, do not necessarily follow the Western pattern.

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[96] 'The winner takes all' is a common type of election in the Arab countries, which is favourable for those in power.

[97] POSUSNEY, *op. cit*., pp. 96-97.

[98] EICKELMAN, *op. cit*., pp. 55-56.

[99] For a description of tribal society see GELLNER, *Muslim Society.*

As a summary, it can be stated that since the 1980s there have been considerable steps forward in the party structure of Middle Eastern and North African countries, but their opportunities continue to remain severely limited.

The dilemma of Islamism: The democracy-paradox

One of the most heated debates regarding Middle Eastern political reforms has been on how to deal with Islamism. Unfortunately, Western public opinion confuses the phenomenon of Islamism with Islam as a religion, which leaves its mark on the European and American judgement of the youngest monotheist religion. According to a poll made in the United States, in 2006, 44% of those asked were of the view that Muslims are too fanatic in terms of their religious beliefs.[100] Preconceptions like this may arise from two sources. On the one hand, in recent years terrible attempts have been committed in Western countries on behalf of Islam (September 11, 2001 in the United States, the attempt in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005). On the other hand the adaptation problems of the Muslim population living in Western Europe, estimated to be 15-20 million-strong, are equated with the alleged intolerance of Islam. In Western public opinion, Islam and democracy are incompatible.[101]

On the basis of the survey done in four countries (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco) in the framework of the above-mentioned *World Values Survey*, we may come to the conclusion that also Muslims who can be considered deeply religious support the implementation of democracy in their own state, which means that 'Islam and democracy are not incompatible with each other'.[102] But Islam and Islamism[103] are not identical. Are there irreconcilable contradictions between Islamism and democracy?

Experience shows that the relationship between Islamists and the existing political structure can be of three types[104]:

1. Islamist movements have come to power in two Middle Eastern countries, Iran and Sudan.[105] The two practical examples are identified with revolutionary-military

[100] ESPOSITO and MOGAHED, *l. c., e.g*. Muslim societies have also developed a negative image of the Western countries, which has historical (*e.g*. crusades, colonialism) and contemporary (the policy of the United States excessively supporting Israel) reasons.

[101] At the time of writing this paper, the so-called *burka*-issue has stirred a great scandal in France. President Sarkozy has announced that the garment covering the whole body, the *burka*, is in contradiction with European values.

[102] TESSLER, "Do Islamic Orientations Influence Attitudes toward Democracy in the Arab World? Evidence from the World Values Survey in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Algeria", p. 116.

[103] The current study does not wish to discuss the concept of Islamism in detail, but it may have various interpretations. By Islamism we mean an ideology that applies the elements of Islam to attain its political goals. In more detail see ROSTOVÁNYI, *op. cit*., pp. 114-155.

[104] The question is only discussed here in outline, due to lack of space. In more detail see ESPOSITO and VOLL *Islam and Democracy,* p. 9.

[105] Outside the Middle East, the Taliban regime (1996-2001) of Afghanistan can also be mentioned, together with Pakistan which is an Islamic Republic (since 1956) in its name, too.

Islam, as Islamists had come to power by force, not by way of election. In Iran the Islamic state came into being as a result of the 1979 Islamic revolution, while in Sudan, Islamists led by Hassan al-Turabi took over in the wake of the 1989 military coup. From the point of view of democracy, however, there are relevant differences between the two cases: While in Iran there are also democratically elected organizations in operation, in Sudan there are not even slight traces of the above. In both states there has been a political break-off within the ruling elite. In Iran, the reformist wing, led by Mohammad Khatami and Mir Hossein Mousavi, think in terms of a modern state, more open toward the outside world, but faithful to the heritage of the Islam revolution. In Sudan, Muslim thinker al-Turabi's has moderated his former views, and now he wants, contrary to al-Bashir, to form a regime less reliant on the oppressive machinery. The break-off within the elite thrust Sudan into a permanent state of civil war, while in Iran dissatisfaction remained on the level of street unrests. In Sudan the key actor of stability is the military, in Iran the highest leader is safeguarding the values of the Islamic revolution. In spite of the division in the elite, neither country is being democratized or liberalized. It is to be noted, that, for all the above-mentioned facts, Iran can be considered in many respects more democratic than some of the Middle Eastern states.

2. Islamist groups are legalized actors, participants of the political processes of the given countries. A condition of this is, however, that they should give up their attempts to overthrow the given regime, and accept the undemocratic rules of political life. The question of democratization arises most markedly in this group, as the major advocates of political reforms are the Islamist groups. Islamist groups, as anti-democratic organizations, propagate the model of authentic democracy, amid undemocratic circumstances.

In the Middle East, contrary to the wider Islamic world, the popular support for Islamist movements is tremendous, as the evidence of several quasi-democratic elections has proven. While *e.g.* in Pakistan, or the most populous Muslim country, Indonesia, Islamists do not achieve significant results in the elections, in Palestine Hamas won the 2006 Parliamentary elections. Among the multiple reasons for this, one is definitely that the secular parties are weak, alien to the system, unable to address the population, while Islamists are building on past traditions, and dealing with people's problems appropriately (*e.g.* charitable activities). Islamist organizations basically unite three types of functions: the political, the social, and often the military activities. Several legalized Islamist organizations do not have a military wing (see *e.g.* the Islamic Action Front in Jordan), at the same time they sympathize with certain violent actions (see the relationship with Hamas of the above-mentioned organization). In other organizations, however, (see Hezbollah, Hamas), the political wing gets completed with a military wing as well. Military activity often takes the form of fighting against an outside enemy (*e.g.* Israel).

The Western world pursues the policy of refusal as to legalized Islamist parties as well, since, as the common view holds, Islamists use elections as a means to achieve their undemocratic goals. In other words, Islamists might divert democracy in order to realize an Islamic state, which itself is contrary to democracy and the Western

interpretation of human rights.[106] The 1991 election in Algeria and the 2006 Palestinian elections are often mentioned as textbook examples for this. The argument goes that a group labelled terrorist by the West should not be allowed to enter for the elections, or, if it does, the result of the democratic elections should not be approved.[107]

The view presented above can be called extreme simplification, as Islamist groups are diverse, and it is to be noted that even individual groups do not constitute homogeneous units. Research in recent years has underpinned the internal division of Islamist organizations, which can be a factor of ultimate importance for the democratizing attempts of the international community.[108] Integrating Islamists who reject extremism in the political processes is a necessary but insufficient condition of successful political reforms. The major problem of legalized Islamist organizations is that the rules they had accepted are not democratic, but serve to maintain the power of the ruling elite. This in itself is a compromise that Islamist groups are only ready to undertake if the benefit from political participation is greater than from staying out of it. It is because very popular Islamist organizations do not want to be puppets of the regime, but want a share in making decisions. But in Middle Eastern countries there seems little chance for that, for the time being.

3. The third group is made up of Islamist organizations whose operation has not been legalized in the country. Such is *e.g*. the organization of Muslim Brothers in Egypt, which has become a moderate movement by today. The relationship between Muslim Brothers and the state of Egypt is rather complex, at the same time, if they entered for a really democratic election as a political party, they are likely to achieve rather good results. Currently, too, every fourth representative in the Egyptian Parliament is a member of Muslim Brothers. In his book, Bernard Lewis writes about Egyptian Muslim Brothers as follows: Recently, leaders of Muslim Brothers have been trying to distinguish themselves from even more radical and terrorist Islamic groups, this is why they make themselves out to be 'peaceful', even 'democratic' reformists.[109] Lewis suggests that Muslim Brothers will only keep their reformist, democratic character temporarily, until they seize power, after that the 'genuine' self of the organization will come to light, which is not peaceful, but anti-democratic. In several countries, including Egypt, the leadership turns against Islamists, equating moderate ones with the radicals.

Aside from Egyptian Muslim Brothers, it is also worth mentioning the Syrian wing of the organization, which the al-Assad regime crushed down on in the city of Hama, North of Damascus, in 1982, in a bloody operation. In some countries the leadership treats certain Islamist groups differently. In Jordan, *e.g*., the Islamic Action Front does not question the legitimacy of the Hashemite dynasty, or the rules of the political game. The organization Hizb al-Tahrir, established in 1950, set goals contrary to the interests of the monarchy, so it was banned. Western states also support the authoritarian leaders in banning Islamist organizations.

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[106] ESPOSITO, *op. cit*., p. 244.

[107] A major advocate of this view is Daniel PIPES. In his writings he analyses these questions at length. See www.danielpipes.org

[108] SCHWEDLER, *Faith in Moderation. Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*.

[109] LEWIS and CHURCHILL, *Islam. The Religion and the People,*.

It can be stated that it would also be worth distinguishing illegal organizations according to whether they are moderate or extremist. It can be predicted that, in the long or medium term, entering into contact with moderate Islamists is inevitable, as Lewis's hypothesis has not been justified in practice. It has been pointed out above that the relationship between Islamists and the ruling regime can be different, at the same time, for reasons of space, we could only superficially touch upon the question of the complex nature of Islamism. Yet, not only the Western public, but also experts repeatedly make summary judgements about Islamism, and Islam, which is not identical with the former. Bernard Lewis, *e.g*. writes about the phenomenon of Islamo-fascism: "Today we face a third such totalitarian perversion – this time, not of a country, nor of an ideology, but of a religion, Islam. …. The immediate target of their attack is the Western world, previously known as Christendom. … It is true, Islamofascism arose among Muslims and is led and used by Muslims, in the same way that Nazism and Bolshevism were … But there was an Islam before the rise of Islamofascism, and there will no doubt be an Islam after its demise."[110] What Lewis calls a totalitarian ideology is not Islamism, but Islam itself, which is not only confirming false Western preconceptions, but is simply false itself.

Syrian-born Bassam Tibi shares Lewis's opinion. He claims that Islamists divide mankind with artificial dividing lines, as proved by the examples of India and Bosnia-Herzegovina. For him, Western-type liberal democracy and the secular nation-state are global ideas, incompatible with the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism that causes 'worldwide disorder'.[111]

Ahmad Moussalli, professor of the American University in Beirut, uses sharp words to criticize Bassam Tibi's views, who, he says, looks at fundamentalism in the light of Western preconceptions. He refuses the view that Islamist thinkers fundamentally reject democracy, as he thinks there is no inherent contradiction between Islam and democracy. He distinguishes moderate and radical Islamism, which Bassam Tibi refuses.[112]

The question about the compatibility of Islamism and democracy is hard to answer. Due to the complexity of Islamism, it is justified to analyse each individual case. Political reforms, however, must not be based on neglecting moderate Islamist groups, as they are popular with the public.

The external context: The democratization of the Middle East in the foreign policy of the United States

Following the terror attack of September 11, 2001, the leaders of the United States decided to break with the formerly valid principle, notably that Middle Eastern *status quo* serves the American security interests better than the democratic transformation

[110] LEWIS and CHURCHILL, *op. cit*., pp. 166-167.
[111] TIBI, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism. Political Islam and the New World Disorder,* pp. 25-29.
[112] MOUSSALLI, *The Islamic Quest for Democracy. Pluralism, and Human Rights,* pp. 18-28.

of the region. At the beginning of the post-bipolar era, Bill Clinton announced *democratic enlargement* concerning the Third World, but he did not extend this doctrine to the Middle East. The United States built its Middle Eastern strategy, besides the traditional allies (Israel and Turkey), on two non-democratic states, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

In the 1990s the United States looked at Islamist groups as a threat. Since the failure of the Algerian elections (1991) Washington has followed a cautious approach to the question of Middle Eastern democratization, building its policy rather on its reliable partners. In relation to the so-called rogue states of the Middle East (Iraq, Iran, Libya, and Sudan), during the years of the Clinton administration, the US applied a system of punishments, diplomatic pressure, and limited military operations (*e.g*. Operation Desert Fox in 1998). Washington's Middle Eastern policy had to be reviewed following the terror attack of September 11, 2001.

In September 2001, George W. Bush announced, as an important part of the anti-terrorist war, the modernization of the Middle East, the main goal of which was the democratization of the region. The Afghanistan war that broke out in October 2001, then the third Gulf War started in March 2001, prove the commitment of the Bush administration to the worldwide spreading of human rights. The United States has, of course, confirmed its intention as to the export of democracy, not only with arms, but with other instruments as well. Such are *e.g*. the Broader Middle East Initiative launched in 2004, the application of diplomatic techniques, sanctions, and the conditionality formulated in the frame of international cooperation.

The American attempts have achieved ambiguous success. Iraq and Afghanistan are led by democratically elected governments, but a wider extension of civil and political freedoms has not been attained. In spite of this, on the fifth anniversary of the Iraqi war, President Bush expressed optimism: "We will show that freedom-loving men and women are able to overcome terrorists. And we will show that it is not terror but freedom that belongs to the future of the Middle East."[113]

The greatest problem for the United States in the Middle East is the democracy-paradox. It may happen that the democratic elections are won by political forces undesirable (Islamists) for the United States, as it was shown by the Palestinian events of 2006. In almost every state of the Middle East, the only real opponents of the authoritarian leaders are Islamists who wish to bring about fundamental changes in the country's political structure and foreign political orientation. Thus, the key question is how the United States will be able to harmonize national interests with the imperative to spread democracy. In other words, the results of democratic elections do not necessarily comply with the political goals.

In 2009 Barack Obama announced a new Middle East policy whose foundations were made public in his speech in Cairo, on June 4, 2009.[114] According to some experts' opinions, the speech did not include any concrete political steps, but his views on Islam can be looked upon as a gesture toward 1.5 billion Muslims of the world. Obama touched upon the question of Middle Eastern democracy deficit as part of

[113] *President Bush Discusses Global War on Terror.*
[114] OBAMA, *On a New Beginning.*

point four of his speech discussing nine challenges. The American President mentioned the negative Middle Eastern judgement of the war in Iraq, claiming that democracy cannot be forced on any state from outside. At the same time, the United States is supporting free elections and the enforcement of human rights, which Obama referred to as universal values. From the speech it can be inferred that Obama broke with his predecessor's Middle East policy which considered the democratic transformation of the Middle East as a priority. Though the speech had positive reception in the Middle East, some opposition groups criticized the President for not using a more forceful tone against authoritarian leaders.

The practical weight of Obama's Cairo speech could be felt at the Iranian Presidential elections held in June 2009. Obama called the Presidential election Iran's internal affair, and promised that Washington was willing to begin negotiations on the nuclear program, irrespective of the election results. The American President, however, implicitly assured the Iranians supporting Presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi of his moral backing.[115] The careful diplomatic rhetoric will certainly improve the negative image of the United States in the Middle East, though it will not directly influence the political transformation of the region.

Conclusion

It has been pointed out in this study that authoritarian regimes are rather lasting in the region. While writing this paper, Tripoli hosted the series of festivities organized to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of al-Qaddafi's 1969 coup. Al-Qaddafi, the Middle Eastern head of state filling his post for the longest time, has become a popular figure of the international community. From an economic point of view, Libya is one of the most successful emerging states of the Maghreb region, where West European businessmen and politicians follow on each other's heels. Libya's return to the international business arena was not accompanied by the democratic transformation of the North-African state. By the way, the fortieth anniversary coincided with releasing from prison Abdelbaset Ali al-Meghrahi, serving his life sentence because of the Lockerbie case. Al-Meghrahi, who is suffering from cancer, was released out of mercy, a step criticized, aside from the relatives of the deceased, also by the United States. *The Sunday Times* says the Libyan concession of British Petrol might be in the background of al-Meghrahi's release, as BP signed a contract in Libya just a few days before.[116] The Libyan case sheds light on the fact that Western states are not necessarily interested in the democratic transformation of the region, and in supporting (often Islamist) movements urging political reforms. Al-Qaddafi, though in an undemocratic way, created stability in his country, and prepared the political scene for his son, Saif. In the event of a possible democratic election, it is likely that the *salafist* movement would come to power in Libya, which would seriously interfere with the economic interests of the West.

[115] SOLOMON and SPIEGEL, "Obama Says Iran Must Pick Its Own Leaders".
[116] "Al-Megrahi's release 'would free BP' to join the rush for Libya's oil".

As a summary, the question of democratization is a complex issue. The Middle Eastern population support the introduction of democracy and are dissatisfied with the current political leaders. However, looking at Middle Eastern regimes from above, it must be seen that the institutional structure and the societal system that developed in the region since the declaration of independence does not favour radical political changes. The recent years have seen political reforms in Morocco and Jordan acknowledged and welcomed by the West. At closer scrutiny, however, it must be seen that in these two states political reforms were followed by an era of deliberalization, during which they passed laws seriously restricting civil and political freedoms. So we cannot be optimistic regarding the near future, as both autocratic republics and monarchies are going to keep their current political structure in the long term. For all the above, the United States can, though cautiously, support groups interested in democratic reforms. Still, the main problem to be tackled in the near future will be how to deal with Islamism.

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