PART VII

The European Neighbourhood Policy and future lines of inquiry
Introduction

Since the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched in 2003, the European Union’s (EU’s) policies have increasingly focused on how the EU can engage with so-called ‘moderate’ Islamist movements. Starting with some reflections about definitions of Islamist actors in the region, this chapter traces the role that Islamists in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have been given in the EU’s bilateral initiatives, before moving on to a more nuanced analysis of this role in the ENP. It sheds light on the views of such movements and their willingness to become engaged and involved with the EU in its foreign policies at the political and strategic levels. Given the developments in the region since the Arab uprisings, we investigate, more specifically, the role and place of Islamist movements in the EU’s democratisation policies. We conclude with a set of policy recommendations on how a revitalised ENP, related to the 2015 ENP review process (European Commission and High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2015), can better integrate Islamist movements through mutual respect, peaceful and non-violent forms of political participation. The chapter focuses on Islamist parties in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Palestine, where the authors have gathered ethnographic data.

Who are the Islamists in the Middle East and North Africa?

In the last decade, ‘the nature of the relationship between the West and political Islam has become a defining issue for foreign policy’ (Emerson and Youngs 2007: 1). The EU, like other liberal-secular Western powers, has tended to see ‘Islamism’ or ‘Political Islam’ either through the ‘traditional orientalist views’ or through ‘realist notions of regional security’, thus subsuming the incredibly wide diversity of Islamist actors and movements in the region to a ‘monolithic Islamic threat’ (Volpi 2009: 20). Western anthropology, following Weberian sociological theory, has tended to treat Islam from a ‘traditional practice’, devoid of reason and logical discourse, instead of focusing on understanding the historical context conducive to the practice and discourse of Islam (Asad 2009: 23). Following the Arab uprisings, the rise of sectarianism in the...
region and the governing experience of various Islamist parties, there is a clear need to think outside of the box. As underlined by Schwedler,

scholars should ask whether these categories continue to provide the kind of analytic traction that made them valuable in the past. The constant pressure on scholars of Middle East politics to respond to a growing wave of Islamophobia has complicated efforts to rethink these categories

(Schwedler 2015)

ENP documents, tend to refer to either ‘moderate’ or ‘radical’ Islamist movements, as if this would cover their diversity.¹

The term ‘Islamist’ refers to ‘highly diverse groups that advocate social, political and economic reform through the application of Islamic teachings to all aspects of life’ (Schwedler 2013: 3). Defining Islamist actors and movements has raised significant debate among foreign policy practitioners and academics for many years. While some Western academics such as Varisco (2010) argue that the term ‘Islamism’ is fuelling Islamophobia by associating Islam with violence, others argue that it designates ‘the spectrum of actors who are committed to public action in the name of Islam’ (Hegghammer 2012). Without entering this debate, this chapter takes the view that Islamist actors refer to those movements whose public action is driven by principles found in Islam. Since the Arab uprisings, Khalil Al-Anani argues that Islamist politics in the Middle East have been reshaped and that the Islamist architecture is now ‘fluid, dynamic and most notably divisive’ (Al-Anani 2012: 467). He introduces a distinction between formal and informal Islamists. The former refers to ‘Islamist parties, movements and organisations [that] were the only representatives of Islamism’ for decades and before the Arab uprisings (ibid.: 468). Informal Islamists are instead

not officially affiliated with any of the Islamist movements or associations. Nor are they keen to establish their own parties or organisations. Ironically, they eschewed joining the new Islamist parties that have been founded since the Arab ‘uprisings’. Thus, they are free from organisational and hierarchical burdens . . . [they] rely heavily on social networks, kinship, friendship links and new technology to disseminate their ideology and widen their influence. They have followers from different social strata; urban and rural, poor and rich, schools and universities, etc.

( ibid: 468)

Some of these movements have been (or are still) prone to violence and extremism, but this needs to be reassessed constantly depending on who defines them as violent and for which purposes. However, movements’ stance on violence is not the only selection criteria here (see our note on Hezbollah below). The Muslim Brotherhood (MB), the oldest political Islamist organisation founded in 1928 by al-Banna, entices a negative image due to its violent past, even in spite of being elected democratically in 2011 in Egypt: the MB’s Freedom and Justice Party or FJP (officially founded by the MB on 30 April 2011) won the largest number – 235 seats or 47.2 per cent – under Egypt’s complex electoral system (Meijer and Bakker 2012: 4). Today, all the different branches of Egypt’s Islamist political parties ‘now condemn violence’ (Meijer and Bakker 2012: 14; see also Ragab 2012) and therefore are included in the review of this chapter. Similarly, al-Adl Wal-Ishane, a Moroccan Sufi association, advocates the establishment of a Caliphate, but through non-violent means and is therefore included in the movements reviewed in this chapter. The authors agree with Al-Anani that the term ‘Islamists’ covers a
wide diversity of actors ranging from conservative parties, such as Ennahda in Tunisia, which was the first Islamic party to lead the drafting of a new democratic constitution, as well as the PJD in Morocco, which is well integrated in the political game, to the Egyptian MB, which was banned in 2013 and declared a terrorist group by the al-Sisi military regime. The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), a nationalist-Islamist spin-off from Egypt’s MB, formed the Reform and Change Party and had an iconic victory in the Palestinian Legislative Council 2006 elections. Its participation in these elections was consistent with its dual strategy of directing ‘resistance’ against Israel, as the occupying power, and building Palestinian support through welfare services (Bhasin and Carter Hallward 2013). In Lebanon, since 1982, Hezbollah evolved from a ‘revolutionary vanguard’ Islamist organisation, bent on violently overthrowing the Lebanese government, to a hybrid Islamist organisation that uses legitimate political tools to the same end. Today, Hezbollah operates on the civilian plane of da’wa, social welfare and religious education, the military-resistance plane and the political plane (Azani 2013).

Islamist actors themselves display different views as to whether they should define themselves as ‘Islamist’. In 2013, following the overthrow of the MB in Egypt, Islamist officials elsewhere have been eager to avoid being labelled as such. Some officials from the PJD claim their party has an Islamist frame of reference, but is not an Islamist party. This small, yet significant characterisation is revealing of how labelling and cognitive frames impact upon Islamist actors in the region, their interlocutors and their evolution over time. For Ahmed Yousef, a senior political adviser to the former Hamas prime minister of Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas is a Palestinian liberation movement that uses traditional Islamic teaching as its point of reference. Hamas is simply a movement resisting (Israeli) occupation and besiegement. Hamas draws inspiration from faith; yet religion has little to do with our struggle. Our faith determines our values, not our platform.

The ENP: politics of engagement or politics of containment? (2004–2011)

The ENP was launched as a ‘ring of stability amongst friendly neighbours’ (Commission of the European Communities 2003), and aimed at defining the EU’s role in its neighbourhood, both to the South and to the East, following the 2004 enlargement. The inauguration of the ENP coincided with the EU acknowledging the need to engage with these ‘new’ major political Islam forces in the region. In fact, the EU started to show some pragmatism, as the rise of Islamist political parties and their political victories in the region became a constant trend since 2005. The Moroccan PJD gained nine seats in the Parliament as early as 1997, and became the first opposition party in 2002 with 42 seats after the legislative elections and again in 2007 with 46 seats. At the 2005 elections in Egypt, the MB – a key, albeit outlawed, Islamist opposition force – won a fifth of parliamentary seats. In the January 2006 elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), Hamas (Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya), the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement – which is on the EU’s list of terrorist organisations – won 74 seats in the 132-seat chamber (56 per cent of the seats). Fatah (a reverse acronym from the Arabic name Harakat al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastini, literally Palestinian National Liberation Movement), the Western-backed, secular movement was placed second, with 36 per cent of the seats. These election results created a huge dilemma for external actors like the EU, which had been promoting a liberal form of democracy in the MENA region since the 1990s. But since the events of 9/11 and the US-led ‘war on terror’, ‘Islam’ had become the new securitised object in EU discourse on the Middle East. One of the main misunderstandings in EU circles has been that Islamism is
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incompatible with democracy, and the EU thus found itself in a cul de sac: how does it export its liberal democratic discourse, which worked so well in the European context, to a region that, in the EU’s framing, is not yet ‘ripe’ for democratisation (Pace 2010).

Paradoxically, these electoral victories for the Islamists have ‘diminished European (and American) enthusiasm for pushing forward a transformative agenda’ in the field of democratisation (Kodmani 2010: 5). Under authoritarian governments, Europeans have had difficulties, or no willingness, to maintain ties with grassroots opposition movements. Since the start of the 1995 Barcelona Process, but also later, under the ENP, the EU has maintained strong ties with civil society, but not necessarily with religious-based organisations. Instead, it has tended to engage with the more secular-oriented civil society (Kodmani 2010: 5). Overall, until the Arab uprisings, no specific strategic role was given to Islamist actors within the framework of the ENP. This is mostly visible in the practice of EU development aid towards the region and access to EU funding, but also in the overwhelming focus on security interests in the region.

**Democratisation and dialogue with Islamists**

The EU has tended to engage with Islamist political actors mostly when it comes to combating radicalisation (Hamid and Kadlec 2010), particularly since the victory of Hamas in 2006 (Behr 2010). Building on the EMP approach, the EU’s internal security has acted as the prime prism through which the EU has constructed its relationship with southern partners, and when it comes to Islamist actors (Wolff 2012). Each of the ENP Action Plans with the EU’s southern partners addresses the issues of justice, security and migration. It is within this context that the EU has tended to praise the role of key southern partners, such as Jordan, in the fight against ‘extremist interpretations of Islam and the dialogue between cultures’ (Council of the European Union 2007a: 6) via the Alliance of Civilisation or the Amman Message. The ENP Jordan National Indicative Programme for 2007–2010 thus stressed the role of public education in disseminating ‘the vision of a moderate Islam’ (Council of the European Union 2007b: 24).

Under the ENP, engagement with Islamist political parties and parliamentarians became more common through parliamentary diplomacy. Members of the Moroccan PJD and the Istiqlal party, a nationalist and conservative party, which advocates Islamism participate in the Mixed Parliamentary Commission EU-Morocco. Created in 2010, it aims at strengthening parliamentary links within the context of the advanced status of Morocco. A similar mixed parliamentary commission between the EU and Tunisia has also been created, in November 2015.\(^4\) Even though, since the Arab uprisings, the role of parliaments has changed (in particular in Tunisia); in the majority of Arab states, parliaments are weak, with ‘little influence on the political process’ and little legitimacy since ‘only 48% of Arab citizens believe their parliaments monitor the activities of government’ (Berton and Gaub 2015). German foundations have also been active in linking with political parties and mostly with similarly ideological partners. Thus, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, a German political foundation close to the Christian Democrats, cooperates with Nidaa Tounes, the ruling ‘secular’ party, since the legislative campaign, while its Moroccan branch cooperates with Istiqlal, which was (until 2013) in a coalition government with the PJD. Unfortunately, these initiatives have remained scattered, without providing any ‘systematic and formal engagement’ with Islamists (Boubekeur 2009: 7). Western diplomats have also been in contact with Hamas but keep these encounters unofficial (Pace interviews in Gaza 2007 and 2014; Abu Amer 2015).\(^5\)

In the Mashreq, the EU missed many opportunities for a systematic engagement with Islamist actors. As already stated above, in Egypt for example, the MB stepped into the political arena by participating in the 2005 elections. Although the MB participated in Egyptian
elections in the 1980s through party lists or independent candidates, 2005 was a turning point as they earned 88 out of 444 seats in parliament through MB affiliated independent candidates. Similarly, after facing internal religious disapproval, in 2006, Hamas participated and won the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections, signalling its decision to fully transition to an Islamic democratic political party. In fact, the MB and the political wing of Hamas have been referred to as ‘moderate’ Islamists by observers, precisely because they have accepted the framework of elections and pluralism to promote their views. In the case of Hamas, the EU had sent its own electoral observation mission to monitor the election process and found the election results ‘free, fair and transparent’ (EU Election Observation Mission 2006). But given the constraints placed on the EU by Israel and the US, as well as the other members of the Quartet, the EU refused to accept the election result and insisted that Hamas accepts three conditions set by the Quartet, rather than allowing Hamas time to prove itself in government or to prove the movement’s political wing’s sincerity (or otherwise) about engaging in the political domain through a democratic mandate. This was a thoroughly missed opportunity (Pace and Pallister-Wilkins 2016) in engaging in a series of diplomatic efforts and in having an open dialogue with Hamas officials on the key issues of concern for the EU including: Hamas’s position vis-à-vis Israel, women’s rights, religious minorities, morals in public life, the application of Shari’a and the Houdud (or corporal punishment), the use of violence, political pluralism, the religious freedom of minorities, that is, key issues of intense debate within both Hamas and the MB political circles. Although the EU’s listing of Hamas on its terrorist list legally allows EU officials to engage in a dialogue with Hamas officials – what it does not permit is the transfer of financial aid directly to Hamas – there has not been any organised, systematic and formal engagement of EU officials with Hamas’ political bureau. What we observe instead are many sporadic contacts and encounters between members of both the MB in Egypt and Hamas in Gaza, with officials from the EU and non-EU Member States including officials from the UK, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and Norway over the last nine years or so.

No EU money for Islamists

Islamist organisations have been de facto excluded from EU funding, the EU pursuing, under the ENP, a policy of containment motivated by concerns about radicalisation and terrorism (Youngs 2014). Access to EU funding for Islamist parties and civil society actors has been made
difficult by the choice of budget support, as one of the main policy instruments to channel aid to EU’s southern neighbours. The European Commission has overwhelmingly privileged this policy instrument that enables the EU to channel financial aid directly to the national treasury of southern neighbours over grants that would allow civil society to gain access to EU funding. Instead, budget support, supposed to favour ownership, favours power centralisation in authoritarian regimes through a de-politicisation of ENP cooperation (regimes favour less or even non-politicised areas for support) while restricting progress in democratisation and human rights. Budget support has thus favoured a transnational managerial management of EU funding to the region, privileging financial performance over policy objectives (Wolff 2015a).

Thus, in Morocco, the EU opted for sectoral budget support, that is, mainly support to reforming public governance and the financial sector. Although budget support has supported the modernisation of sectoral legislative and regulatory frameworks – principally in the financial sector, public finances and taxation – a joint evaluation report concluded that it did not necessarily address public service reform and therefore the needs of the people, nor did it manage to have any significant impact on regional, gender and urban/rural disparities (European Commission 2014). In the case of Egypt, a 2013 report of the European Court of Auditors concluded that the evaluation of EU support to governance was ‘well-intentioned but ineffective’. Out of the EUR1 billion aid disbursed between 2007 and 2013, 60 per cent was disbursed under sectoral budget support (European Court of Auditors 2013a). It suffered, however, from ‘endemic corruption’ and a ‘lack of budgetary transparency’ while funds channelled through civil society ‘were not sufficient to make a discernible difference’ (European Court of Auditors 2013b). Despite difficulties to achieve progress in the field of human rights and democratisation via the ENP dialogue, and the main ENPI project allocating EUR 90 million to reforms in the areas of democracy, human rights and justice, the Commission continued nonetheless to deliver budget support. For instance, the report notes that

> corruption matters were discussed in the Subcommittee on Justice and Security, which met annually from 2007 to 2010. There was some exchange of information on anti-corruption initiatives but regular calls for cooperation from both sides were not followed up by concrete actions. The dialogue also did not lead to new ENPI projects nor did it address the difficulties faced in starting up the 2008 ENPI project.
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>(European Court of Auditors 2013a: 23)

The EU ‘did little to defend Islamists’ basic political rights, but instead funded programmes designed to train “moderate” imams’ (Youngs 2014: 51). Where it believed that its funding was serving the purpose of terrorists, sometimes following claims by authoritarian governments, the EU withdrew its financial support, such as in 2003 in Egypt (Behr 2010). In Morocco, under the EMP or ENPI funding, Islamists ‘have never benefited from funding’ (Wegner and Pellicer 2009: 170). Rather, the EU’s policy has been one of ‘avoidance’ of Islamist actors, the EU preferring to support the regime with ‘material and legitimacy resources’ (Wegner and Pellicer 2009: 170). Unlike the US, which has pursued a policy of promoting the role of any legal political party in Morocco, the EU has been reticent to engage with Islamists, at least until the Arab uprisings. Support to political parties and technical training to Members of Parliament was nonexistent on the EU’s side until the uprisings.

The way the EU has dealt with the legal constraints on transferring financial aid directly to the elected Hamas government – which also happened to be on its terrorist list – was to create the Temporary International Mechanism (TIM). TIM was set up because the EU did not want to deal with the Hamas-led government. In June 2006, TIM was established by the European
Commission, at the request of the Quartet and the European Council, to facilitate need-based assistance to the Palestinian people and to facilitate the maximum level of support by international donors. Emphasis was given to the sectors that enabled the continued functioning of essential public social services. TIM was phased out in March 2008 and replaced by PEGASE. This refers to the EU’s mechanism created to continue its support to the Palestinian people. PEGASE was actually launched on 1 February 2008. The programmes that have been financed through PEGASE were designed to support the three-year Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP), which was presented by the Palestinian Authority Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, at the Paris Donor Conference of 17 December 2007.

**The Arab uprisings, the ENP and the Islamists: from spring to winter?**

For many decades, the EU was faced with the so-called ‘Islamist dilemma’ in the MENA region: how could it continue to promote democracy without risking the rise of Islamists in power? But with the popular uprisings that swept the MENA region from December 2010, the EU did not have a choice. In Tunisia, the government of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali collapsed and Ennahda – a moderate Islamist political party – was granted permission to form a political party by Tunisia’s interim government. Following the first free election in the country’s history, the Tunisian Constituent Assembly election, on 23 October 2011, with a turnout of 51.1 per cent of all eligible voters, Ennahda won 37.04 per cent of the popular vote and 89 of the 217 assembly seats (41 per cent, according to Feldman 2011). In May 2012, Mohammed Morsi of the MB became Egypt’s first democratically elected president (Hamid 2011; Kennemore 2014). Asef Bayat attempted to shed light on these developments and transformations in Islamism through his edited volume on *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam* (Bayat 2013). He defines ‘post-Islamism’ both as a condition and a project characterised by the fusion of religiosity and rights, faith and freedom, as well as Islam and liberty. For Bayat, post-Islamism emphasises rights rather than merely obligations, plurality instead of singular authoritative voices, historicity rather than fixed scriptures and the future instead of the past. In Tunisia, Ennahda agreed to resign, in January 2014, to make way for the final drafting of a constitution by a neutral interim government, followed by planned elections based on the new constitution. As Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone explain, the case of the Tunisian Islamist party, Ennahda, shows how the electoral rise of Islamist parties since the Arab uprisings has given rise to different political outcomes in different MENA countries – generating a significant amount of critical engagement with the relevance of thinking about Islamist politics through ideology. Hence, Islamism can be thought of as an evolving ideology that adapts to new circumstances rather than a failure for its acceptance of democratic mechanisms (Cavatorta and Merone 2015).

During the initial protests’ period starting from December 2010 and, in a pragmatic turn, following the Arab uprisings and the realisation that the EU did not know its new interlocutors in its southern neighbourhood, the EU started to engage with Islamist actors. First, Stephan Füle apologised and presented an ‘unprecedented *mea culpa*’ for the EU’s approach in the region, saying that the EU should have backed democrats and not dictators’ (quoted in Leigh 2011). It published a new communication on a ‘Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean’ (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2011a) and announced a revised ENP (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2011b). The idea was also to use ‘smart conditionality’ and to apply the ‘3M logic’ according to which, ‘money, markets and mobility’ would open up to southern neighbours who would be doing...
‘more for more’. Then, in a second step, the EU set up task forces with Tunisian and Egyptian political leaders, including members of Ennahda and the MB, to discuss how to ease democratic transitions. The EU–Tunisia Task Force, co-chaired by EU High Representative/Commission Vice President, Catherine Ashton, and Tunisian Prime Minister, Beji Caid Essebsi, was established to coordinate European and international support to allow quicker and more effective assistance to Tunisia. EU financial support to Tunisia was planned in the region of up to EUR4 billion between 2011 and 2013 (European Commission 2011). The EU also launched an EU/Egypt task force to reiterate EU support for the reform process in Egypt (European External Action Service 2012). When the conclusions of the EU–Egypt task force were being adopted in 2012, Egypt seemed to be following a democratic path: a new constitution had been drafted and elections were being organised (Al-Ali 2012). However, political developments showed how unreal these hopes had been. In 2013, the Egyptian army took power and a new wave of repression against the advocates of the overthrown President Morsi started. The path to stabilisation, democracy, the rule of law and human rights was abandoned, and an ongoing process of re-autocratisation followed (Potyrala et al. 2015).

In the Tunisian case, the situation is different but the outlook is also rather negative. The EU–Tunisia task force met in September 2011 to unveil the ‘Jasmin Plan’ (Tunisia’s ambitious plan for economic growth) on how Tunisia could grow in the next five years by overhauling its financial regulations system: including the encouragement of the development of new public–private partnerships, small businesses and increased microfinance lending throughout the country. The idea behind this plan was that with these changes the economy could experience a 5 per cent economic growth in 2012 and 2013. Yet, growth only reached 2.4 per cent in 2013 and 2.3 per cent in 2014, due to the absence of European demand, a slowdown in domestic demand (affected by strict macroeconomic policies and also the terrorist attacks in the Bardo Museum, in Tunis and nearby Sousse, at the beginning of 2015 (World Bank 2016)). This is in sharp contrast with the plan that aimed for 7 per cent growth between 2013 and 2016 so that Tunisia will be able to converge with the lower end of European Union Member States (Republic of Tunisia, Finance Ministry 2011). At the time of writing, this goal has not been met due to the condition of the global economy as well as the fall in tourist figures, but this level of growth will be needed for sufficient jobs to be created for the annual and additional young Tunisians entering the job market (Unver Noi 2013: 117). In this context, it seems that the EU has not drawn any lessons from the past by retaining a focus on neo-liberal reforms (within the EU–Tunisia task force), which were precisely the origins of discontent among Tunisians, who went out into the streets to protest and who managed to force Ben Ali to flee his country. Similarly, in Morocco, the EU has tended to mostly support neo-liberal reforms, which have matched the agenda of the monarchy and indirectly contributed to disempowering citizens and workers by privileging the technocratisation over the politicisation of the economic agenda (Cavatorta 2015). Combined with the selective funding mechanisms of the EU, these measures can only play in favour of strengthening authoritarianism and socio-economic inequalities.

The post-Arab uprisings experiences of Ennahda in Tunisia, and the MB in Egypt, reveal a great deal about the complex relationship that Islamists have had to develop with power since they were elected. In Tunisia – less than one year after the ouster of President Ben Ali, in November 2011 – the College of Arts and Letters at the Manouba University near Tunis was taken hostage by long-bearded men and veiled women carrying signs reading ‘My niqab [face veil] is my freedom’. A group of around 50 young Salafi (radical Islamist) men proceeded to occupy the university, until the end of January 2012, in support of two female students kicked out of the classroom for refusing to take off their face veils. Many Tunisians have been concerned about the Salafis’ rising influence and what they perceive as timid reactions from
Ennahda, while in government. The events, at Manouba especially, alarmed secularists, liberals and women, who accused Ennahda of turning a blind eye to growing radicalism. However, the party explained that its refusal to enshrine Sharia (Islamic Law) in Article One of the (new) Constitution was the ultimate proof of the party’s rejection of extremism. With this decision, Ennahda’s leaders underscored their political distance from the Salafis and positioned their party as the guarantor of the country’s stability (Lusardi 2015). On 6 February 2013, a secular leader, Chokri Belaid, was assassinated, and in late July 2013, the leftist leader, Mohamed Brahmi, was also assassinated. A political crisis evolved, as the country’s mainly secular opposition organised several protests against the ruling Troika alliance that was dominated by Rashid al-Ghannushi’s Islamist Ennahda.

Although the Arab uprisings constituted a window of opportunity to engage with Islamists, the revised 2011 and 2015 ENP do not foresee connecting more forcefully with key actors in the various countries, including Islamist actors, at various levels. Instead, the EU tends to continue with the same caveats that, as in the past, remain vague and unspecific when it comes to the concept of promoting ‘deep democracy’, but also lack a full awareness of ‘the complexity of current liberalisation and transition processes, whose forms vary greatly from country to country’ (Schumacher 2015: 569). Worse, following the ‘Jasmine revolution’, ‘much French funding for [Tunisia] was directed at suppressing Ennahda’s popularity’ (Youngs 2014: 135). Overall, engagement with the Egyptian MB has been severely limited since the coup, which removed Morsi from power on 3 July 2013, after just over a year in the presidency. In short, succession to the old regime was essentially restored under the leadership of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (later elected president) and the Islamist group was repressed. Human Rights Watch has denounced European ‘continuous support’ to the regime and silence on its repression and the crackdown on the MB (Parker 2015). Even though the EU High Representative, Catherine Ashton, was the only Western diplomat to visit Morsi in prison, European governments have remained silent following his condemnation to the death penalty, posing the question of the prioritisation of its own security interest and short-term stability in the region (El-Sherif 2014; European Parliament 2015; Human Rights Watch 2015; Khalaf 2014; Mandour 2015).

The prioritisation of security and stability is again visible in European governments’ support for de-radicalisation programmes. Thus, European governments have been informally supporting the creation of the new Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams that promotes a moderate Moroccan model of Islam. In Morocco, the EU has had little engagement with official political parties and even less with non-official movements such as al-Adl Wal-Ihsane. Despite being extremely popular among Moroccans, this movement – which promotes reform of the monarchic system towards an Islamic state based on Sharia and procedural democracy – has never been supported by the EU when it comes to facilitating its legal recognition (Wolff 2015b). In Morocco, most of the EEAS Delegation contacts on the ground go through the various sectoral ministries and one programme that supports capacity-building of the Moroccan parliament. This is seen as due to the de-politicisation of the EU’s support to Morocco, favouring non-contentious cooperation on sectoral issues, such as trade or regulation and privileged relations with technocrats (Cavatorta 2015), but also a result of the structural weakness of political parties and the Moroccan parliament.

Conclusions

Are Islamists ready to engage in EU Mediterranean policies? From the Islamists’ point of view, the EU’s credibility in the region has been severely undermined by its refusal to recognise the
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The electoral victory of Hamas in 2006. The inclusion of Israel in the UfM, launched in 2008, like in the past with the EMP, irritated a number of legalised Islamist parties in the region. Anger was heightened after the EU’s meagre response to Israel’s military intervention in Gaza during 2008–2009, 2012 and the devastating impact of the war on Gaza of summer 2014. The EU’s response to al-Sisi’s ousting of Egypt’s first freely elected leader, Morsi, through a military coup in July 2013, was further evidence for Islamists that the EU could not be trusted: on the one hand, it seems to promote the value of democracy while, on the other, it supports authoritarian and undemocratic regimes as a way of ensuring its notion of stability in the MENA.

The 2015 ENP review process should have initiated a new approach vis-à-vis the role and place of Islamist movements at the EU’s democracy policy table, not least because of the evolution in the last decade or so in the behaviour and outlook of some of the Islamist movements in the MENA addressed in this chapter. The 2016 successful re-election of the PJD in Morocco, and the confirmation of a bi-polar system monopolised by, on the one hand the Islamists, and on the other the PAM, their left-wing opponent, show indeed that Islamist parties are now fully part of the political landscape.

Our contention has been that the EU has based its sporadic relations with Islamist movements on a classical security/stability logic, preferring to continue its support of authoritarian regimes, such as al-Sisi, in Egypt – who ensures for Europe a false sense of stability/security in return. Our suggestion is that the EU must rethink its security/stability reasoning and engage with Islamist leaders (in a truly dialogical encounter), with the aim of listening to these partners’ concerns, perceptions and views on the everyday political situation in their countries, as a way of knowledge transfer from the South to the North. If the EU is genuinely interested in promoting a sustainable and more effective humanitarian approach to the MENA’s development – politically, economically and socially – it needs to accept that Islamist agents are part of the reality of its neighbours to the South and engage with them. To work with Islamist actors in a true partnership requires designing programmes that consider these actors’ needs. Only if Islamist actors – especially those that forgo violence, respect pluralism and human rights – are given an opportunity to influence EU external policy can EU foreign assistance efforts for the MENA region become more effective and sustainable. Such engagement of Islamist actors in EU foreign policy-making can then be a way to prevent, mitigate and resolve violent conflict and contribute to the EU’s as well as the MENA region’s stability and security.

Islamists’ attitudes to the use of violence and rejection of what are considered Western democratic values are not sufficient criteria for a categorisation of which Islamist organisations the EU should engage with. As we have shown in this chapter, the programmes of radical Islamist movements can evolve internally, according to their given place in the political process of their countries, as well as externally through interactions with the international community. What is important is that the EU read such developments and keep an eye on the evolution of Islamist movements in their particular domestic and geopolitical contexts.

Notes

2 Interview conducted in Morocco, June 2015, by S. Wolff.
3 Interview conducted in Gaza, September 2007, by M. Pace.
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References


