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Democratization: A Theoretical and Practical Debate

TIM NIBLOCK*

Perspective

A number of factors complicate the task of providing a 25-year overview of democratization studies of the Middle East, and in assessing the state of this field of study today. The first is that the study of democratization in the Middle East does not, and should not, stand alone: it has to be connected up to wider theoretical studies of the phenomena of democracy and democratization. A second factor concerns the time-span covered. Democratization has been a major theme in Middle Eastern studies for only about ten years. Although earlier theoretical literature is relevant to the issue, there is no body of work on democratization in the Middle East which can be traced through the 25-year period. Finally, the academic study of democratization in the Middle East can not be dissociated from the democratization policies pursued by Western governments. Much of the academic work on democratization in the Middle East has been policy-related: geared to recommending to Western governments how they can help promote the process. The relevance of this stems from the increased willingness of Western governments, over the past decade, to play an active role in promoting liberal democracy in other parts of the world. An assessment of the development of democratization studies, therefore, needs to take into account the relationship between the academic and governmental agendas, and the degree to which the promotion of democratization in the Middle East has in fact been a useful policy to pursue.

This article will examine, first, the main contributions which have been made to the understanding of democratization in the Middle East. An attempt will then be made to identify inadequacies in the existing literature. This will be followed by an account, and an assessment, of the democratization strategy in the Middle East pursued by the European Union (EU). The EU has been singled out for attention as it is the international actor which has been most specific in articulating democratization objectives in the region. Finally, it will be suggested that the international community, both academic and governmental, could achieve more for the peoples of the Middle East by changing the emphasis of

* Professor of Middle Eastern Studies in the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Durham, UK.
its current concerns. Less stress should be placed on the generalized concept of liberal democracy, and a closer focus should be placed on an extensive yet clearly-defined set of characteristics which comprise good governance.

Understanding the Factors Affecting the Democratization Process in the Middle East

The context of democratization studies on the Middle East has been set by the global trend towards democracy. The most important factor causing this trend was, of course, the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The disintegration brought about change at two different levels. First, new political systems had to be constructed in the former Soviet territories and in many of the states which had been heavily dependent on Soviet support. Second, pro-Western regimes were more vulnerable than before to demands for political liberalization. They could no longer use the ‘Communist threat’ as a justification for restricting political freedoms, for there was no such threat. The Western powers themselves, moreover, were no longer inhibited from exerting pressure for political reform by a fear that such pressures would drive these countries into the hands of an opposing camp. A further important factor inducing political change stemmed from economic factors. The increasing emphasis which international financial institutions were giving to economic liberalization, from the mid-1980s onwards, posed new political challenges to the regimes in those countries where reform packages were imposed. The cuts in state expenditure inevitably lowered standards of living (at least in the short term). One strategy for meeting the resultant unpopularity was to institute a measure of political liberalization, thereby both diverting public attention and spreading the blame/responsibility for economic policy. Political liberalization was also used as a means to signal to international investors that the character of the regime was changing towards one which had more Western-style characteristics and which was therefore more safe for investment.

The Middle East stands out as the region of the world where democracy is least in evidence. Very few of the political systems of the region can be regarded as liberal democratic, and for most of the populations of the area there is little indication that democratization is a short-term prospect. This phenomenon has been particularly apparent since 1992. Whereas from 1988 to 1991 democratization seemed to be making progress in the Middle East (with Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, and Yemen all experimenting with liberal parliamentary systems), since 1992 there has been regress. The last parliamentary elections


2 An extensive treatment of this aspect is found in T. Niblock and E. Murphy (eds), Economic and Political Liberalisation in the Middle East (British Academic Press, London, 1993).
in each of the above-named countries have been less free, less open and less genuinely representative than the elections before.

The most important achievement of democratization studies of the Middle East has been to conduct an enlightening debate on the reasons why the Middle East has been so little touched by the global trend. Much of the debate has revolved around the concept of ‘exceptionalism’. The latter concept refers not to the reality of a low level of democratisation in the region (in these terms, the Middle East is indeed ‘exceptional’ internationally), but to whether there are substantive long-term reasons why democracy has not proved, and will not prove, workable in the region. In other words, is it just a matter of time before the Middle East follows other parts of the world into democratization, or is it likely to remain for the conceivable future outside of this process? The achievement, then, has not been one of reaching an agreed position on the causes for lack of democracy, but of clarifying the arguments which can be put forward to explain it—and perhaps identifying some of the key weaknesses in each argument. In what follows, I will present the main explanatory lines of analysis, commenting briefly on the strengths and weaknesses inherent in each.

The first line of analysis, which rests strongly on a perception of the Middle East’s long-term exceptionalism, is the explanation in terms of culture—especially the Islamic component of Middle Eastern culture. It is contended here that the belief-system of Islam, embodying divinely-ordained prescriptions which cover a wide range of different aspects of social, political and economic life, negates the concept of popular sovereignty and renders it impossible to entertain a political system which functions according to majority votes. While this approach is still maintained in some quarters, it has been subject to strong and persuasive counter-arguments: the Islamic framework has a fluidity about it, leaving room for a wide variety of different interpretations, many of which have no problem in accommodating liberal parliamentary institutions; some Islamic countries have succeeded in establishing democratic systems (e.g. Malaysia and Turkey); and some elements in Islam are specifically favourable to democratic values (e.g. the emphasis placed on extending full participation in the sacred community to all, and on universalism, the ‘rational systematisation of social life’ and spiritual egalitarianism).

The second line of analysis focuses on the structural relationship between state and society in the Middle East. The contention made is that social groupings (whether class formations or civil associations) are in a weak and dependent position in relation to the state, and are not capable of impelling the state towards an agenda which reflects their political interest in achieving a stake in

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3 An issue of the Arab Studies Journal was devoted to ‘Middle East Exceptionalism’, see Arab Studies Journal, Spring 1998, vol. VI, no. 1.

4 The writer is himself responsible for the classification of lines of explanation given here. The authors referred to do not necessarily classify themselves in the same way.


6 See Simon Bromley, “Middle East Exceptionalism: Myth or Reality”, in Potter et al., p. 333. Bromley is in this passage referring to some of the arguments put forward by E. Gellner, in Muslim Society (Cambridge University Press, 1981).
policy-making.\(^7\) The bourgeoisie, often regarded as imbued with a crucial role in leading the move towards democratization, has developed within a framework where its interests are closely interlinked with the interests of key elements in the state, and where it is dependent on these elements for contracts and licences. More broadly, it is dependent on the state for the suppression of radical threats to its position. The intelligentsia and the wider middle classes are similarly dependent on the state—many of the members of these strata being state employees. The industrial and service workers are kept in position through a combination of social welfare and oppression.

The Middle Eastern state has, it is contended, achieved this dominance over society due to a variety of different economic and politico-historical processes. Rentier income has accounted for a substantial part of government revenues (and not only in oil-producing states), such that the state has not been greatly dependent on revenues raised through tax from the population. The ‘revolutions’ which removed regimes based on the old landed classes and the urban notables were carried through by the military, which then used a carefully-constructed web of security, economic and political measures to ensure that no social or economic grouping could challenge the power of the new regime. National and international problems (such as those given rise by the legacy of imperialism and by political zionism) have often enabled the Middle Eastern state to lay claim to a ‘sacred mission’ on behalf of the population, thereby justifying the construction of a large military/security infrastructure and the suppression of opposition as treason.

The structural line of explanation has two significant advantages. First, although it is sometimes advanced as an argument for Middle Eastern ‘exceptionalism’, it uses variables which can be of significance anywhere (although no doubt to differing degrees). It provides, therefore, a basis of comparability with democratization experience elsewhere, suggesting that the Middle East’s political development may in the long-term not be greatly at variance with that in other parts of the developing world. Second, it enables differences between Middle Eastern states to be brought out: the factors do not impinge in the same way on every Middle Eastern state, either in extent or in manner. The structural explanation, therefore, enables researchers to explain why some Middle Eastern states have developed parliamentary systems with at least a veneer of democracy, while other have not. A difficulty about the structural approach, however, lies in reconciling it with the experience in East Europe—for there the state was even more dominant over society than it was in the Middle East, yet democratization occurred.

The third line of analysis will be referred to here as the practical problems approach (in general the range of problems have mostly been described individ-

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\(^7\) Among the writers who put forward a structural explanation are Bromley, ‘Middle East Exceptionalism ...’; and John Waterbury. For the latter, see J. Waterbury, Democracy without Democrats?: the Potential for Political Liberalisation in the Middle East, in Salame, G. (ed.), Democracy without Democrats : the Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World (I.B. Tauris, London, 1994), pp. 23–47.
ually, rather than being welded together into an overall approach).\textsuperscript{8} The contention here is that Middle Eastern governments are held back from democratizing by the very real problems which democratization would pose to the coherence and perhaps survival of the state. The main problems referred to are: the likelihood that elections would be won by an Islamist movement antithetic to the liberal democratic framework; that the process of economic liberalization, on which most of the states of the region are embarked, requires a strong government capable of adhering to unpopular decisions in the face of mass protest; that, given the strategic importance of the region, external powers would use a liberal democratic framework to buy influence and distort the political process; and that freedom of political organisation would encourage inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict, as parties would base themselves on ethnic and religious loyalties.

The practical problems approach benefits from the same two advantages as the structural approach: the variables used enable comparisons to be made between Middle Eastern states and other states, and among Middle Eastern states. A valid criticism, however, is that the approach may display a naïvely trusting attitude towards Middle Eastern governments—it assumes that they would be happy to press forward with democratization if only the practical situation rendered it more straightforward. The practical problems may, perhaps, be more accurately characterized as excuses used by Middle Eastern governments to mask their underlying refusal to compromise their hold on power.

One line of analysis which has not been covered above is that of modernization theory, where emphasis is placed on the socio-economic prerequisites for liberal democracy.\textsuperscript{9} The main prerequisites which are identified are those of education, industrialization, social mobility, urbanization and standard of living. Although modernization theory may contain some useful insights, there is no reason to believe that it explains the slow pace of democratization in the Middle East relative to other developing countries. A number of Middle Eastern countries score relatively highly on the above indices, yet they have been surpassed on the road to democratization by countries with lower scores.

\textbf{Identifying Inadequacies in Democratization Studies of the Middle East}

The academic debate on democratization in the Middle East has clearly made some good use of wider theoretical literature on democratization processes. There are, however, three respects in which perceptions in the wider literature have been given insufficient attention.

First, the Middle East related literature purveys a romanticized conception of the nature and characteristics of liberal democracy. This occurs not through any explicit description of liberal democracy, but precisely through the absence of any analysis of the concept and its practical application. The concept hovers, like

\textsuperscript{8} A number of the practical problems covered here are dealt with in H. Deegan, \textit{The Middle East and Problems of Democracy} (Open University Press, Buckingham, 1993).

\textsuperscript{9} See D. Lerner, \textit{The Passing of Traditional Society} (Free Press, New York, 1958).
a mystical symbol, in the background of the discussion on democratization in the Middle East, with an implied assumption that liberal democracy constitutes an ideal polity where the common good is realized by means of the population deciding issues through the election of individuals who carry out the people’s will. Yet the wider theoretical literature on democracy and democratization has, over a prolonged period, pointed to the unreality of this perception of democracy. As early as the 1940s, Schumpeter in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* showed that liberal democracies are in fact managed by elites. Democracy should, he said, be re-defined in terms of ‘an arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote’. Schumpeter referred to the classical doctrine of democracy as having survived despite its lack of realism, acquiring the status of religious belief. Democracy, he said, had changed from a mere method that can be discussed rationally ‘like a steam engine or a disinfectant’, to an ideal and a mystical symbol. Much of the more recent theoretical literature has emphasized that there are social and economic costs to democratization: it is likely to be elite-led, and there is ‘no room in the new democracies for either “social democracy” (the extension of the democratic principle to the workplace, and to other institutions) or “welfare” or “economic” democracy …’

The practical effect of the failure to provide a realistic conception of liberal democracy is that the political systems of the Middle East are being compared with an ideal which does not exist in reality—hardly a fair comparison. It is not surprising, therefore, that these political systems emerge in a poor light. It might be useful if the advantages of democracy could indeed be discussed rationally ‘like a steam engine or a disinfectant’, rather than occurring under the shadow of a mystical ideal.

The ideal-laden conceptualization of democracy has, moreover, had a negative impact on empirical research on Middle Eastern political systems. Having written off the political systems of the area as being congenitally undemocratic, researchers have clearly felt that it would be a waste of time to examine or analyse the participative or representative aspects of the systems. There has consequently been very little empirical research on either the elections or the parliamentary/consultative bodies of the Middle East. Yet there are elements of accountability, representation and political conflict which are present in these processes and institutions. Even when an election is rigged, it may be worth considering what social groupings have been prepared to collaborate, and why voters may still deem it worthwhile voting. Similarly, the study of government-dominated parliamentary or advisory bodies can provide insights into the struggle for influence between different factions in the regime, the latitude within

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which free discussion is permissible, and the rationale or lack of rationale in the government policies which are debated. It may be significant that one of the most revealing and informative studies of an Arab legislature (and of popular attitudes both to it and to the elections which brought it into existence) has been conducted by a non-Western non-academic research organisation.\textsuperscript{12}

The second weakness is that the literature concentrates mainly on the underlying factors impeding democratization, giving relatively little attention to \textit{how} democratization may come about. Much of the recent theoretical literature on democratization has moved away from the former focus, mainly because democratization has occurred in so many countries which were previously deemed ill-suited to it (e.g. Eastern Europe). The concentration has shifted towards examining the processes whereby internal divisions within a regime, or a crisis confronting a regime, can open up a process of democratization.\textsuperscript{13} A faction within an authoritarian regime may initiate such a process not because its members adhere to the intrinsic values of democracy, but because it needs popular support to outmanoeuvre a rival faction. Or else, a ruling party/clique may opt to democratize so as to lessen the danger of being eradicated when an opposition movement comes to power. The chance of competing for power can be seen as preferable to remaining in power but living with the risk of long-term elimination.

Shifting the focus of democratization studies of the Middle East towards a concern with \textit{how} democratization might be initiated could prove productive. It is, at least, a possibility that the intense jockeying for power and influence which is currently taking place within the Saudi royal family (mainly over the succession) could lead to one faction or other seeking to buttress its position through popular support, and championing the opening up of the political system. Indeed, in certain respects this has already happened.\textsuperscript{14} The same possibility arises over the succession struggles which are occurring within the ruling families of the United Arab Emirates (especially Abu Dhabi) and Kuwait. Similarly, the very intensity of the conflict between oppositional Islamists and governmental secularists in Algeria could push both sides to accept a democratic framework. Each could realistically calculate that having a chance to compete for power may be preferable to running the risk of losing everything. John Waterbury has given some attention to this ‘pacted’ approach to democratization, but the idea has not been widely applied in democratization studies of the region.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} See Isabelle Daneels, \textit{Palestine’s Interim Agreement with Democracy} (Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre, East Jerusalem, May 1998).

\textsuperscript{13} See, for example O’Donnell and Schmitter, \textit{Tentative Conclusions} \ldots, The latter draws conclusions from vols. 1–3 of the work edited by O’Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead, \textit{Transitions} \ldots, Also of key importance here is D. Rustow, ‘Transitions to Democracy:Toward a Dynamic Model’, \textit{Comparative Politics}, 1970, no. 3, pp. 337–63.

\textsuperscript{14} See the interview given by Prince Talal bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud in \textit{Al-Quds al-Arabi}, 17 April 1998. Prince Talal was advocating free elections and a general opening up of the political system. He is believed to be a supporter of the faction of the Al Saud which is closely identified with Crown Prince Abdallah.

\textsuperscript{15} Waterbury, ‘Democracy without Democrats \ldots’, pp. 34–42.
A third dimension where the wider literature has had insufficient impact on the Middle Eastern case relates to the role of international political factors. The particular mix of economic and strategic interests which Western powers have in the Middle East, it could be contended, ensure that the regimes there will be supported against internal as well as external threats. All proclamations of commitment to democratization are overridden by these interests.

The Interaction with Practical Politics: the Democratization Issue in European Union Policy towards the Middle East

Over the past decade, the European Community/Union has steadily become less reticent about seeking to shape the political and economic systems and practices of the less developed countries with which it has contact. Democratization and economic liberalization have constituted the twin foci of the EU’s concerns in this regard. The view has been that if Europe is to use its influence to improve conditions for the populations in the countries concerned (a development which serves Europe’s own interests, in a variety of ways), support needs to be given to democratization and economic liberalization.

There are, not surprisingly, resonances between the practical problems which the European Union has encountered in implementing its democratization policies in the Middle East, and the various difficulties in the democratization process which are identified in the academic literature. A consideration of the EU’s experience, and an assessment of the policy recommendations which follow from this, therefore, should contribute to developing a constructive academic approach to the subject.

EU democratization policy has succeeded in creating a deeper understanding, in Europe and the Middle East, of the need for more open political systems in the Middle Eastern region, and has perhaps encouraged some regional governments to give new consideration to political reform. There have, nonetheless, been a significant number of problems in putting the policy into effect. The principal problem areas are identified below:

- The EU concern with democratization has not achieved substantial success in improving the political conditions facing the population of the Middle East. As noted earlier, the region has in fact witnessed some regress in democratization over the last five years—which, as it happens, are the years in which the EU has been pressing its democratization agenda.
- EU policy has failed to engage with Middle Eastern opinion-formers or policy-makers. The sensitivity of regional governments at being forced by external powers to adopt democratic systems, the cultural arguments about whether liberal democratic institutions are of universal applicability or are specifically Western, and the equivocation (on the European side, as well as

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the Middle Eastern side) as to whether the democratization which might lead to Islamists coming to power is actually desirable, have all limited the scope of interaction between policy-makers on the two sides. There has been no basis for intellectual exchange or for collaborative effort.

• The twin foci of the EU’s concerns, democratization and economic liberalization, have been shown in some situations to be mutually antagonistic. Democratization is rendered more difficult by the social tensions spawned by economic reform, and a liberal democratic government may not be the best instrument for the implementation of unpopular economic reforms (at the very least, an element of ‘executive elevation’ may be required). Blanket proclamations of support for democratization and economic liberalization, therefore, have not proved very useful. Policy-prescriptions need to be more nuanced, conceived within a more sophisticated conceptual framework.

• The security and economic interests of EU countries have caused a lack of coherence in the application of Europe’s democratization concerns to the states of the Middle East. In practice these interests have determined whether and how EU governments will seek to change non-democratic systems in the region. The principled aspects of policy have come to lack credibility.

• Focusing on the ‘big’ issue of democratization has detracted from the attention which can be given to a range of more specific issues which affect populations critically. Among these are the level of corruption, the effectiveness of bureaucratic organization, the independence of the judiciary, the existence of well-conceived and clearly-articulated laws, freedom of expression, the respect given to minorities, attitudes to human rights issues, and the extent of inequalities which may create social disorder.

• EU policy has constituted a blunt instrument. None of the political systems of the Middle East are Western-style parliamentary democracies, yet they differ critically one from another in terms of the dimensions covered in the previous point. It is important to recognize the significance of these differences, and to allow policy towards the states concerned to be influenced by this recognition.

Adapting EU Policy: Towards an Emphasis on Good Governance

The problems which the EU has encountered in implementing its democratization policy suggest strongly that EU policy needs to be reviewed and adapted. The democratic ideals which it upholds in its international posture must, of course, be retained, but the practical framework for its interaction with the polities of the Middle East (and perhaps other developing countries) needs to be such that they can bring real benefit to the peoples of the region. The suggestion here is that the ‘good governance’ approach would satisfy this objective. Up to the present, this approach has been used mainly in the African context, where its adoption (by specialists and by policy-oriented bodies) also came in response to the need for a practical and realistic framework for interaction.17

17 See, for example, Patrick Chabal, ‘Prospects for Democracy in Africa’, International Affairs, April 1998, vol. 74, no. 2, pp. 289–304. Chabal emphasizes that more can be gained by promoting political accountability than in
The rationale for adopting the good governance approach as a basis for shaping the EU’s involvement with the politics of the Middle East is, to some extent, based on the positive counterpart to the arguments which were advanced in section 4 above. ‘Governance’ is an approach which can be more specific in content, less subject to allegations of cultural bias (as all cultures believe in it), more conducive for the latter reason to inter-country and inter-culture debates, and less one-sided in the negative connotations which it carries (European countries have blemishes in their records of governance also). It is suggested, therefore, that it can provide a more appropriate basis on which the EU can involve itself in the region.\textsuperscript{18}

Some possible problems in adopting this approach, however, must be acknowledged. The first is that there is no general agreement as to what good governance comprises. Some of those who have used the term have included democratic institutions as part of their definition of what they mean by it. This would raise once more the problems which were outlined above. It is more common in the good governance approach, however, to emphasize values and practices which are not absolutes. In this case, the stress would be on accountability rather than on a specific institutional form through which accountability can achieve its fullest expression. Recommending the adoption of the good governance approach, therefore, would need to be accompanied by recommendations as to what good governance comprises.

A second problem stems precisely from the lack of an absolute in the approach to good governance recommended here. Democratization, with the concrete goal of democracy at the end of the process, presents a clear political aim and a manifesto for change. Good governance, while comprising elements which are clear and specific in their goals, constitutes a more diffuse and less directly challenging manifesto. It may be more difficult to mobilise European opinion around such a concept. Yet a concept which mobilizes European opinion but fails to have an impact on the Middle East does not constitute a sound basis for European interaction with Middle Eastern polities and societies. Moreover, the emphasis which the good governance approach gives to accountability, transparency and human rights enables the concern with democracy to find expression through less direct but nonetheless significant channels. Good governance is not concerned only with governmental effectiveness but also with how the population relates to the processes of government.

\textsuperscript{17} continued
Defining the Content of Good Governance and Making it Operational: the Academic Role

The criteria for good governance need to be chosen according to the purpose for which the concept is used. Those which are appropriate to the World Bank, for example, would not be appropriate to the EU. It may be suggested that the criteria relevant to the EU could be selected around one central concern: that of promoting stability based on popular acceptance. The phrase ‘based on popular acceptance’ is important. The stability which is sought would not be that of imposition and suppression, but of the satisfaction of the population’s needs in a way which creates fairly widespread acceptance of governmental authority. In this manner, the European Union’s interest in promoting the stability of the region would be pursued within a framework which is consistent with the principles which the Union sees itself as representing.

Specialists on the Middle East, both European and Middle Eastern, have a role to play in developing and refining concepts of good governance appropriate to EU policy in the Middle East—using their expertise to devise a framework which is socially and politically relevant and culturally responsive. The underlying principles guiding EU policy on good governance and democratization are applicable globally, but the specifics of it need to reflect regional particularities. Once an appropriate framework is agreed, European and Middle Eastern researchers need to work together in undertaking a complex and difficult task: conducting objective studies of the extent to which good governance criteria are in fact upheld within the region. From this, recommendations on how good governance can be further promoted should ensue.

The criteria for good governance used by other organisations will be used here as a basis for considering which criteria may be relevant to EU policy. Two organisations have been prominent in this respect: the World Bank and the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP). The World Bank, in the criteria it put forward in 1993, avoided statements about political systems and rights.\(^{19}\) It listed the following:

- A strong, participatory civil society.
- Open, predictable policy-making.
- An accountable executive.
- A professional bureaucracy.
- The rule of law.

The UNDP’s criteria, published in 1995, were more political and more explicit\(^ {20}\):

- Political legitimacy.
- Cooperation with institutions of civil society.
- Freedom of association and participation.


• Bureaucratic and financial accountability.
• Efficient public-sector management.
• Freedom of information and expression.
• A fair and reliable judicial system.

Other concepts that have figured in criteria proposed for good governance are transparency, lack of corruption, popular powers to select and remove leaders (at least at local levels), competence and capacity, ability to maintain law and order on a basis of accepted legislation, separation of the state machinery from private interests, and respect given to economic, social and cultural rights (e.g. the rights of individuals to social security, to work, to form and join trade unions, to adequate standards of living, to education and to participate in the cultural life of the community).21

The following criteria may be tentatively suggested as relevant for EU policy:

• Governmental and bureaucratic accountability. This involves there being mechanisms which ensure that both politicians and officials are answerable for their actions at the governmental level. Answerability must relate to bodies outside of the executive arm of government. The institutions of civil society need to be able to question and criticize the appropriateness of the action taken, and for that purpose a transparency and openness about governmental decision-making is required. This is particularly crucial on all matters relating to public resources and resource-management.
• The rule of law, involving a clearly-articulated and extensive legal framework, applied equally and effectively to all citizens by an independent judiciary and with the support of the forces of law and order. The rule of law needs at the top level to constrain the actions of the powerful, and at the lower level to protect the population from arbitrary action or random violence or theft.
• Respect for human rights, minority rights and the independence of the institutions of civil society. This includes freedom of expression and of information.
• A competent and effective bureaucracy, independent of private commercial interests, and operating without corruption. The bureaucratic structure needs to be able to generate, under the direction of the policy-makers, effective policies aimed at social and economic development, and to be able to implement these without corruption, patronage or clientalism. The penetration of the state machinery by private interests, leading to these interests appropriating the resources of the state, would run counter to this conception of a competent and effective bureaucracy.
• Appropriate levels of decentralization, ensuring that government is not conducted at a distance from the mass of the population.
• The pursuit of ‘safety-net’ policies, ensuring that there are mechanisms for helping those who are at the bottom of the social ladder.

21 Mention of these rights is made in the various articles in Faundez, Good Government and Law ....
It can be argued that these criteria should be divided into two categories: The first three, which may be conceived as involving ‘fundamental’ rights, and the last two which are sometimes seen as being ‘instrumental’ to other goals. Yet such a division would, for two reasons, be unfortunate. First, because it is important to conceive of all of the criteria as involving instrumentality: they are measures which are necessary in order to promote stability based on popular acceptance. Second, because the division may downgrade the importance of the last three criteria. These criteria, however, are crucial in the attainment of the overall goal.

A framework of this nature would, it is suggested, make possible a genuine engagement between the European and Middle Eastern sides, enabling researchers from the two regions to work together for the benefit of the population of the Middle East.