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EVENT TRANSCRIPT

Getting to Pluralism: Political Actors in the Arab World

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FABRICE POTHIER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this Carnegie Europe discussion. My name is Fabrice Pothier. I am the Director of Carnegie Europe, the pan-European foreign policy forum of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. It's a real pleasure today to welcome Mr Michael Köhler from the European Commission, as well as my colleagues, Marina Ottaway from Washington and Amr Hamzawy from Beirut, to talk today about how to engage with political actors in the Arab world. And that will mean not only political actors within the traditional political sectors, but I think also outside and those political sectors. And that's actually a new trend that is particularly interesting.

So I will turn now to Marina Ottaway, who will give us a perspective on one of her latest publications which you should have seen a copy of, *Getting to Pluralism*, which is a new Carnegie Book that looks at the various groups of political actors in the Arab world and tries to give a map of how to engage with some of them and how to bring modernisation. We will then have Amr Hamzawy who will bring some complementary analysis to that and we'll finally turn to Mr Köhler who will give his perspective on one of the European Union on how those political actors are viewed from here. So, Marina, over to you.

MARINA OTTAWAY: Thank you very much. The project that led to the publication of the book was started in reaction to all the response to the President Bush Freedom Agenda, if I can put it that way; that is the emphasis on the part of the US Government to promote democracy in the Arab world. And the question that we posed when we started our research, saying, okay, we all agree that democracy is a good thing, but democracy does not just happen. It's not a question of the foreign governments putting sufficient pressure and you will favour the democratic transformation; democracy is very much based on the balance of power between different political forces in a

country. You cannot have a democracy if you don't have a strong opposition; it takes two to tango so you need a strong government and you need a strong opposition, in addition to having governmental institutions. So the project that we started was where we tried to analyse who are the political actors in the process of reform, who are the groups and on whose behaviour, whose decision it depends whether or not there would be political reform in those countries. And we singled out three categories of political actors, the first being the governments themselves. Let's not forget that much of that reform comes from the top down. It may come from the top down as governments reacted to the pressure from the opposition, but in the end it is governments that introduce political reform. So how governments think about political reform, whether it's acceptable or whether it's not acceptable, what kind of reform and so on is very important.

And then we looked at what, at the time, were the most important political actors in the Middle East, and it is the older secular parties, either the socialist parties who are inspired by the Arab Nationalist, Arab Socialist, the heirs of Gamal Abdel Nasser, if I can put it that way, political parties, and then the liberal parties. So these were the secular parties and finally the third category of parties was the Islamist parties. The book does analyse these three categories of political actors but, as we discussed, political situations have dynamics; one of the disadvantages of being an analyst of contemporary phenomena rather than a historian is the ground keeps on shifting under your feet, so what we discuss tonight is not just this view of the actors that we outline in the book, but also the kind of political changes that we have seen happening since.

Because we started the project with only the assumption that there was in fact a mood for change, there was in fact a trend towards change in the Arab world, not necessarily a trend towards democracy. None of us involved in the project, whatever the Bush Administration might have been saying, had any delusion that the Arab countries were going to turn democratic in short order as a result of what the United States or the European Union or anybody else was going to do. But certainly we started our project on the assumption that there was in fact a ferment for political change in the area. For example, it was very clear in 2005, 2006 when we started working on this project that there were a lot of discussions on political reform in the Arab world. If you read the Arab press at that time, the discussion on political reform was central to a lot of the discussions by columnists and so on; there was lively discussion within the societies about the issue of political change.

By the time the book was published, we saw a very different political situation beginning to emerge. First of all, the discussion on the hope for political change emanating from the formal political process, that is the idea that somehow opposition parties who get enough seats in parliamentary elections to force change on the government, that hope had pretty much dissipated. Islamist parties in 2005, 2006 – 2004, 2005 – perhaps 2004, 2005 is more appropriate, were very sanguine about their prospects. I remember meeting in 2005 the person who was named the head of the Party for Justice and Development in Morocco who introduced himself by saying you are meeting the next Prime Minister of Morocco.

Well, at the next elections the party lost a million votes, but this was not just Morocco. It was the mood that prevailed around the region that Islamist parties really felt that they were moving up, that they had a real future ahead of them. And of course Arab governments felt that, my God, maybe the Islamist parties were right and they were very worried about the prospects that these parties might win elections. And in fact, if you look at some of the elections that took place in the first half

of the decade, the Islamist parties were winning a lot of votes. The secular opposition was not doing very well, but the Islamist parties were doing quite well.

So essentially when we started the project, there seemed to be both a mood for reform but also the impression that in fact the formal political process, the electoral process, might lead to real changes in the balance of power in the country. By the time we completed the study the ground had shifted once again and it was quite clear that the formal political process was pretty much dead. Governments had managed to re-establish their grip on power; they had never lost it completely but they had reacquired their confidence that they were on top of the situation. At elections all the Islamist parties were losing votes in the elections, so it's not that they lost all the representation they had in parliament, but they were losing a lot of their votes and certainly were not dreaming any longer of being in power before long. On the other hand, what we have been seeing is a new political process, a new political ferment that has transferred away from the formal political process, from the electoral process and from the political parties as political actors, and more in the realm of social movement, social agitation.

What we are witnessing in a large number of Arab countries is a lot of strikes, a lot of protest actions by groups, by new labour organisations, usually not very strongly structured, wildcat strikes in various countries, in various industries, a lot of ferment, protests, that comes out through the blogs, through the internet in this debate and so on, a lot of movements essentially, a lot of events that governments do not seem to be able to control. So what we are seeing is two different factors.

One is the formal political activity really counting less and less and certainly being much less important as an instrument of change. And, on the other hand, we are seeing these new phenomena that are very difficult to analyse because they are very recent and therefore it's very difficult to judge at this point whether they continue and particularly whether they will lead to any change, but certainly something which governments so far have not been able to handle. They have been able to handle quite successfully the political parties; they have used a lot of it by repression.

For example, in Egypt there are thousands of members of the Moslem Brotherhood, including some influential leaders, who are in gaol, and the leaderships are perhaps in gaol for long periods of time but they get arrested and released. The government is sending a very clear message on that, you know, we are keeping an eye on you and there is only so much latitude you have to make and if you move too far then we'll intervene again and you'll spend another period in gaol and so on.

So the repression is working on the formal movements and the governments have not figured out how to intervene, how to put an end to these protest movements that are taking place and developing in other areas. There is a shifting ground therefore away from the formal and more towards the informal. I will stop here in my presentation and let Amr develop the point a little more and then we will discuss essentially the speaker before he has unfortunately to leave us.

AMR HAMZAWY: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here and, as Marina said, I'm going to share some reflections which are based on the research we did in the book, *Getting to Pluralism*, to an extent and, to an extent, it moves beyond research which is compiled in the book, and its different chapters. First of all, let me start by reflecting on the title, *Getting to Pluralism*. And the question which we have to raise, to ask, is has the Arab world become more of a pluralist place in

the last years and, if so, in what ways, in what measures. What measurements should we use? My answer to the question is yes, definitely, if we look at the social spectrum, if we look at the media spectrum and the media arena, if we even look at formal politics, the Arab world has become more of a pluralist place. If you take countries such as Morocco, even a place like Tunisia with the autocratic government it has, with the police state it has, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait and Bahrain, to highlight seven key countries in the region, we clearly see a movement towards greater pluralism in the media arena, we clearly see a movement towards a greater pluralism in civil society spaces in the social spectrum and we can see a greater degree of pluralism inside formal politics. We have more in terms of quantity and quality, more of political actors contesting formal politics in the seven countries I just mentioned.

However, the greater degree of pluralism socially, in the media arena and politically in the Arab world, has not resulted in significant changes in the two key aspects of democratisation which are, as Marina outlined, a, distribution of power and, b, rule of law. So when it comes to distribution of power and rule of law, Arab countries have remained very much the same countries that we did observe and analyse in the 1980s and 1990s, no significant changes in terms of the distribution of power. In fact, we are seeing a countermove towards a greater concentration of power; otherwise we cannot understand why so many Arab societies are discussing the possibility of a father/son succession in terms of presidential power. And so in Egypt, Yemen, Syria; Tunisia is starting a discussion along the same lines.

So we are seeing a move towards a greater concentration and not a better distribution of political power and rule of law remains undeveloped, uninstitutionalised, as it has been since the 1980s and even before. So, yes, what we are looking at is a diverse and in fact ambivalent picture which Arab societies show us, societies which are becoming more pluralist in different spectrums but when it comes to the three key questions of policy, distribution of power and rule of law, Arab societies have not changed much.

Now, the book offers an attempt to analyse why, why the greater pluralism in the media realm, in civil society spaces, in the social spectrum, even formal politics to an extent, has not led to a better distribution of power and to a better established rule of law. And the answer we offer is twofold: one, ruling establishments, autocratic ruling establishments in the region – and we describe ruling establishments in the Arab world in countries as different as Morocco, Egypt, Jordan and Kuwait and Yemen, we describe them as autocratic in spite of the fact that some of them have come to accept a degree of political competition in formal politics. We have elections, local and national elections in Morocco, we have local and national elections in Egypt, we have elections, regular elections in Kuwait. However, ruling establishments, and in spite of the fact that they have come to accept a degree of political competition in formal politics, have managed to sustain their grip, their authoritarian grip over society. Regardless of elections, regardless of election dynamics, Arab governments, Arab ruling establishments, have not lost their control over politics. They remain the gatekeepers.

And there are clear signs for that. Let me give you two examples: one, Egypt in 2005 and 2007, constitution amendments in 2005 of Key Article 76 which organises elections for the presidency, and in 2007 constitution amendments of 34 articles in the Egyptian Constitution. In the two cases, in 2005 and 2007, the amendments introduced and adopted after referendum were by no means democratically spirited. They resulted all of them in a better and a tighter grip of the ruling

establishment over political dynamics. In Algeria last year President Bouteflika inspired a change, a constitutional amendment to in fact enable him to run endlessly for the presidential office. So the constitution was amended not to provide for more checks and balances, or to provide for better pluralist dynamics, but the other way round, to tighten the grip of the Algerian ruling establishment over Algerian politics. Tunisia very much the same; a recent constitutional amendment allowed President Ben Ali to run one more time and of course he won the elections a few weeks ago.

So one answer to the question why greater pluralisms socially and in the media arena has not resulted in great political pluralism is to understand the fact that Arab governments have been able to contain the dynamics of their societies and have sustained their tight grip over their countries. A second answer which takes us to the opposition spectrum is a weakness of the opposition spectrum and Marina addressed secular parties, regardless of their background, liberal, leftist or Pan Arabism, nationalist – we have different variations in the region. But all of them share the fact that they lack popular constituencies, their messages do not resonate well with wide segments of the population and they are organisationally extremely stagnant. Of course, it can be argued that all of these deficits are outcomes of the authoritarian regime but, in one way or another, those secular parties share responsibility for their stagnation and their weakness.

The second component of the opposition spectrum in formal politics when it comes to parties and political movements is the Islamist component and all of us invested hopes or great expectations that when Islamists get into politics they are going to change the scene because we expected Islamists to bring in wide and popular constituencies, popular social movements, that have been able to compete with the state to contest state power, even when it comes to social service delivery, in a very effective way.

Look at the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt, Islamist in Morocco, Islamist in the Gulf, in Yemen, in Jordan and of course in a place like Palestine. However, Islamists, in spite of their popular constituencies, in spite of their popular support, were not able to change the rules of the game and they have come to participate in semi-autocratic settings, in semi-authoritarian settings, which in fact faces Islamists with stronger crises than ever before. If you look at Islamist parties and movements, they have been losing elections in the last two to three years, contrary to what we predicted as researchers; they have been in fact in a self-reflective mode, more and more debating on their own internal crises and less on their role in their respective political system. A key example here is the Egyptian Moslem Brotherhood. Since 2007 the movement is no longer debating what it needs to do in the Egyptian society or for Egyptian politics to push it towards democratisation. The movement is primarily debating its internal clashes between the old guard and the young guard, between reform minded bloggers and conservative minded 1960s and 70s in terms of the generation. Leaders between a group which the political participation is sceptical and a group which is split [unclear] friendly but, at any rate, the movement is in a self-reflective mode. It's debating more and more its own internal clashes, and the same can be said about the party for Justice and Development whose president Marina met a couple of years ago; this party is now in a serious crisis debating what way to go and how to manage the dynamics of restricted pluralism, of semi-old authoritarianism which we have in Morocco.

Finally, the last answer which we offered to why pluralism in the social arena and in the media arena has not led to political pluralism takes us to informal politics. One of the clearest dichotomies of Arab politics is that, if you look at the wider picture, we are looking at stagnant formal politics

and vibrant informal politics. Protest activities, demonstrations, growing numbers, take place outside formal politics; parliamentary politics seems to be becoming less and less significant, even in terms of consensus building. The media is vibrant and protest activities are vibrant. Informal politics have become more vibrant. The dilemma here is that most Arab societies do not have the measures, the channels needed to get back the dynamism created outside informal politics into formal politics to create a consensus and to push for democratisation.

So we have a gap, a huge gap, between dynamic informal politics where people and groups see themselves represented and formal politics that is no longer interesting for most Arab citizens. And the key indicator here is the voter turnout; it's striking that voter turnout has been declining in most Arab countries. In Morocco it has been declining, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Yemen, so it has not been going up when elections happen regularly. It has been going the other way round; it has been declining over time. So voter turnout is an indicator.

Let me end on a brief note on the differences between regionally. As we started the project in 05 and 06 everyone was debating political reform and democratisation regionally – I'm not talking about the US – in the region itself. As of now, political reform and democratisation are hardly debated. What is really debated in the region is the crisis of the state, out of good reasons. Arabs see the nation states disintegrating or in a crisis in different places, in Yemen, in Iraq, in Lebanon, but even in stable countries. Up until now stable countries like Egypt and Algeria, nation states and their institutions are facing severe crises; they are no longer delivering to the basic needs of their population, so what is being debated right now – and this is where we would like to take our research in the near future – is the state, its crisis and the failure of its modernisation project. Let me stop here.

FABRICE POTHIER: Thank you very much, Amr. Let me turn to Michael. So the Islamists are down, the state in power is up and the secular parties are nowhere to be found. So the question within this complex and challenging picture is what role for Europe. Thank you.

MICHAEL KÖHLER: Let's see, a €1000 question and I could become rich very soon if I had a conclusive answer. To win some time to reflect, I want to thank you for inviting me. But I find it very tough really to talk after Marina and Amr because I think on the facts there, there is absolutely nothing that one can disagree with. I mean you simply did your homework very well and I think from Brussels the Arab world doesn't look very much different from what you have found in Beirut. The question is basically how you evaluate, how you assess your findings. Listening to you, I have the feeling – well, you know, this French *bon mot*, plus ça change, plus ça reste la même chose, eh? The more it changes, the more it stays the same. Is there really significant change? We heard about change. Amr spoke about social movements, Marina spoke about social movements, but does this mean that there's change in the social fabric? Does this mean it will spill over to the political realities, yes or no? I think it's probably too early to say. We all know that there was some sort of astonishment in the scientific community and research community in the late 80s/early 90s when the famous Wind of Change was blowing over the globe and then when it came to the Arab world it seemed to blow, let's say, at a much softer pace than in other parts like in Latin America and Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, for example, and that was the period when somebody like Ghassan Salamé published his book called *Les Démocraties sans Démocrates*.

So there seemed to be democratic possibilities, democratic opening, but hardly any call from those who would benefit from this democracy, meaning the stakeholders, meaning the people basically. I don't want to discuss whether he was right or wrong, but I think there's still a widespread impression that in many parts of the Arab world there is no comparable popular demand for formal democracy in using its tools than in other arts of the world, apparently. Well, we can discuss for long whether this is right or wrong, but obviously it is true. All the facts that Amr just mentioned are true, for example, this steep decline in voter participation in Arab elections over the years.

So how do you interpret this? Does this mean that people simply don't want to be taken for fools, they don't trust the electoral process, they don't really think that anything would change? There is certainly no democratic alteration process which would be derived from the result of these elections because anyway the result of the elections is cooked up previously in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or does this mean that people simply are not interested in democracy because either they don't feel a need for change or they feel that they can articulate their interest in another way? For example, in the very classical way that is not only familiar in that part of the world but also in other parts of the world, including Europe, which is clientalism, which is asabea [?], yes? Can you organise your needs and care for the people in your family in the same way or in an incorrect way if you don't use means of formal democracy?

I have to say I also notice obviously the change that there is in the Arab world, a growing articulation of needs, protests, use of modern technology, information technology and so forth, but I'm not as sure as my two partners here on the panel whether this already means change, and if it means change whether it is significant. Is it change to be, to remain? After all, most of the Arab countries are pluralistic if you look at their composition of society. Iraq, Lebanon, Algeria, Yemen, by all means, even Morocco, are rather pluralistic if you look at the fabric of society and therefore the fabric of the political class. What has happened over the years is not necessarily a democratisation of structures of government but if you take the case of Syria or the case of Tunisia, one cannot be but full of almost admiration for how the regimes in place, police states, as you call them, for example, managed to change the societal basis of their power by keeping their former mechanisms of power as they were.

If you look at the composition, for example, of the Political Bureau [?] or the Executive Committee of the [unclear] City Park in Tunisia, you will see that in the 80s the social logic or composition of these people was completely different from today. You had, for example, trade unionists, you had officials, you had the state bureaucracies and so forth; today you have liberal professions and so forth and so forth, so the people who are co-opted to power are different. There has been a process of rejuvenation, if you want, of opening up to new parts of the society but, at the end of the day, the same people are in power; the very top doesn't change. They've changed their supporters but they don't change the very people at the top.

Now the fact that in many of those countries that have a pluralistic fabric anyway, you hear different voices and you hear them more than you heard them in the past because of the possibilities of modern technology. Is that an expression of real change in society already? I would wish so. But I'm not as optimistic as maybe Marina and Amr are. I would hope that they are right and I am wrong. Maybe over time, maybe we have to come back here again in about five years and check what has happened. Let's not forget the fact that many more opinions can be expressed today is mainly a result of technology and technology that does not come from those countries.

It was not because of a change in the society or a change in the nature of the regime of this or that Arab country that, for example, you would have more TV stations, that you would have more diverse opinions, more discussion in TV. This came through satellite technology and at first it came from outside the Arab world. It came from certain channels based in London and so forth which may be an exception. And of course, yes, over time, then smart regimes would take this up and would try to basically put themselves at the top of the bandwagon, so to speak, or the march, but is this really something which means that the way the decisions are made and how the process of formation of political will in the society is changing? I'm not sure.

Frankly, I'm not in the capacity of telling you today whether this means that we are at the start of a change which makes these societies more comparable to our way of decision making politically or not. What I think is, however, that the socioeconomic and also the ecological problems that many of these countries face might – and I want to be cautious there – might over time lead to a situation where the massive nature of the protest that is to be seen on the streets, that articulates itself in the media, can no longer be contained, can no longer be satisfied through means of kinship, through means of clientalism and so forth. One little example: we're not at the start of the Copenhagen World Summit on Climate Change. I was in Egypt about half a year ago and I was stunned to see that if you go to certain Egyptian ministries there are people working on displacing about 15 million Egyptians because they simply know that if the Mediterranean Sea level rises by half a metre or a metre, then parts of the delta of the Nile can no longer be inhabited.

That's not so much the pressure of water, it's rather salination which comes in, shall we say, so if you have to displace let's say about 20% or 15% of the Egyptian population, this cannot be without consequences on political life and on the formation of the society. If you force villages, for example, to live in towns that so far don't yet exist or will be built perhaps in desert regions, if you force fishermen to become factory workers, for example, this must have an impact on society, this must have an impact on how political formations deal with this. And it might become difficult – Egypt just being an example now - to cater with these problems and to satisfy the needs of the people concerned through simply traditional means of clientalism, kinship and so forth.

Now, that could mean that the protest that you feel and that you interpret to be an expression of pluralist interest will take the more organised form and will have to be dealt with by the political fabric. But it's too early to call for me. I think that if you count the ecological problems, socioeconomic problems, demographic growth and so forth, if you take all these together, you will have a significant number of Arab countries that will probably be faced with challenges so big that it must change the traditional way of how a political party is formed and how decisions are made and how the people are also to say who stays at the top of the helm and remain in power.

Now, what does this mean for the EU? Well, I'm here in a private capacity and that alone makes it impossible for me to really share with you all the thinking, considerations, that there are in the corridors up the road and also on the other side of the road as well concerning how to deal with these groups. But I think, in all honesty, we have to say that – and I see one or two faces here in the public who would probably like to comment on this because they are also in the know – but I don't think that at this moment in time the European Union – and that means both members states and the institutions here in Brussels – have a coherent concept on how to deal with Arab countries and the change that there is in those countries. I think we have to reckon with the double effect of, on

the one hand, disenchantment that many of the hopes placed on the possible chances of the potential of Euro Arab and Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and partnership in the second half of the 90s have been basically disappointed. And if you are as mean as I am, you could even argue that the launching of the European Neighbourhood Policy in itself is already an expression of resignation because it means basically that you don't address the region as a region any longer, but you basically pick and choose. You take this or that country, you offer them a tailor-made deal; if they jump on the wagon, so to speak, fine; if they don't, then also fine. So you give up your ambition of dealing with the countries and dealing with their societies together on the basis of a joint approach.

So there is certainly disenchantment, not only in the south with respect to the north, but also in the north with respect to the south. And I found it very significant that when about a year ago, or two years ago, the European Union launched the Eastern Partnership and the Commission proposed that there should be a significant increase of funding for the Eastern partners of the union; for the first time in 20 years there was an automatic backlash; there was no strong call to say if we do this for our Eastern partners we have to do the same thing for our southern partners. This, for me, was an expression of disenchantment, of disillusionment, maybe also in the south but certainly in the north people said listen, we don't know exactly how we can make it move, how we can push the reform, we have tried means of cooperation, we have tried means of change in the economic structures, we have tried civil society. We even at some time followed Mr Bush's approach, all this has not yielded too much so frankly maybe we should keep it calm for sometime and wait for other times to come.

The second element that there is, is something which my two colleagues here have mentioned as well. Of course, there is an increasing awareness in Europe of the notion of political Islam but there is also knowledge about the fact that political Islam is not the only game in town. There was perhaps an atmosphere a couple of years ago where people said, okay, listen, if you only organise free and fair elections in these countries then in every country basically there is a strong chance that the Islamists will take over, and this led to the conclusion that we should know more about the Islamists in whatever way you want to define what Islamists means. Again, there I think our view has become slightly more differentiated. On the one hand, there is now the clear understanding that the Islamists are certainly not the only game in town. The problem is that the others that we would like to be games in town, like for instance the secular opposition, are even weaker of course. Then, secondly, there is a growing diversity in the Islamist movement itself which has, by the way, always existed but in the days of strong confrontation in the 90s, confrontation between the Islamists and the rulers that there are, forced major blocks like the Fist [?], for example, in Algeria, which covered for sometime the internal splits that there were in the movement and that come up again as soon as there is slightly less repression obviously.

So today you have again, like in the late 70s, the full range of Islamists, from almost social liberal Islamists, progressive Islamists, through to basically the Taliban on the other side, so there's a full range.

Now, who are the people you can talk to, who are the people that you can work with, who are the people among those who would want to work with Europe? And the third aspect is certainly that in a European Union of 27 member states with central institutions that are still at their very start of development – I'm just alluding to the European Islamic Action Service, for example – pluralism

doesn't only exist in the Arab world but pluralism of opinion also exists very much in Europe and, in particular, with respect to the question of how you should deal with these countries and how you should deal with these movements. You have basically three lines of thought: you have those who say Islamists, no way, we don't even want to think of it. You have those who say, well, you have to understand what's going on there in your neighbourhood, therefore you have to talk to everybody and find out whether there is a scope for cooperation.

There is a third line of thought that says, yes, of course we have to understand and where possible we should perhaps also cooperate, but this is not so much for the European Union, this is rather for member states. And according to which angle you come from, you rally to this camp or the other camp.

Therefore, conclusion and sorry, again, that I have to run after that. I think in a way Carnegie has to be blamed for organising this discussion too early. It's too early to call. I think it's too early to call with respect to the question whether there will be real pluralism. When I use the word pluralism, I don't only allude to a variety of opinions. As soon as you have two or three people around, you have a variety of opinions, but is there something that allows in a systemic way different opinions to be part of the same societal and political game and, at the end of the day, leads or influences the decision making process? I think it's a bit too early. I think, over time, there cannot be any other solution than to have more pluralism in society and therefore also in the political game.

As far as the European side is concerned, I think it's too early to tell you whether we would be able to develop a more cohesive strategy with respect to the various forces that there are in Muslim and Arab societies, Islamist and other, and when we would be able to do so. I think there's only a very strong challenge that we all feel but nobody has so far found what we call in my language the stone of wisdom, so to speak, but we are digging further. Maybe we are going to discover it tonight. Thank you.

FABRICE POTHIER: Thank you very much, Michael. You have almost answered the thousand dollar question and I think Marina and Amr would like to react on some of the points and then we can open for discussion. Do you still have five minutes just to listen to Marina and then we can turn to Amr and then I will open the floor for questions and comments.

MARINA OTTAWAY: Thank you very much for the very interesting remarks. I'm afraid that we agree even more than you think because neither Amr nor I – and I think I can speak safely for both of us here – are saying that the emergence of these new social movements, of this social unrest, is in itself a sign of change. What we are arguing is, is that if we are looking for direction from which a change could come, we have to look less at the formal political activities through the election, to political parties, because for all the reasons that we have all seen very clear the signs that there is a lack of faith in the system and there is a lack of dynamism in this area. But if we are trying to look at where change might possibly come from, then I think we need to look increasingly at this new area of activity. I hope – I mean I would like to be optimistic and I'm afraid I am not an optimist – that we don't have to wait until one-third of the delta is under water before we see signs of political changes in the Arab region.

AMR HAMZAWY: Michael, I am going to address the question of pluralism. You had an interesting reflection on media pluralism saying, well, it was not satellite channels, other technologies that

were exported to the Arab world, imported not only by governments but corporate interests as well and Al Jazeera is a government project and Alarabiya is a corporate interest project, so two big satellite channels in the region. The point which I would like to make is – and here I tend to disagree – to my mind, when I compare how Arabs debated politics, social and economic problems in the 1980s and 1990s, with how they debate political, social and economic issues as of now, clearly we have a shift towards greater pluralism in the media arena. And this is not only a greater pluralism in terms of quantity, the fact that we have more media outlets as compared to the 1980s and 1990s, but even in terms of quality, how political, social and economic issues are being debated, so a diversity of opinions and the dialogue and the exchange between those diverse opinions which are taking place.

And once again, it's not only about Jazeera or satellite channels and it's not only about bloggers, it's even gone so far as to impact on governments sponsored, state sponsored TV channels, state sponsored radio stations, state sponsored daily newspapers and weeklies which, as of now, really have to at least have opinion pages that reflect a pluralism of sorts. So we clearly have a shift towards greater pluralism in the media. Once again in civil society spaces, it's very much the case in quantity and in quality and there are some impressive cases in the region. Look at Morocco. Moroccan civil society is a dynamic civil society; of course it cannot address the big questions of the Moroccan politics, the distribution of power, the role of the monarch and rule of law, but it has done much in terms of women empowerment, in terms of social and economic rights, in terms of devising strategies to work at reducing poverty rates. And what can be said about Morocco can be said to a lesser extent about Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait and Jordan, so even in civil society arenas we have a move towards greater pluralism.

What is missing, the missing link, is that this pluralism we are looking at in the media and the social spectrums is yet to reflect on the formal political process, on the formal political sphere. There we still have very much, as you said, even when elites have managed to renew the social contract and the participating actors in social contract, moving from workers to business elites, Egypt and Algeria, for example. And the Egyptian ruling establishment depends on the business elite as a measure supporter of its rule as of now. Even when they have renewed the social contract, no greater pluralism can be found in formal politics. This is the real point, but if you [unclear] and move beyond politics we clearly have a movement towards greater pluralism in a systematic and in an institutionalised way.

FABRICE POTHIER: Thank you, Amr. Thank you very much, Michael. We will now open for questions and comments. If you can kindly introduce yourselves there will be a microphone in the room.

OLAF DEUSSEN: Hello, good evening, Olaf Deussen from the Euro-Arab Forum. Basically I have one question of clarification and where I would like to have your opinion. The one about clarification, talking about Islamist parties, but I was wondering as you were raising the whole question of popular support and all that. Now we are only talking about the Arab world so what about Islamist parties outside the Arab world? What about popular supporters? I mean I'm not saying anything new if we say that most Moslems – I don't want to make the confusion now between Islamists and Moslems – but most Moslems live outside the Arab world. How come that we're not mentioning Indonesia and all that? Maybe if you can reflect a little bit on your way of thought if you say that's not at all important, if we talk about engaging Islamist parties. Is that a way of getting in touch with

them via Indonesia and all that? The second question is more on the point you raised on the challenges of engaging with Islamist parties and there my question is what has to happen in the countries or in the West, in Europe, on this question of perception? If you compare Islamists to Christians – we just had a discussion where the question was, is it not up to Christian parties actually getting in touch with other religious parties in the sense of now, taking as an example, the German party, CDU, that has Christian in its name, take the so-called Christian right in the US. Just as an idea, there is room for God, let's say, in parties or in politics; what has to happen, where is the challenge that this might form an alliance or is it rather the complete opposite on that? Thanks a lot.

FABRICE POTHIER: Thank you. We will take another question from our friend from the European Commission at the back.

ANTONIS ANTANASIOTIS: I am Antonis Antanasiotis from the European Commission. You told us a bit about the Bush Administration policy towards Islam. What about the Obama Administration? There was the famous Cairo speech which, if I remember correctly, was very well received in a way by the Arab world because they were very flattered to be addressed, to be singled out. But in terms of concrete moves, has there been anything concrete? I think the Islamic world was flattered but there was also a wait and see attitude; they said we like the nice words, we like to be singled out for attention, but we want this to be followed up by more concrete, by more identifiable moves. And do you think that they have been satisfied? Do you think that they have something to expect? Do you think there is a plan in the Obama Administration for something to come up with? Thank you.

FABRICE POTHIER: Marina, do you want to start?

MARINA OTTAWAY: Let me start with the second question because, in a sense, it's the easier to deal with. I'll comment on the other as well. The Obama Administration policy towards Islamists, essentially it had not gone beyond the Cairo speech. The Obama Administration has been consumed in terms, first of all, of high level attention. The Obama Administration has been consumed by the domestic debate. The debate on healthcare reform has paralysed the United States, very frankly, and absorbed the attention of this administration to a point at which I am not quite sure the Europeans quite appreciate how much it has paralysed the administration. To the extent, there has been high level attention given to the Middle East, it has been on the peace process and, if you want to talk about the broader Middle East of course, the relationship with Iran. There has been almost nothing in terms of broader initiatives, other initiatives, so I don't think the administration has given much thought to relations with Islamist parties rather than saying the right things about Islam essentially.

And one of the reasons for that is that the administration has not made up its mind whether it's going to go back to a policy of providing political reform in the Arab world, which is the policy which would force it to deal more clearly than before about how we are dealing with the Islamist parties. The impression now – and that is based, to some extent, on the speech that President Obama gave just very recently concerning the decision on Afghanistan – is that this administration is not going to get involved, at least not during the first term, assuming that there is a second term, on democracy promotion. That issue is very, very low on the radar screen for the administration. Obama talked about we are not going to engage in nation building in Afghanistan essentially, or something to that effect, and it's a rejection of nation building that does, by and large, imply also a

rejection of democracy promotion. So I would argue that the administration has not really gone beyond the Cairo speech and as far as I can tell there is no policy dealing directly with Islamists.

Let me talk very briefly to your question and then I'll let Amr take over on this. It is true that we have not looked at all at the whole issue of the Islamists outside the Arab world, so the whole issue of Islam and democracy, Islam and political reform outside the Arab world. The reason is very simple: we are a small program and we just don't have the capacity essentially to go beyond. We are a handful of people dealing with this issue so, very simply, we have not done it, not because we think that there are no differences between what's happening elsewhere, but our focus is essentially the Arab Middle East. And so that's why we have not done it. Concerning the issue of whether the relationship with Islamists should be between religious based political parties and so on, that is an interesting issue and I am not going to address that directly, whether it could be important for Christian Democratic parties to try to establish a relationship with Islamists. Whether or not that is the case, the problem is still there for governments in Europe, in the United States, that claim to want to promote a democracy on how to deal with what is arguably one of the most important political actors in the region. I mean we cannot just say this is totally a metaphor for religious parties; these are major actors and one way or another I think governments have to come to terms with the fact that they have to deal with these organisations.

AMR HAMZAWY: Okay, let me continue where Marina started on engaging Islamist parties and movements. I guess what we have to keep in mind, first of all, is the fact that religion is a much traded commodity in the region and religion is by no means as a commodity which is being used in politics and in social dynamism. It's by no means restricted in terms of its usage to Islamists. Even if you look at ruling parties, seemingly nominally secular parties do use religion systematically to generate the popular support and popular legitimacy. So if you try to identify and classify the Arab political scene, looking at the question who uses religion and which movement is religion based and which is not, you will end up having an extremely confused picture of what's going on because everyone uses religion when it comes to politics. And, as I say, sometimes it's a competition which is going on in Egypt, between the ruling National Democratic Party and the Moslem Brotherhood, both of them do systematically use religion to generate popular support.

What becomes more central more often an indicator to approach the scene, is probably to understand where which group of actors stand on different political and socioeconomic issues and then, from a European perspective – and here I'm not addressing the government to government level, I'm addressing the party to party or civil society level – to judge and to see which group of actors is closer to which group of actors in Europe. And here Christian Democratic parties would have to look not only at whether Islamists really mean it well with religion or not, or mean it well with Europe or not, we'll have to see the platform which each Islamist party puts forward. And here you will have to move beyond the regional scene into a country based analysis because Islamists in Morocco are very different from Islamists in Egypt and are very different from Islamists in Jordan. And here I'm not addressing cases outside the Arab world. If you take Greece and electoral platforms, programs put forward by the Party for Justice and Development in Morocco 2007, by the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt in 2005, by Jordanian Islamic Action Front in 2006/2007, huge differences in the platform and socioeconomic and normative issues even on the meaning of Sharia and what does it mean by implementation of Sharia and a whole set of questions. So it will have to be a country based analysis and it will have to be driven by socioeconomic and political considerations.

At a government to government level we have always said in our writings at Carnegie that there are two criteria to understand when and why the US or European governments become less fearful of reaching out or engaging Islamist parties and movements. The first criterion is whether you are close or far from the Arab/Israeli conflict. Of course, you cannot understand the reluctance of the US to engage Egyptian Islamists or Jordanian Islamists if you forget the fact that Egypt and Jordan are very close to the centre of the Arab/Israeli conflict which is Israel and Palestine, whereas the US has less doubts and European governments in fact as well. When they look at Moroccan Islamists, far away, have nothing to do with the major regional conflict in the Middle East. And the second criterion is whether you are looking at the scene where you have a bipolar competition between pro-Western ruling establishment and anti-Western Islamist movement, or whether you have more of a pluralist competition going on. Once again there is a difference between Egypt and Morocco. Morocco does not have only the Party for Justice and Development; Morocco has a plurality of political actors, political parties and movements. Egypt has a bipolar competition scene between ...

AMR HAMZAWY: ... in a pro-Western ruling establishment, an anti-Western, at least in terms of its rhetoric, an anti-Western Moslem Brotherhood. So once again in Egypt it's harder for the US Government or for the European governments to reach out to Islamists as opposed to Morocco. So here you have to look at the different criteria in place.

A final comment on Islamist cases outside the Arab world and, as Marina said, of course they are relevant but we did not address them. But when you look at non-Arab Islamist cases, it's primarily Turkey which is the most influential on Arab Islamists, the most influential even on Arab intellectuals and Arab writers when they debate the future of Islamists. And the Turkish experience tells us one major lesson, which is apparently you can get Islamists to commit in a procedural sense and in a normative sense to democracy and democratic procedures once you get them to participate in formal politics in a sustained and systematic way, unchanged and with no systematic ruptures, state repression or social isolation. So this is the one lesson which the Turkish example tells us and it's being reflected on by many Arab Islamists and by observers of the scene.

FABRICE POTHIER: Thank you, Amr. We have two questions, one from the gentleman at the front, a member of the press, and then the gentleman with the glasses at the back.

NAWAB KHAN: Nawab Khan from KNA, which is the Kuwait News Agency. As you know and Mr Köhler said it now, the EU shuns or avoids any contacts with Muslim parties or groups in the Arab world and the most prominent example is with Hamas where the EU praised it, it was elected, called it democratic and then put them on the terrorist list. So I mean what is your comment on this? And the second question is that how does pluralism or the development of democracy in the Arab world reflect on what happens in Europe? And I give you the example of the ban of the minarets in Switzerland. How will this affect the Islamic groups [inaudible - no microphone] to increase anti-Westernism? Thank you.

FABRICE POTHIER: Maybe the lady at the front first and then the gentleman there.

ISABELLE MONTOYA: Isabelle Montoya from the Euro-Med and Middle Eastern Unit at the European Parliament and I was very interested in what you said earlier about - I hope I haven't misunderstood you - but you said that you didn't see any channels for change in the Arab world,

whereas you were saying that the pluralism in the media sector, for example, was increasing. So I would like you to elaborate on that, which sort of channels were you thinking of and why?

LUCA MARCOLIN: Good evening. It's Lucca Marcolin from the European Commission and the Bureau of European Policy Advisors. So I'm sorry if my question sounds naive – I'm an economist so I'm rather new to the topic. I had a question on what Mr Amzawi said regarding the secularisation of politics in the Arab world and I actually was rather surprised – okay, so I'm young but not that young – I remember the entry into politics of the Islamic Party in Turkey and I was wondering back then why there was going on a reverse process with respect to what Europe has been subject to in the centuries in the sense that we tried to secularise it while the Islamic parties came second in Turkey. So my question is, is there any hope or is there any necessity perhaps for a secularisation of Islamic politics, or is it too early for such a phenomenon in the sense that perhaps we do need Islamic parties in the Arab world in order to progress to pluralism? Thank you.

AMR HAMZAWY: Thank you very much. Let me start with your question on channels for change and how does the statement I made on the lack of challenge for change correspond to the fact that we have been seeing greater pluralism, at least in the media and the social arenas. Now the channels I was referring to are the channels which a protest movement, social movements, political movements, outside the sphere of formal politics would use to inject their dynamism, their demands, their strategies to build consensus, to address major questions in the respective country, would use to inject their dynamism into formal politics. What we lack are the channels between vibrant informal sphere and the stagnant formal political sphere; those are the channels which we lack. Those channels normally can be established if you have serious and transparent and sustained electoral processes, if you have checks and balances between branches of government, if you have vibrant media and civil society arenas that have enough power to pressure stakeholders in the formal political sphere to change or to reflect on the decisions or to change their priorities. What we see in the Arab world in most cases is a process of delinking between pluralist media and social spectrums and informal politics and stagnant formal politics.

Let me give you an example. In Egypt, for example, Egyptians debated constitution amendments, which took place in 2007, extensively and intensively for a year. The ruling National Democratic Party as it brought its legislation to amend 34 articles of the constitution to the People's Assembly did not take up a single suggestion that was articulated in the press debate or in the media and social debate that was going on. So you had that picture of a society which was debating extensively and intensively a key moment in its political development and a ruling establishment that simply decided to ignore it and had the power to ignore it with no repercussions. Because what happened in Egypt was not as if you had a messy social and political scene right after the ill-spirited constitution amendments were adopted. No, it remained calm, it remained quiet, it remained with the same demonstrations that we have been seeing since 2005, 500 demonstrating in Cairo or in a different urban centre for a few hours and that's it. And even the security apparatus did not need to use wide scale repression to control the scene.

A second example in Tunisia - and it's a police state which you have in Tunisia. However, Tunisian activists managed to establish an interesting movement which is the October 18 Movement, which is an alliance in the [unclear] sense, ideological differences. You have Islamists activists, you have secular activists inside it and they had only one key item on their platform, which is to push for democratic constitution amendments. The government of Ben Ali amended the constitution but

once again decided to completely ignore the debate which was going on in the Tunisian media and the Tunisian press and in Tunisian civil society and introduced one amendment which was once again undemocratically spirited and opened the way for Ben Ali to run for one more term, as we saw a few weeks ago. And of course the same can be said about Algeria and the same can be said about Yemen. So it's the delinking between dynamic and pluralist social and media arenas and formal politics that have remained stagnant. And the channels we lack are the channels to inject that dynamism to formal politics.

On the question of – I did not say that Arab politics or Arab political spheres have become more secular – but what I was trying to say was that, depending on where we look, we have a plurality which we say in the book as well, we have a plurality of actors. We have secular and Islamists, we have ruling establishments and opposition actors. However, in spite of the plurality of actors that has increased over time, the two key questions of any party which are the distribution of power and the rule of law have remained unchanged. We lack a just distribution of power or a distribution of power that enables democratisation processes to take place and we are yet to establish rule of law with all what it takes, checks and balances between government branches and independent judiciary. So I did not say Arab politics or Arab political spheres are becoming more secular. However, your point is interesting in a different way. What we know once again, to a lesser extent from the Arab world and to a greater extent from the Turkish case, for example, is that religious based movements, Islamist movements, Islamist parties, when they get into formal politics they tend over time to de-prioritise moral and religious questions and to prioritise socioeconomic and political issues, public policies. So if you look at AK [?] Party and its platform, you compare the current platform with AK Party platform a couple of years ago, you clearly see a shift towards a de-prioritisation of moral and normative questions and the prioritisation of public policy. This process is described sometimes as an internal secularisation of religious parties; it's an interesting process. In the region I can only see some traces of it in Morocco, in the case of the Party for Justice and Development; otherwise, and because we lack sustainability in Islamist participation in politics, it has not been the case.

MARINA OTTAWAY: Okay, let me take your question, first of all, and I take them very briefly because I don't think really they were questions but comments, I would argue. Yes, I think the European Union and the United States and probably the European Union encouraged by the United States did essentially panic when Hamas won the elections and they did something that the democratic countries should not do – that is to disown the result of the elections and go in a different way. I totally agree with you if you say that was not the way things should have...

SPEAKER 1: But should Europe have put the Islamist parties in the Arab world? [inaudible]

MARINA OTTAWAY: Well, there are always probably contacts at some levels, but there is certainly not a recognition of the legitimacy of Hamas as a political party. I would be very surprised if there was no intelligence contact somewhere just because that's the way forward. Again, concerning the issue of the minarets in Switzerland, that's a comment and not a question.

SPEAKER 1: [inaudible]

MARINA OTTAWAY: Well, okay, it certainly does not encourage it. Essentially, Europe is setting a bad example and I think unfortunately it's a very dangerous example because we have seen it, for

example, very clearly on the issue of Human Rights in the violation of Human Rights that took place in [unclear] and also, even more clearly, when the United States enacted the patri [?] attack [?] that a lot of Arab countries were delighted. A lot of Arab governments were delighted because in a sense it justified their own repression of Human Rights. So I think there is no doubt that these are policies that do not encourage the evolution of the Arab world in a pluralistic direction.

But what I want to comment on also, I want to add some comments about the question about why is it Arab countries, there seems to be a reverse process in Arab countries that, instead of moving towards greater secularism, they are moving in the opposite direction. First of all, there is an unstated assumption that the future is towards secularisation, that the secularisation is the inevitable march of history that leads towards secularisation. I'm not too sure that this is the case. I live in the United States and I think we have seen a considerable increase in the role of religion in politics in the last decade or so in certain parts of the United States. So I'm not too sure that it is accurate to say that the trend in the world is towards greater secularisation.

But the second point which I think is very important is if you look at Turkey the secularisation was imposed on Turkey by an authoritarian regime. Whether you like the reform that Ataturk imposed on Turkey, those were reforms that were imposed. They did not reflect a true transformation of the society. And what you find is that as the society becomes more democratic – and it has become more democratic – then I think trends that always existed in society become much more manifested so that I'm not too sure that it's true that Turkey went backwards. It's fine that we are beginning to see trends and phenomenon that were there all along but this narrow military establishment and the bureaucratic establishment kept it from being manifested. So the most important thing now is to see what the trends are. And we go back here to the point that Amr was making – how then is the debate going to change once you allow essentially the strengths that were always there to become manifested. And I don't think what is happening in Turkey now makes me particularly pessimistic about the future, but I also cannot accept the... I'm not convinced, being a secular person myself - I'd like to see it that way – but I'm not too sure that the future necessarily goes in the direction of greater secularisation.

FABRICE POTHIER: Thank you, Marina. Now Amr wants to add a few words.

AMR HAMZAWY: On word on the Minaret question. I do agree with what Marina said. At the end of the day the dominant narrative in the Arab world – and I'm restricting what I am saying to the Arab world which I observe and follow – the dominant narrative interpreting the decision, the outcome of the referendum in Switzerland, has been to say, well, look at how conservative and how illiberal minded and spirited they are. And of course it's a negative precedent; it's not a positive moment for anyone who is trying to convince Arabs to open up and to take a good example of European and Western societies in general. However, what I'm always afraid of when it comes to those debates in the region, looking abroad and looking across the Mediterranean to Europe and trying to understand what's going on, is that we tend as Arabs to ignore that we have much of the same troubles in our own societies and in our own social fabrics. So I expected or hoped that the Arab press would raise the question of freedom of religion in different Arab countries and I do not have to highlight the specific Saudi experience which is when it comes to non-Moslems and even Moslems from different sects or different indoctrination – and I'm referring to the Sunni/Shia difference – which is a very tough experience for non-Moslems and for Shia Moslems. But I'm also referring to places like Egypt, like Morocco, like Jordan, like Yemen, where non-Moslems have a

very hard time even building churches or renovating them. I'm not sure whether any one of you have followed debates in Egypt recently on finally reforming Egyptian laws that govern how Egyptian Copts renovate their churches and what kind of stipulations we do have. So we have some real troubles in our societies as well and what I don't like in those moments is that we do not have the courage to address what has been going wrong in our societies and we tend to spend great energy and great time accusing the culture of the other, in that case Switzerland, of being illiberal, forgetting about our own illiberalism.

SPEAKER 1: May I add something here?

FABRICE POTHIER: Maybe if you don't mind, outside the discussion. We have to close now but you are welcome to do it in private. I would like to thank our speakers and also the audience for coming today and for this very interesting discussion and those very pertinent points. Thank you very much.