

Political Islam in Morocco

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Abstract

Islamist parties in Morocco have seen an ideological transformation from a radical – even violent – political doctrine to a more pragmatic and progressive strategy in recent years. This paper seeks to understand how the internal ideological evolution of Moroccan Islam and the international context have made collaboration with Europe and the US possible. The key Islamist players on the Moroccan political stage are the Party of Justice and Development and the Association for Justice and Charity, both of which have shown a desire to increase cooperation with Europe but this, they claim, has not been reciprocated by the EU.

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POLITICAL ISLAM IN MOROCCO

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Nearly twenty years ago, to talk about political Islam in the Maghreb was to talk exclusively about its Algerian and Tunisian variants. At the time, it seemed unlikely that Islamism could emerge in Morocco and Moroccan observers and political figures alike were firmly convinced that the King's political function (*'amir al mouminoun*) protected the country from this ideology. That all changed at the beginning of the 1990s, when Islamism burst upon the Moroccan political scene. Despite concerns among European Union (EU) and Moroccan political figures, the development of Islamism has upset neither the country's political balance nor the monarchy's relations with Europe. This article seeks to understand how the internal ideological evolution of Moroccan Islam and the international context have made collaboration with Europe possible. It points out that Moroccan Islamists have shown a desire to increase cooperation with Europe, which they argue has not been reciprocated by the EU.

The Evolution of Moroccan Islamism

The Islamist movement in Morocco is far from homogenous.¹ Pluralistic by nature, Moroccan Islamism can be divided between two groups: the Justice and Development Party (*Hizbo alaadalati wa atanmia*, or PJD in its French acronym) under the direction of Saad Eddine Othmani, and Justice and Charity (*al 'Adl wal 'Ihsan*, JC), led by Sheik Abdessalam Yassine.

In political terms and by virtue of its clandestine organisation, JC must be considered as the most important Islamist group. After a long history of tension between Yassine and Hassan II, stretching back to the 1970s, in 1988 the former established JC as a new organisation. In 1989, the incarcerated Yassine was freed from prison but members of his group were often arrested by the police. In January 1990, the association was officially outlawed. Upon the death of Hassan II, the new King Mohammed VI, changed strategy with regards to the movement and ended surveillance of Yassine. Since then, the movement has consistently demanded legalisation.

In contrast, the PJD was formed from the fusion of a large number of small moderate Islamist organisations and monarchist insiders. Under the name of the Constitutional and Democratic Popular Movement (MPDC) this coalition competed in the 1997 legislative elections and entered Parliament for the first time after winning nine seats. In 1998, the party changed its name to become the Justice and Development Party. During the 2002 legislative elections, the PJD won 42 out of 295 seats, becoming one of the country's main political forces. In 2004, Saad Eddine Othmani became the party's secretary general.

The PJD represents what might be described as 'legitimised Islam' or 'state Islam'. In contrast with JC, it does not call into question the Moroccan kingdom's political foundations. The party is pro-monarchist and does not endorse a revolutionary rhetoric of social change aimed at creating an Islamic state. On the contrary, it holds that state and society are not to be Islamicised because Morocco is already a Muslim country. It nevertheless insists on the principle of defending Moroccan society's Islamic identity through legislative and institutional means when that identity is threatened. This involves a basic discourse of probity founded on respect for religious morality. From this point of view, the PJD has acted as a party-pressure group,

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¹ Zeghal (2004).

mobilising when needed all those within Moroccan society and the Moroccan administration who believe that the country's Islamic identity is under threat. The PJD frequently condemns all proposed measures that would diminish the Muslim character of the state or the monarchy. The PJD's religious discourse is close to that of the *Waqfs* Ministry (Ministry of Religious Affairs). Its detractors hold that it is manipulated by the monarchy as a bulwark against Islamic terrorism and non-official Islam more generally. The party has recently moved from critical support for the government to 'constructive opposition'. This strategy allows it to both satisfy the party's radical wing and pursue a policy of integration by means of political alliances. PJD criticisms of the government thus aim at gaining a certain popularity among the impoverished segment of the middle class, but without jeopardising more complex state alliance strategies on issues related to the defence of the country's Islamic identity.²

In Parliament, PJD politicians now downplay religious themes and questions related to religious faith in favour of more political and secular matters. Moreover, they have adapted their political programme to the government's public policies. It is difficult to precisely define the party's political programme, which is characterised by inconsistency. Political pragmatism takes precedence over the clear definition of a recognisable ideology. The party's political programme does not result from a homogenous way of thinking founded upon a fundamental theory developed by party leaders and intellectuals. Instead, the PJD's programme is pragmatically constructed. These positions are sufficiently flexible to allow the party to endorse various government policies when necessary, and at the same time to criticise other positions of the government in order to appear as a platform for protest among militants.

Organised as a political party, the PJD's structure is nevertheless tied to a religious association, the Movement for Unity and Reform (MUR), which brings together 200 different groups. Although the party denies any organic relationship with this federation of religious associations, most PJD leaders are members of the MUR, holding various functions, depending upon the structure to which they belong. There is a division of labour between the MUR and the PJD: while the latter adheres to its pro-monarchist position, the MUR is more critical of the authorities and remains in contact with its base through religious and pastoral associational work.

JC differs significantly from the PJD in terms of its ideology and its relationship with the monarchy. JC is highly critical of the monarchy and resolutely affirms the necessity of adopting a republican form of government. The movement does not hesitate openly to criticise Mohammed VI, calling for the construction of an Islamic republic that would respect democratic values and the rights of man. According to Nadia Yassine, the daughter of JC's founder, 'the monarchy is not made for Morocco', 'the Constitution deserves to be thrown upon the garbage heap of history', and 'all signs indicate that the monarchy will soon collapse'.³ The organisation places itself outside of the system. Organised around the figure of the charismatic leader, the movement's open conflict with the regime makes it the most virulent opposition to the monarchy in Morocco. While the PJD develops its non-confrontational relations with the King, the JC is in permanent conflict with the authorities and has on several occasions been subjected to repression. 'We are the object of very strong police pressure in Morocco because we are critical of the system',⁴ states Nadia Yassine. Yet, while it openly opposes the monarchy, the JC nevertheless condemns political assassination and armed violence. Instead of indirect action, the JC prefers recourse to legalistic and pacifist action (demonstrations, petitions, and so

² "Two Countries: Who is Using Whom in Egypt and Morocco?", *The Economist*, 16 December 2004.

³ Interview with Nadia Yassine, Courbevoie, 20 June 2006.

⁴ *Ibid.*

forth); its members have disowned the violent tactics deployed in the 1970s and 1980s. The association is tolerated but closely watched. It does have its own press. Invoking Sufism, the organisation proclaims a desire to Islamicise society non-violently through education. It is active in the charitable domain and owes much of its influence to its social activism. While the PJD separated its political and religious wings, religious activities and political activism coexist within the JC.

For the PJD, support for democracy in part results from a desire to appear respectable in a context in which Islamism was considered an unreliable partner. For the JC, locked in conflict with the monarchy, supporting democracy represents a means of showing opposition to the regime. While both organisations have thus come to support democracy for tactical reasons, this positioning has arguably pushed party members to internalise a positive belief in democracy as the most legitimate form of political system. It is for this reason that JC and PJD members make such great efforts to define the contours of ‘an Islamic democracy’ and Islam’s intrinsically democratic dimension. Nadia Yassine regularly asserts Islam’s democratic character, claiming that the Prophet himself governed according to the principle of popular sovereignty.

Moroccan Islamists and European Democracy

More than merely rhetorically supporting the democratic norms that prevail in Europe, Moroccan Islamists have increasingly become participants within the European political space. At the end of the 1990s, Sheik Yassine’s Justice and Charity movement began viewing Europe as a land of exile and political expression. Realising that the spread of their ideology was limited and even blocked by the kingdom, JC decided to ‘export’ their movement beyond national frontiers. This export took place through the creation of an association whose subsidiaries are found both in Europe and the United States: the Muslim Participation and Spirituality (MPS) association. The creation of this movement was the result of the activism of political refugees who had fled political repression in their countries of origin, as well as political engagement on the part of students undertaking advanced degree programmes in the early 1990s. Expressing itself from outside the country on the Moroccan situation and hoping thereby to put pressure on the monarchy, the MPS seeks to profit from its presence in Europe in order to win legal status for the Moroccan JC, as well as guarantees concerning democracy and human rights. For the Islamists of the Justice and Charity party, having a foothold in Europe is part of a strategy to ensure that their country is not their only site of political engagement.

By becoming a force of opposition in Europe to the Moroccan regime, the JC-MPS movement appeared *mutadis mutandis* to be an agent for democratisation. The French and Belgian branches of the MPS regularly organised demonstrations denouncing the political situation in Morocco. The MPS’ chief of public relations in France, Abderrahman Makhoulouf, affirms that ‘no one talks about the catastrophic political context in Morocco. With the means at our disposal, we have sought to alert French public opinion to the very poor situation in which the movement of Sheik Yassine finds itself in Morocco.’⁵ It is in the same spirit that Nadia Yassine regularly visits France in order to denounce the political situation in her country and the repression which her movement is subject to. Thus, on 17 June 2006, the ‘New Europe-Morocco Friendship’, an association close to Sheik Yassine’s Islamist movement, denounced the political repression of the movement on the part of the Moroccan government by organising a conference in Brussels hosted by the Sheik’s daughter, on the theme ‘Human Rights Flouted in Morocco’.

⁵ Interview with Abderrahman Makhoulouf, Paris, 8 June 2006.

With repression of the Justice and Charity continuing a month later, Nadia Yassine launched a tour around Europe to denounce police oppression. At one of her appearances in France, she declared, ‘The conditions for political and democratic participation in Morocco are not present. How are people to vote and choose their leaders when an important segment of the population is illiterate? In these circumstances, talk of free elections is a joke. There’s a lock on the political game and elections are nothing more than a farce’. Despite a structure that is presented as autonomous, the MPS continues to be directed by Sheik Yassine’s daughter and to give voice to his party’s ideology, particularly via conferences concerning Islamic banking and modernity (democracy, secularism, women’s rights). Muslim, French-language internet sites such as *Saphirnews*⁶ and *Oumma.com*, which are read by many young Muslims in Europe, also advocate the party’s positions. In a statement posted on *Oumma.com*, Nadia Yassine asserts:

Contrary to other countries like Spain, Belgium and even the United States, France hardly respects the human rights of which it is so proud, especially where we are concerned. In practice, human rights only go one way and are chosen and applied according to the standards of Western political correctness. France is so close to the Moroccan monarchy that it has forgotten its strongest and most essential principles! I believe that France will pull itself together and prove to the world that all oppressed people can count on it now and forever.

Moroccan movements in Europe have integrated into the available political framework, by means of councils such as the CFCM, the presence of *imams* in local mosques, or into the Islamic associative landscape. Justice and Charity thus decided to pursue its policy of criticising the Moroccan regime within the MPS, not by addressing the question of the monarchy’s illegitimacy, but rather in the area of human rights and public liberties. In 2006, PSM supporters living in Belgium and France created the Alliance for Freedom and Dignity (AFD), an association responsible for promoting and defending democracy and human rights in Muslim countries (and particularly Morocco) by organising various demonstrations and conferences.

While Sheik Yassine’s movement uses Europe as a political platform (something it cannot do so freely in Morocco), for the PJD maintaining a presence in Europe is more a question of electoral strategy. Nearly three million Moroccans (or nearly 10% of the total Moroccan population) live abroad, most of them in Europe (France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy). The PJD regards these immigrants and their dual-nationality children as a not insignificant electoral reservoir, capable of being mobilised in the course of campaigns. In April 2006 the PJD organised a ‘European electoral campaign’ aimed at their compatriots living in Europe in the hope of winning their votes for the 2007 elections. As a militant of the Islamist party living in France suggested: ‘With legislative elections approaching, it is normal that we should organise official meetings and informal gatherings in order to inform Moroccan immigrants about our social project and our programme. The aim is to found an electoral base in Europe’.⁷

Given the electoral strength of Moroccan nationals living abroad, the PJD has even recently exerted pressure to ensure better representation in elections. Thus, together with other political groups, in 2006 it signed a communiqué condemning ‘government backsliding with regards to the organisation of elections among Moroccans living abroad’.

In addition to pressing within European democracy for change in Morocco, the PJD and JC have also increasingly taken a stand in support of representing the Muslims of Europe via

⁶ Interview with Nadia Yassine, “La meilleure façon d’avancer se trouve dans la résistance pacifique” [Peaceful Resistance is the Best Way to Move Forward], *Saphirnews* (available at <http://www.saphirnews.com>).

⁷ Interview with Tariq G., Saint Denis, 31 May 2006.

numerous Islamic structures. Indeed, these parties are not present as such in Europe but are rather to be found enmeshed in the European Islamic landscape in the form of cultural and/or religious associations, which have either been created as associative structures *ex nihilo* or integrated into already existing organisations.

Numerous high-ranking members of the National Federation of French Muslims (*Fédération Nationale des Musulmans de France*, FNMF)⁸ are members and supporters of the JDP, following the example of Anouar Kbibech, President of the Regional Council of the Muslim Faith (CRCM) for Ile-de-France East (*Conseil Régional du Culte Musulman-Ile-de-France Est*), the regional branch of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (*Conseil Français du Culte Musulman*, CFCM). The CRCM-Ile-de-France East was responsible for the creation of a new Muslim movement, the Rally of Muslims in France (*Rassemblement des Musulmans de France*, RMF) that held its first meetings in Paris in June 2006 and brought together around 200 mosque and associative leaders. According to the President of the CRCM Ile-de-France East, this initiative aspires to be ‘complementary to and not in competition with the French Muslim Council’.⁹

Founded more recently than the FNMF, Muslim Participation and Spirituality (*Participation et spiritualité musulmane*, PSM)¹⁰ identifies with the Moroccan Sufist and Islamist Justice and Charity movement founded in Morocco by Abdessalam Yassine. This association constitutes the JC’s European arm (principally in France, Belgium and Canada). Set up by Moroccan students who had come to Europe to study at university in the early 1990s, it has grown considerably since the year 2000 and is today one of the most active Islamic associations in Europe.

Conceived as structures to defend the interests of Muslims in Europe, these organisations propose an Islam which allows one to be a good, engaged Muslim without throwing into question integration into European society. The Islam advocated by these structures does not claim to break from European social and political values and, according to leaders of these associations, the Muslim religion itself constitutes a means for self-affirmation within European society. These movements make a point of publicly advocating respect for European political standards around such values as citizenship and seek to promote an Islam that takes into account Western social realities. In this respect, they are attempting to establish an ‘Islamic citizenship’ and present themselves as the privileged interlocutors of local and national public figures in relation to such diverse questions as religious activities, racism and the problem of juvenile delinquency in the *banlieues*. While the first generations of Muslim immigrants were not attracted by this form of Islamic militancy and preferred to organise themselves around projects related to the construction and management of mosques, a proportion of their children, most of

⁸ According to its directors, the FNMF, created in 1985, brought together nearly 500 associations. Considered close to Morocco, it is a member of the French Muslim Council (CFCM). Created by the French Minister of the Interior, the French Muslim Council brings together religious structures representative of the French Islamic landscape. Its purpose is to serve as an interface between public authorities and French Muslims and collectively to manage questions related to religious practice.

⁹ Interview with Anouar Kbibech, Paris, 9 June 2006.

¹⁰ The PSM is distinguished by the originality of its doctrinal origins. Its modes of mobilisation are inspired by those created by political Islam at the same time that it identifies with Sufism. The doctrine of the UOIF, for its part, belongs more or less to the same line of thought as that of the Muslim Brotherhood. The PSM’s success is due to the fact that it functions as a refuge for members without asking them for exclusive membership and encouraging them to hold political positions at the local level and to participate in various citizens’ rights associations, without asking them explicitly to refer to the movement in the course of their public sphere activities.

whom were born and educated in Europe, are finding a means of fully realising themselves as practising and engaged Muslims in this ideology, without repudiating successful economic and social integration. The PSM has thus actively mobilised in France against the legal project to forbid wearing religious symbols at school by participating in the ‘a school for all’ collective. This permitted the emergence of an original coalition of Muslim and secular associations.

As a third strand to policy, Moroccan Islamists have sought dialogue with political and academic bodies within Europe. In this way, they can present their often little-known programmes outside their country, while within Morocco appear as central political actors with access to networks and international support. A trip to Spain to meet several political leaders between 26 March and 1 April 2005 was among the PJD’s recent initiatives. Five members of the party’s General Secretariat, including secretary general Saaddine Othmani, were received by the vice-president of Spain’s Socialist Party and the Popular Party. This delegation also met with the President of the Spanish Parliament, representatives of the Association of Moroccan Workers and Immigrants in Spain (AMWIS), the President of the Spanish Employers’ Union, José Maria Cuevas, and the President of the Spanish Confederation of Business Organisations.

This visit was part of a programme established by the General Secretariat of the party to visit several European capitals in the run up to the 2007 legislative elections in Morocco. As part of this programme, on 6-12 April the PJD delegation also visited Paris where it met with several representatives of France’s main political parties. Among them were a representative of the right wing Union for a Popular Movement (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*, UMP), François Bayrou; the President of the centre Union for French Democracy (*Union pour la Démocratie Française*, UDF), Jean-Pierre Chevènement; and Gérard Chenel, the Socialist Party’s (*Parti Socialiste*, PS) representative in charge of Mediterranean affairs. Here, too, the delegation’s meetings with political parties were accompanied by a strategy targeting Muslim communities in France.¹¹

While the PJD’s external relations efforts target European institutional and political groups, the non-legalised JC is forced to focus on alternative political networks and intellectual forums. Nadia Yassine participates in a series of forums and meetings organised by such anti-globalisation movements as the IV European Social Front held in Athens from on 4-7 May 2006, and the first congress of Islamic feminism held in Barcelona on 27-29 October 2005. Positioning oneself as a ‘thinker’ or ‘university academic’ is a means by which figures without official recognition can make their voices heard by their respective states and thus by EU member states. Nadia Yassine also often participates in university conferences where she is invited to express her views as an intellectual on the state of Islamic political thought today, as she did in May 2003 during the VI International Congress of the Mediterranean Studies Association in Budapest, in June 2004 at San Sebastian and again the same year in Amsterdam on the initiative of the ‘*Al Bayt al arabi*’ institution.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and European Neighbourhood Policy

While Moroccan Islamists claim to support democratic rule and show an admiration for Europe in this regard, there is a desire to distinguish between being pro-democracy and being pro-Western. Both the PJD and JC maintain that there is no necessary relation between the two. The

¹¹ It is to be noted that JDP members can also operate in Europe without advertising their political colours and prefer the appearance of inter-cultural dialogue on the model of the conference held on women’s rights in the Maghreb held at the Paris Institut du Monde Arabe in November 2003, in which the JDP’s Mme Benkhaldoun participated.

Islamists regularly denounce Western cultural and political imperialism towards their country, claiming that democratisation is only a pretext for Europe and the United States to Westernise (and thus de-Islamicise) Moroccan society. They assert that Moroccan society itself possesses the cultural resources necessary to become a democratic society and that these are to be drawn from Islamic sources. This is why Moroccan Islamists also desire to distance themselves from Western influence and schools of thought (the philosophy of the Enlightenment, for example). The same refusal to borrow Western political culture is extended to minority rights (where minority rights are said to have a non-Western, Islamic origin). During a 2004 conference in Paris organised by a French Muslim association, Nadia Yassine argued that the Prophet himself protected religious minorities and that, in consequence, 'it is useless to turn to Western political culture in this area'.

Apart from a complete refusal to borrow Western models, Moroccan Islamists denounce what they see as the selective and opportunistic manner in which Europe applies democratic principles. Europe does not require that its authoritarian allies practise democracy. Moreover, they believe that Europe opposes elections when Islamists are brought to power. As a PJD leader who lives in France stated, 'On the one hand, Europe suspects us of having an ambivalent relationship with democracy but when we win in elections, they oppose our victory as happened with Hamas in Palestine. In such a context, how are we supposed to value democracy and desire that the democratic process develops in the Arab world?'¹² However, these anti-Western criticisms do not at all represent a desire to break with Europe; on the contrary. In the mind of the Islamists, collaborating with the West is a political necessity: their aim is to appear as respectable agents of change.

Crucially, PJD and JC views on the European foreign policy initiatives in Morocco are not strongly favourable. Despite the importance of EU aid to Morocco, European policies have yet to conceive of a place for the Islamists in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). Also, they have not considered their possible integration in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The failure to integrate Moroccan Islamists into the ENP and EMP contrasts with the American policy of establishing relations with these political actors. Since the 11 September attacks, the US regards Moroccan Islamists as reliable partners capable of playing a driving role in the democratisation process and as a bulwark against Islamic terrorism. Europe, by contrast, has always been reluctant to include North African Islamists in their partnership and neighbourhood policies, which are very strongly marked by security preoccupations. In a context of Islamic terrorism, EU relations with southern countries have been driven by a concern to preserve political stability. This has led Europe to support Arab regimes threatened by the rise of Islamic terrorism, even when those regimes are authoritarian.¹³ Very strongly influenced by the spectre of Algerian Islamism, it is judged that the European Union has always refused to accept North African Islamists as reliable partners in dialogue, judging that these groups advocate the creation of an Islamic state opposed to democratic principles. The EU's position regarding Moroccan Islamists finds its justification in the analysis of experts (scholars and consultants) who hold that a declining Islamism¹⁴ can no longer constitute an actor in the EMP, for it no longer represents a portion of the country's public opinion. This security-based perspective also prevents the EU from considering these parties as political partners and has thereby led it to exclude all civil society NGOs with an Islamic

¹² Interview with Rachid B., Paris, 5 July 2006.

¹³ The EU takes the Islamist movements of the region into consideration above all from the perspective of security concerns, considering them as having equivocal relations with terrorism.

¹⁴ Kepel (2000).

identity from the structures of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The result has been an over-representation of secular and pro-government associations as well as relative indifference on the part of the Islamists towards the EMP.

Moroccan Islamists regret the absence of supportive EU policies and denounce Europe's slowness in addressing the Islamist phenomenon. 'The Europeans still see Islamism as a phenomenon synonymous with instability and conflict', one PJD member lamented. 'Yet Islamism is plural and part of the Islamist trend has changed and evolved. This latter has long accepted Western political values and the need for dialogue with Europe'.¹⁵ Given the important place it occupies on the Moroccan political scene, the Islamists say that they would willingly respond to any overture on the part of the European Union. They complain of the lack of initiative on the part of the EU. 'Europe has still not understood that, whatever it says or does, we represent a majority of Moroccans and, by consequence, Morocco',¹⁶ bemoans one Justice and Charity militant. 'If Europe wishes to engage in dialogue with Morocco and encourage political pluralism here, it has to speak with us rather than denounce us as dangerous terrorists. We are better positioned than anyone else in Morocco to encourage the emergence of a genuine democracy'.¹⁷

Given the expressed desire of the PJD and JC to establish relations with the EU, they deplore the lack of policies seeking dialogue with Islamic parties within the European Union.¹⁸ Moroccan Islamists, for their part, have been particularly critical vis-à-vis the policies pursued within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, condemning what they see as Europe's desire to impose its own values through cooperation programmes, especially concerning women's rights.¹⁹ Another criticism made by the Islamists of European policy is that instead of attempting to give lessons to Muslim civil societies, Europe should address respect and defence of the rights of Muslim Europeans.

Some links exist on an ad hoc basis with projects run by a number of individual EU member states. However, the nature of these links is often determined by the countries that participate in them. The resulting initiatives are thus those of individual member states rather than of the European Union as a whole. Instead of being coordinated, there is a divergence between the policies of the various EU member states. Although they have received very little media attention, initiatives such as the convention of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC)²⁰ on the fight against international terrorism signed at Ouagadougou on 1 July 1999, as well as the exchanges that have taken place since then between the OIC and the EU, are examples of how the Islamic factor has found some place in discussions between the EU and its neighbours.

¹⁵ Interview with Tariq G., *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Interview with Karim L., Brussels, 28 June 2006.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ As regards the actors and programmes possibly engaged in the Algerian-Moroccan zone, one finds the European Council, its committees (COREPER, COPS) and programmes (Crisis Management, Human Rights and Democratisation), the European Commission delegations in Algeria and Morocco, European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the action plans drawn up for each country (the one for Algeria will soon appear) and finally the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), to which both Algeria and Morocco belong.

¹⁹ Ammor in Fernández & Youngs (eds) (2005).

²⁰ The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) was founded in 1970 and includes 55 member states. Its seat is at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Despite several attempts at rapprochement and the growing interest shown by the European Union in the question of political Islam, these initiatives remain informal and do not take place within an institutionalised structure. Within the foreign ministries of certain member states such as the UK and Spain, however, there exist discussion and reflection groups devoted to Islamic parties. These initiatives have yet to be translated into concrete measures within EU institutions, however, as evidenced during the November 2005 ‘Barcelona +10’ summit, the absence of new tools and actors for tackling political questions (particularly that of democratisation) with southern states has led to a pro-regime focus on the fight against terrorism.

As already stated, in this regard Moroccan Islamists compare the EU unfavourably with the US’ policy of deepening engagement. When a part of the Moroccan political class, strongly supported by the government’s left wing, called for the PJD to be dissolved in the aftermath of the 16 May 2003 attacks in Casablanca, American Ambassador Margaret Tutweiler intervened with the support of her administration to prevent this from happening. Moroccan Islamists complained of European silence on this issue. American diplomats have come regularly to consult the Islamists on Morocco’s political situation.²¹

While the Islamists congratulate American policy towards them and recognise the courage of American authorities in this area, they express their regret that the European Union does not have a similar policy. As a result, the EU has an image problem within Islamist parties while the US is increasingly seen in a positive light, despite criticism of its Arab policy. As a JC militant explained, ‘The US has scored points in this area and caught up with Europe. If the US didn’t support Israel and wasn’t at war in Iraq, American policy towards Muslim countries would be excellent’.²²

The US has also forged relations with the clandestine JC organisation. American officials thus recently defended Nadia Yassine when Moroccan authorities sought to punish her for her violent remarks against the monarchy. She has also been invited to speak at conferences held by a number of American universities, such as the University of California, Berkeley and Harvard University, among others.

Conclusion

The EU’s support for the Moroccan regime and eschewal of significant engagement with Moroccan Islamists ensures that the PJD and JC remain critical of the ENP and EMP. Soberingly, these groups complain that the EU has fallen well behind the US in terms of engagement with Morocco’s Islamists. Significantly, the PJD and JC have become more active within European democracies than the EU has in recognising them as democratic actors within Morocco. This imbalance is especially marked in the case of the JC movement.

The integration of Islamists who represent a non-negotiable part of public opinion and enjoy popular support would allow the EMP to have a better impact on the ground. This would help the EU and its various cooperation programmes to increasingly reduce anti-European sentiment over questions of democratisation and to catch up with the US in this area. By including them in these European dynamics, the Islamists would be in some ways prodded to clarify their still ambiguous positions regarding democracy and human rights. Multiplying interlocutors in the framework of the ENP and EMP would force the Moroccan regime to take greater account of

²¹ “Stratégie: Bush drague nos islamistes”, (“Strategy: Bush flirts with our Islamists” - editor’s translation) *Tel Quel*, No. 177, 21 May 2005.

²² Interview with Jamel T., Paris, 15 June 2006.

EU recommendations concerning democracy and the economy. This policy will only be possible if the EU clearly defines its action lines towards the question of Islamist politics in the Arab world, while also multiplying its political exchanges, not only with the Islamists, but with all Moroccan political actors, particularly those representing civil society.

Faced with the absence of opportunities for dialogue at the level of the European Union, Moroccan Islamists increasingly have a tendency to turn towards the US, which has in the past five years observed a policy of consulting Islamist parties. But the EU can nevertheless make a profound difference and play a distinctive role. The privileged position that it occupies among leaders of southern states, as well as the tools that are at its disposal for engaging civil societies in the EMP, might facilitate the establishment of a triangular diplomacy between the EU, state leaders and Islamist parties. This would give new momentum to the theme of democratisation, today entirely subjugated by security preoccupations.

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