
Book Reviews

Europe, the USA and Political Islam: Strategies for Engagement, edited by M. Pace (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, ISBN 9780230252059); ix+210pp., £57.50 hb.

Throughout the first half-year of the so-called 'Arab Spring', the EU demonstrated its ambiguous stance against the authoritarian regimes in several countries of the Middle East–North Africa ('MENA') region, combining both activism and passivism in a seemingly erratic fashion. Although the magnitude of these events surprised almost everyone, close observers of the region have been advocating for years an observed mismatch between western policies and the actual situation on the ground. Unfortunately, some of these voices have been lonely cries in the desert. This book, although written and finalized before the events occurred, is no less relevant to the situation today. This volume is an excellent example of a growing literature that starts to ask some pertinent and critical questions concerning how the west engages with the MENA region in the field of democracy promotion. Not all scholars will embrace the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the analyses, but the powerful message should not be ignored.

This volume examines the 'nuts and bolts' of engaging with Islamist movements. Empirical examples of the political agendas, strategies and motivations behind American and European efforts at promoting democracy are provided with a view to the situation in Afghanistan, Albania, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Iran, Iraq and Turkey. All authors seem to share similar theoretical understandings of the topic, but they do not apply the same research design. The overall message is very consistent: efforts at promoting democracy have been vague at best and counterproductive at worst. Inspiration for this book was found in the work of writers identified with agonistic pluralism and discourse theory (Laclau, Mouffe and Tully). The EU plays the role of a normative promoter of a very specific kind of democracy. Democracy is presented by the EU as a means of promoting liberal understandings of the concept: enabling free market mechanisms to flourish, support elections and installing stable governance. All chapters illustrate the selective understanding of western efforts at promoting democracy. Some of the authors provide merely 'snapshots' of much broader discussions on democracy and its external promotion from outside powers (especially the chapters on Egypt, Iran and Turkey) and do not always do justice to the complex matters they want to unravel.

Although critical in nature, the results are not unfounded, nor does the book avoid practical policy suggestions. The events in the MENA leave us with so many questions: not only how the situation will evolve, but also how European leaders will take lessons from years of failed policies. One can only hope that some of the core messages of this book find their way into broader policy circles.

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Using Europe: Territorial Party Strategies in a Multi-level System, by E. Hepburn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010, ISBN 9780719081385); xv+271pp., £65.00 hb.

While there is a rich literature on the positioning of national political parties on European issues, the specific challenges and opportunities that European integration presents for regional political parties have been less thoroughly explored. Eve Hepburn's monograph on territorial party strategies seeks to fill this gap. The author provides an in-depth account of how parties in three European