



A Long-Lasting Controversy: Western Democracy Promotion in Jordan

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Executive Summary

1) This report is a follow-up to a previous EuroMeSCo pilot study on Morocco that examines how Western democracy promotion efforts are perceived in a key Middle Eastern country, namely Jordan. Jordan is one of the countries of the region that has received the most democracy assistance in recent years. It is also considered a regional "test case" for democracy given its comparatively open society and the stated reformist intentions of its leadership.

2) The focus of the study is on whether democracy promotion is perceived as legitimate and credible in Jordan. By its very nature, democracy promotion touches sensitive institutions at the core of a country's political system and, unlike traditional development assistance, is in part granted directly to non-governmental actors. Perceptions of legitimacy and credibility are therefore crucial for the sustainability and effectiveness of the effort in the longer term.

3) The study examines the degree of legitimacy and credibility of democracy promotion policies by focusing on the perceptions of Jordanians who directly or indirectly get in contact with such efforts: parliamentarians, journalists, politicians, scholars and analysts, representatives of the judiciary and of civil society organizations and so-called quasi-NGOs. It seeks answers to questions such as: Do Jordanian actors feel that they can legitimately accept Western democracy assistance and participate in programmes designed to promote democracy? Are some forms of democracy promotion, or some sources of funding, seen as more/less legitimate or credible than others? Why are Western funds sometimes refused? How are Western criticisms of the state of democracy in Jordan perceived?

4) Jordan receives democracy assistance from the United States (through a number of institutional avenues such as USAID, MCC, HRDF, MEPI, and BMENA), the EU (through the Euro-Med processes and the EIDHR) and, to a much lesser extent, from countries such as Germany, Denmark, and Canada. A host of international NGOs are active in Jordan, both with programming and with reporting on the situation in the country.

5) This study finds that there are some similarities between Morocco and Jordan, such as a mostly positive attitude towards international election observation; a distrust of the United States as a democracy promoter and refusal, in some quarters, to take part in US government-sponsored programmes; and a greater reluctance on the part of Islamists in both countries to accept foreign funding coupled with an eagerness to engage in dialogue and confidence building.

6) In Jordan, however, the issue of democracy promotion is much more controversial. Here, the public debate around the legitimacy of Western democracy assistance is very much alive: it is highly politicised and ever-present since at least ten years. The debate which has crystallized around the issue of foreign funding of NGOs pits nationalists and followers of political Islam against more liberal segments of the political elite. Criticism of the vast majority of Jordanian NGOs that accept foreign funding can be harsh: they are "traitors"

working in accordance with foreign agendas and with the main goal of enriching themselves.

7) However, behind the sometimes fierce and uncompromising rhetoric, there is often both nuance and contradiction. Nuance, as even the fiercest critics of foreign funding welcome cooperation and exchange, and are often eager to cultivate international contacts. Nuance also because difference is often made between different funders and their respective agendas. US assistance is almost universally controversial; EU assistance, while not exempt of criticism and rejection because of political considerations, is more widely accepted.

8) Contradictions are apparent as well: there is considerable enthusiasm for international election observation, even among those very suspicious of foreign funding for NGOs. Similarly, critiques emanating from Western states and especially Western NGOs regarding shortcomings in the Jordanian democratic system are also quite well received, including by many of those who are very protective of Jordanian sovereignty. Moreover, many critics of Western democracy assistance and in particular foreign funding of NGOs still participate in training organized by such NGOs. Similarly, organisations reluctant of US funding still at times accept it.

9) The same kind of ambivalence towards the democracy promotion agenda is also discernable on the government side, which has shown reluctance in particular towards international election observation and foreign donors giving money directly to NGOs, while maintaining a generally positive rhetoric towards the agenda as a whole. In so doing, it takes a middle stance in between the overtly hostile Egyptian regime and the rather more relaxed attitude of the Moroccan leadership.

10) Given this, it is somewhat paradoxical that democracy promotion efforts of the EU and smaller European countries – the most trusted partners among democracy promoters – have a lower profile than those of the United States, which for wider political reasons continues to be widely distrusted as a democracy promoter in Jordan. In particular, a debate seems warranted amongst US agencies as to the focus of its democracy assistance, and in particular the appropriateness of continuing with high-profile politically sensitive activities such as party training and assistance to politically active NGOs when such assistance could undermine them in the medium term.

11) In order to protect NGOs against the criticism of corruption and ineffectiveness, international donors should carefully check the internal structure of recipient organisations, in particular as regards their transparency and internal democracy. They should also critically assess the impact of the work on the ground. Moreover, they should make sure that they are at all times “hands-off” when it comes to priorities and agenda-setting, activities and project design, etc. as this is crucial to ensure the credibility of Jordanian NGOs in the longer term.

12) Western states must avoid another “Palestine 2006”: the effect on the credibility of democracy promotion of Western reactions to the Hamas victory in the internationally-

supported Palestinian elections has been very damaging in Jordan. A more refined strategy vis-à-vis the so-called "Arab street" is difficult to define, but over-due.

13) Western states that support civil society and political party development in Jordan should also increase pressure on the Jordanian government to give some public space to the country's NGOs and political parties. NGO and political party credibility can only exist if they are allowed to have some impact on public policy. Tolerating, but at the same time rendering utterly toothless some of the most important forms of political organization is short-sighted and potentially dangerous as it creates a vacuum between the state and its citizenry.

Introduction

Since the end of the cold war and, in particular, the Al Qaeda attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States, Western governments have in their rhetoric stressed democratization in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region as a key policy goal.¹ The EU, the US and other Western countries have developed and extended their democracy promotion activities in the region, in particular democracy assistance to civil society, independent media, the judiciary, parliament and political parties.² Such assistance has at times been complemented with public criticism of perceived non-democratic behaviour and political conditionalities, i.e. making democratic reform a precondition for granting favours such as trade deals and development assistance.

This report – a follow-up to a previous EuroMeSCo pilot study on Morocco³ – examines how such democracy promotion efforts are perceived in a key Middle Eastern country, namely Jordan. Jordan is one of the countries of the region that has received the most democracy assistance in recent years. It is also considered a regional ‘test case’ for democracy given its comparatively open society and the stated reformist intentions of its leadership.⁴ The focus of the study is on whether, in relatively liberal Jordan, democracy promotion is perceived as legitimate and credible. By its very nature, democracy promotion touches sensitive institutions at the core of a country’s political system and, unlike traditional development assistance, is in part granted directly to non-governmental actors. Perceptions of legitimacy and credibility are therefore crucial for the sustainability and effectiveness of the effort in the longer term. If some forms of democracy promotion – or the agenda as a whole – are widely contested, democracy promoting donors will have to ensure that their actions do not tarnish the very democratization agenda that they want to promote.

The study thus sets out to examine the degree of legitimacy and credibility of democracy promotion policies in the eyes of Jordanians who directly or indirectly get in contact with such efforts – parliamentarians, journalists, politicians, scholars and analysts, representatives of the judiciary and of civil society organizations and so-called quasi-NGOs. It seeks answers to questions such as: Do Jordanian actors feel that they can legitimately accept Western democracy assistance and participate in programmes designed to promote democracy? Are some forms of democracy promotion, or some sources of funding, seen as more/less legitimate or credible than others? Is Western democracy assistance seen as fair and even-handed? Why are Western funds sometimes refused? How (if at all) does Western

¹ The author wishes to thank first and foremost all interviewees who found time in their busy schedules and who generously shared their insights. Without them, the study would not have been possible. Many warm thanks also to Hani Hourani and May Al-Taher for their invaluable help with identifying and tracking down potential interviewees for this study. In this, they were assisted by Mona Khalaf who also provided excellent interpretation of often quite technical conversations and who proved to be a very able guide in Amman: the author is very grateful to her for her professionalism and kindness. Finally, many thanks to Derek Lutterbeck for reading and commenting on earlier versions of this manuscript. The analysis in this report, as well as any errors, are solely the author’s.

² For good critical overviews of the history, actors, projects, and purported goals of democracy assistance in the region, see Carapico 2002, 2009 and Youngs 2006.

³ Khakee et al 2008.

⁴ Some recent overviews of democracy assistance to Jordan include Echagüe 2008a and Abu-Dalbouh 2005,

funding influence the activities as well as the perceptions of an actor? How are Western criticisms of the state of democracy in Jordan perceived? To what extent are there differences in perceptions between people with different ideological outlooks and professional backgrounds?

The reason for focusing on the perceptions of persons who directly or indirectly get in contact with democracy promotion efforts – rather than perceptions of political leaders or the population at large – is that such a focus can bring out a richer and more nuanced picture of how democracy promotion is perceived in the recipient country. In this study, perceptions have been gauged using primarily semi-structured interviews, complemented with references to the debate in the Jordanian media.

So far, perceptions of Western democracy promotion in Jordan have been gauged mainly using another method, namely opinion polls of the general population. A limited number of such polls have been conducted, which give a good, though partial, sense of general popular trends in perceptions. One main finding of these polls is that US democracy promotion is negatively perceived in Jordan. As noted by POMED, a US-based think-tank, although perceptions of democracy as a form of government are overwhelmingly positive in the country, “Jordanians view U.S. efforts to promote democracy with scepticism”.⁵ POMED cites a 2006 Zogby International poll, which showed that only 10 percent of Jordanians believed that “American democracy promotion efforts had a positive impact on their opinion of the United States”, as compared to 72 percent who said the impact was negative.⁶ In another POMED study, David DeBartolo paints an equally bleak picture: more than half of Jordanians polled believe that the US promotes democracy “mostly where it serves its interest”.⁷ Similarly, a 2007 Jordanian Center for Strategic Studies poll showed that the third most important obstacle to democratization in Jordan as identified by respondents was that the “USA does not want democracy in Jordan”.⁸ A number of other studies point to the association, currently made by the general public in most Arab countries including Jordan, between US democracy promotion and the war in Iraq, regime change, and violence.⁹

Opinion polls are of limited use, however, as by their very nature they cannot get to the nuances, reasoning, and choices made by key actors in the democratisation process. Moreover, they have been partial in that they have almost exclusively focused on general perceptions of US assistance, and do not give any indication of how other Western states and NGOs’ democracy promotion efforts are viewed. In a 2006 study, Dorothee Schmid and Fares Braizat, taking a less US-centric approach, found that “on the whole the EU has better reputation with the Jordanian civil society and the larger public”.¹⁰ According to the authors, “The EU’s method remains to try and be as clear as possible with every stakeholder on its

⁵ POMED 2008, p.3. For more on popular perceptions of democracy as a form of government, see Jamal and Tessler 2008 and Braizat 2007.

⁶ *Ibid*, see also DeBartolo 2008, pp.9-11.

⁷ DeBartolo 2008, Figure 12.

⁸ Braizat 2007, p.11.

⁹ Heydemann, 2007, p.1.

¹⁰ Schmid and Braizat 2006, p.14.

goals and incentives. EU's officials thus keep a good relationship with Jordanian NGOs and EU's policies are well accepted by the Jordanian public at large. Doubtless, some organizations who would otherwise reject international funding have exceptionally and readily accepted EU funding for their projects.¹¹ From their analysis, it is unclear on what evidence this conclusion is based, however: none is presented in the report.¹² It also seems at least in part to contradict the findings of another survey, undertaken by UJRC in 2008. The UJRC survey focused on the knowledge and perceptions of the EU and of Europe in Jordan generally; however, it contained one question with relevance to democracy promotion. The answers showed that elite and citizen respondents were overwhelmingly negative in their assessment of EU-Jordanian cooperation in the field of democracy and the rule of law: 44 per cent of the elite and 60.8 per cent of 'normal' citizens found the cooperation 'negative', with only 30.5 and 23 percent respectively thought it had been 'positive'. EU-Jordanian cooperation on human rights and fundamental freedoms receives somewhat higher scores, with 32.9 of elites and 49.3 percent of citizens negative and 40.3 and 28.8 respectively positive.¹³ At the same time, close to 60 per cent of citizens and 36.7 per cent of elites admitted to having very little or no knowledge of EU programmes for the promotion of human rights and democratisation in Jordan.¹⁴

The EuroMeSCo pilot study on Moroccan perceptions of Western democracy promotion showed that, in that country, there is by and large pragmatic acceptance of such policies across the political and ideological spectrum. There are some similarities between Morocco and Jordan, such as a mostly positive attitude towards international election observation; a distrust of the United States as a democracy promoter and refusal, in some quarters, to take part in US government-sponsored programmes; and a greater reluctance on the part of Islamists in both countries to accept foreign funding coupled with an eagerness to engage in dialogue and confidence building.

In Jordan, however, the issue of democracy promotion is much more controversial. Here, the public debate around the legitimacy of Western democracy promotion is very much alive: it is highly politicised and ever-present since at least ten years. The debate which has crystallized around the issue of foreign funding of NGOs pits nationalists and followers of political Islam against more liberal segments of the political elite. Criticism of the vast majority of Jordanian NGOs that accept foreign funding can be harsh: they are 'traitors' working in accordance with foreign agendas and with the main goal of enriching themselves. However, behind the sometimes fierce and uncompromising rhetoric, there is often both nuance and contradiction. Nuance, as even the fiercest critics of foreign funding welcome cooperation and exchange, and are often eager to cultivate international contacts. Nuance also because difference is often made between different funders and their respective

¹¹ Ibid, p. 16.

¹² Basma Bint Al-Talal (better known in Jordan as Princess Basma) gives a brief but informative overview of the contentious issue of foreign funding to NGOs in her 2004 monograph on donors and NGOs in Jordan (Bint Al Talal 2004): the information is mainly from the late 1990s.

¹³ Hourani and Al-Taher 2008, p.24 and Table 19.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.15 and Table 11.

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Contradictions are apparent as well: there is considerable enthusiasm for international election observation, even among those very suspicious of foreign funding for NGOs. Similarly, critiques emanating from Western states and especially Western NGOs regarding lacunas in the Jordanian democratic system are also quite well received, including by many of those who are very protective of Jordanian sovereignty. Moreover, many critics of Western democracy assistance and in particular foreign funding of NGOs still participate in training organized by such NGOs. Similarly, organisations reluctant of US funding still at times accept it. The same kind of ambivalence towards the democracy promotion agenda is discernable on the government side, which has shown reluctance in particular towards international election observation and foreign donors giving money directly to NGOs, while maintaining a generally positive rhetoric towards the agenda as a whole. In so doing, it takes a middle stance in between the overtly hostile Egyptian regime and the rather more relaxed attitude of the Moroccan leadership.

This report begins with a survey of the democracy promoting activities of Western governments and organisations in Jordan. This survey provides the backdrop to the analysis of Jordanian perceptions of Western democracy promotion found in section 2. In section 3, the Jordanian case is briefly contrasted to that of Morocco. In the conclusion, a series of concrete policy recommendations are spelled out.

1) Western democracy promotion activities in Jordan

1.1 Ambivalent backing of an ambivalent reformer

For a fleeting moment after the end of the Cold War, it appeared that Jordan might be the first Arab Middle Eastern country to democratize. Martial law, in force since 1957, was lifted; a new, relatively liberal media law was enacted; and elections were held for the first time in several decades. The moment passed, however, and in the aftermath of the signature of the peace treaty with Israel in 1994, the late King Hussein clamped down on mounting internal dissent (particularly strong given that somewhere between 40 and 60 per cent of the Jordanian population is of Palestinian descent). Since then, liberal openings and periods of increased restrictions have succeeded one another, with a tendency towards decreasing political freedoms.¹⁵

Today, King Abdullah II holds broad executive powers, including the power to dissolve the bicameral National Assembly (which he did in 2001 and then reinstated it again in 2003; in the meantime, he ruled by decree). He appoints the prime minister and the cabinet, the upper house of the National Assembly, the regional governors of the 12 governorates, and half of the municipal council members in Amman (the lower house of the National Assembly and other municipal council members are elected through universal adult suffrage). The king also serves as head of the judiciary. Since the foundation of Jordan as an independent state in 1946, the authority of the monarchy in Jordan is beyond question, it is the line that cannot be crossed in Jordanian politics. According to the constitution, the king is immune from any liability and responsibility.¹⁶

Political freedoms, in particular freedom of expression and assembly, are restricted, and there are persistent reports of human rights violations including torture in judicial cases dealt with by the State Security Court.¹⁷ Elections have at times been postponed, and have not been considered fair. No international electoral observation was accepted in the latest November 2007 parliamentary elections, although domestic election observation was permitted for the first time. Through the controversial 'one man one vote' electoral system,¹⁸ the King's traditional support base among East Bank Jordanians is favoured over other groups such as Jordanians of Palestinian origin.¹⁹

All of this notwithstanding, the country is one of the most important targets of democracy promotion in the region. A main reason is that Jordan is still one of the more liberal states in

¹⁵ For good overviews of recent political developments in Jordan, see Echagüe (2008b), POMED (2008), and Susser (2008).

¹⁶ Cited in POMED 2008, p.3.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch 2008.

¹⁸ This system entails voting for one single candidate rather than a list of candidates (party list). It weakens parties as compared to independent candidates with strong personal or tribal connections.

¹⁹ Democracy Reporting International and Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center 2007; al-Rantawi 2007; European Commission 2008, p.2.

the Middle East context. Political parties are permitted and NGOs enjoy comparatively wide margins of operation. Freedom of speech, however restricted, is still wider than elsewhere in the region, and fear of the authorities is less wide-spread.²⁰ The political institutions are considered reasonably strong and the political opposition is seen as apt at forming alliances across ideological boundaries.²¹ Although facing regular interference and harassment, an opposition press still exists.

Since its creation, Jordan has been a *frontier state* banking on its strategic importance in a volatile region to gain access to Western funds and funds from the oil-rich Arab neighbours alike.²² Currently, approximately 4 per cent of gross national income (GNI) comes from foreign aid.²³ Aid dependency has not necessarily meant pliability to Western donor agendas, however, nor has Western economic assistance to Jordan necessarily combined well with its democracy promotion efforts.

Most analysts agree that Western donors have not primarily been interested in democratisation in Jordan. A case in point is the years after the fall of communism, when Western interest in the country faltered: King Hussein's attempts to re-attract foreign aid by democratizing after 1989 were only moderately successful. However, its unilateral peace deal with Israel in 1994 had a huge impact, in particular on US funding. As one analyst puts it: 'peace with Israel succeeded where democracy had failed to restore the flow of Western funds to Jordan.'²⁴ Given that this agreement 'was not preceded by a national dialogue in Jordan that prepared public opinion for this major step',²⁵ however, it arguably made democratisation more difficult, by creating sharper divisions within Jordanian society.

Keen observers of Jordan agree that foreign aid has directly helped prop up authoritarian rule. Foreign aid enables the government to maintain patronage politics, on which the King's power and authority is based. This is also why reform, political as well as economic, has been slow and selective in Jordan: liberalization has been pursued only to the extent necessary to attract and retain foreign aid flows and thus *maintain* patronage politics, and in such a manner as to reinforce patronage networks.²⁶ Ellen Lust-Okar puts it succinctly: 'Western support, which is primarily supplied for security reasons, has a deleterious effect on the democratization process. As long as Jordan pursues a foreign policy friendly to American interests and a low profile, the monarchy can depend on the politics of patronage, limited liberalization, and repression to keep the home-front quiet.'²⁷ This special donor-recipient relationship, of course, makes democracy promotion in Jordan an enterprise fraught with tensions and contradictions.

²⁰ It must be noted, however, that in a recent opinion poll three quarters of respondents said that they were afraid of publicly criticizing the government (Braizat 2007, p.10)

²¹ Lust-Okar 2005.

²² For a brief history of Jordan's dependence on external funding, see El-Said 2002.

²³ OECD-DAC (2008).

²⁴ Kassay 2002, p.55.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ See El-Said 2002, Wils 2004.

²⁷ Lust-Okar 2005.

Out of the top-ten donors to Jordan as defined by the OECD-DAC, half provide no democracy or governance assistance at all.²⁸ The two main providers of democracy assistance are the US and the EU, with Western states such as Canada, Denmark, and Germany also active in the area. Programmes have focussed mainly on the judicial sector, elections and parliamentary strengthening, media and civil society, and local level democracy. Policies on Jordan are thus quite well in line with democracy promotion activities elsewhere in the region.²⁹ Moreover, Western NGOs have been quite present in Jordan, both with programmes and commentary on political developments. The respect for democratic principles is also stressed in a number of agreements and initiatives between Jordan and Western states. The remainder of this section surveys Western democracy promotion policies towards Jordan in greater detail.³⁰

1.2 The United States

Ever since Jordan signed the peace deal with Israel in 1994, the United States has been the largest donor to Jordan, providing some USD 255 million in 2007 through USAID. Of these, 14 million were dedicated to governance issues.³¹ In programme documentation, democratization figures as arguably the most prominent stated goal of USAID for 2007-2011.³² The aim is ambitious: according to the USAID Strategic Statement on Jordan at the end of the strategy period in 2011, Jordan will have in place the legal and regulatory foundation, institutions and practices of an increasingly democratic society.³³

USAID projects in the area of governance and democratisation have recently included: support for judicial reform (targeting corruption, court automation, improved case management, human resource capacity building, promoting alternative dispute resolution, improving legal education, and facilitating the creation and implementation of codes of conduct for members of the judiciary); legislative strengthening (creation of a legislative research department, strengthening parliamentary committees and parliamentary capacity to monitor public expenditures); support for media liberalization (training of journalists, fostering independent local media, legislative reform, strengthening of media associations and media businesses); gender equality (support for NGOs working on gender issues,

²⁸ OECD 2009. Thus top-donors such as UNWRA centres on relief to Palestinian refugees; Japan on water supply, Arab countries (lumped together in OECD statistics) provide funding for a range of activities, but not democratisation, Israel focuses on agriculture, education and healthcare, and Italy on water supply, SME development, and health.

²⁹ See Carapico 2009.

³⁰ UN efforts fall outside the scope of this report, since they cannot be labelled 'Western'. The main such effort is the UNDP's Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR). This regional programme is in Jordan complemented by a national UNDP governance programme and by smaller projects undertaken by other UN agencies such as UNIFEM.

³¹ <http://jordan.usaid.gov/budget.cfm> The Administration's FY2009 request to Congress is USD 535.4 million for U.S. aid to Jordan. This includes USD 263.5 in economic aid and USD 235 million in military assistance (Sharp 2008).

³² For example, strengthened democratic reforms figures as the first strategic objective for 2007-2011 development assistance (USAID 2006, p.3)

³³ USAID 2006, p.1; see also pp. 10-11 and Annexe III.

including access to services and women's rights); support for political parties and municipal and parliamentary elections (assisting municipal council candidates in the development of electoral platforms, engaging political parties to improve grassroots outreach, assisting parties in developing policies and platforms).³⁴

Apart from USAID, there is an intricate web of other US agencies engaged in democracy promotion in Jordan. The Human Rights and Democracy Initiative (HRDF) of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour (DRL) is the second longstanding vector of US democracy promotion. Its projects are mainly regional, and have encompassed networking of democracy activists, women's advocacy groups, trade unions and media and journalism.³⁵

Jordan has also received so-called threshold funding from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and is eligible for full MCC Compact assistance. The threshold funds are managed by USAID and a large part has been devoted to improving governance and citizens' participation at the local government level.³⁶ Given Jordan's rather limited political reforms, the MCC decision to grant access to full Compact assistance has been controversial, as, in principle, MCC decisions should take into account objectively defined criteria on progress in democratization.³⁷

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, additional instruments targeting the MENA region were created. The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) has invested approximately \$40 million on projects in Jordan since 2002, of which an important part focuses on governance and democracy. Governance projects have mostly been regional, and have ranged from projects that strive to enhance civil society and women's participation in democratic reform to civic education programmes for school children, legal reform programmes and support for elections.³⁸

Key implementing agencies for both USAID and MEPI in Jordan are: the National Democratic Institute (NDI), active in the areas of domestic election monitoring, women's political participation, parliament, and political parties;³⁹ the International Republican Institute (IRI) active in reinforcing local government, strengthening political parties, and encouraging political opinion polling; and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) which is responsible mainly for grant-making on behalf of HRDF.

BMENA is the second process created by the Bush administration after the 9/11 attacks.⁴⁰ The itinerant BMENA Forum for the Future was held in Jordan in 2006, and the BMENA Foundation for the Future is based in Amman since 2008. It has funded a handful of NGO

³⁴ <http://jordan.usaid.gov/projects.cfm?inSector=19>, see also USAID 2006, pp.11-12.

³⁵ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/p/c12440.htm>

³⁶ <http://www.mcc.gov/countries/jordan/index.php>

³⁷ Sharp 2008, p.20.

³⁸ <http://mepi.state.gov/c10155.htm>

³⁹ <http://www.ndi.org/content/jordan>

⁴⁰ For a succinct overview of the process, see Carpenter 2008.

projects in Jordan, focussing on civic education, the rule of law, and gender discrimination in Jordanian legislation.⁴¹

While the US has been quite willing to engage with moderate Islamists in some of its other key allies in the region such as Morocco and Turkey, this has been much less the case in Jordan, presumably because of the Jordanian Islamic Action Front's close ties to Hamas, its staunch opposition to Jordan's peace treaty with Israel, and its comparatively conservative profile. According to a Congressional Research Service report, "[w]hile some IAF members, particularly women, may participate in U.S.-sponsored workshops, there is no concerted effort among U.S. diplomats in Amman to engage the IAF, though occasional dialogue may take place."⁴² Instead, the National Democratic Institute and the International Republic Institute have worked closely with al-Wasat, a minor break-away "Islamic centrist" party, on platform development and message training.⁴³

The US Embassy has reportedly at times used its influence to promote political liberalisation, such as for example in the case of the controversial new NGO law. It does so unofficially, however. Because it is perceived as influential, it can be an important target of lobbying also as concerns internal Jordanian matters.⁴⁴

1.3 The European Union

Over the last decade and a half, the European Union has attempted to promote democracy in the MENA region through various mechanisms such as: the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP or Barcelona Process) and the concomitant bilateral association agreements; the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) implemented through action plans; financial instruments including the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) as well as the European Instrument on Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR); and, most recently, the Union for the Mediterranean launched in July 2008. The EU has stressed the importance it attaches to democracy in its southern neighbourhood in a variety of other contexts as well.⁴⁵

Following EMP practice, the EU-Jordanian Association Agreement of 2002 focuses primarily on economic cooperation, with democracy and human rights mentioned in a common article 2 and in the context of EU-Jordanian political dialogue.⁴⁶ The EU/Jordanian Action Plan of 2004 has a stronger governance component. Stated key priorities include taking a national dialogue on democracy forward, continuing to develop an independent and

⁴¹ http://www.foundationforfuture.org/index.php?q=en/node/121/menu_id=144

⁴² Sharp 2006, p.27.

⁴³ POMED 2008, p.2, Yacoubian 2007, p.8-10.

⁴⁴ Interview, Jordanian analyst, 14 March 2009.

⁴⁵ For a more thorough description of these various mechanisms, see Khakee 2008, pp.10-11.

⁴⁶ Article 2 reads as follows: "Relations between the Parties, as well as all the provisions of the Agreement itself, shall be based on respect of democratic principles and fundamental human rights as set out in the universal declaration on human rights, which guides their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element of this Agreement."

impartial judiciary, reinforcing administrative and judiciary capacity, and developing the freedom of the media and freedom of expression.⁴⁷ Actions include for example establishing a political dialogue between the European and Jordanian parliaments; encouraging reform of the political parties law and the elections law; strengthening the Higher Media Council, developing training and institutions for media professionals and promoting the role of the private sector in the media, reforming the legislation on associations, strengthening the capacity and effectiveness of the National Commission for Human Rights, and establishing a dialogue for co-operation on human rights and democratisation in the framework of the Association Committee.⁴⁸

The goals are reiterated in the ENPI Strategy Paper for 2007-2013 and the National Indicative Programme (NIP) for 2007-2010, the first strategic objective of which is to support Jordan's political reform. The NIP includes an additional element to political reform: the fight against extremist interpretations of Islam and the promotion of the so-called Amman Message on Islam to Muslims and the world. Expected results include: better protection and promotion of human rights, in particular women's rights; a more independent judiciary; the creation of civil society platforms or networks; increased dialogue between civil society, government and parliamentarians; a more independent media and better reporting; and a reduction of religious extremism in Jordan.⁴⁹ For 2007-2010, EUR 17 million (or 6.5 per cent of the total budget) is devoted to political reform.⁵⁰

To this should be added funding for an ambitious agenda of institution building (on which it is difficult to put a precise figure as institution building is in the budget lumped together with support for financial stability and regulatory approximation). With its institution building assistance, the EU expects to achieve better results orientation, accountability, and transparency in Jordanian ministries, the efficient management of human resources in the public sector, and the introduction of merit-based criteria for hiring and promotion; the definition of service delivery standards; and streamlined government structures and procedures.⁵¹ It has often been said that much of EU democracy assistance is centred on relatively 'apolitical' and 'less sensitive' issues such as institutional and administrative reform. The political nature of such reforms should not be underestimated, however. Trimming and reducing nepotism in the public sector in Jordan touches the heart of its system of governance, traditionally based on patronage. This is why, despite agreements with the WB and the IMF to the contrary, advances in this domain were very slow in the 1990s.⁵² As noted in recent EU assessments, this pattern has remained a constant until this day, EU-Jordanian agreements notwithstanding.⁵³

⁴⁷ European Union/Jordan 2005, p. 2.

⁴⁸ European Union/Jordan 2005.

⁴⁹ European Union/Jordan 2007, p.26.

⁵⁰ European Union/Jordan 2007, pp. 26, 37.

⁵¹ European Union/Jordan 2007, p.34.

⁵² El-Said 2002, p.263.

⁵³ European Commission 2008, p.2.

The EIDHR is the specialized EU fund for governance and human rights-related projects in developing countries. It is institutionally separate from the EMP and the ENP and mainly targets civil society. Over the last years, funding for Jordanian NGOs have amounted to less than EUR 1 million yearly, with support increasing incrementally from a very low base.⁵⁴ Support has centred on NGOs working on voter education, legal aid for journalists, children/youth and democracy, torture, women's rights and participation as well as domestic violence.⁵⁵

1.4 Other bi-lateral democracy assistance

Although the US is by far the most important bilateral donor in Jordan, including in the area of governance, other Western states are also active. The main focus of **German** development assistance is on water supply, but the German development agency GTZ is also running a programme on improved budget planning and target-oriented management.⁵⁶ The promotion of democracy and human rights is however for the most part left to the German political foundations, most of which are active in Jordan. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES, linked to the German social democratic party) works on Jordanian media (including media laws), parliament, trade unions, voters' education, and gender at local government level and within trade unions.⁵⁷ The Friedrich Naumann Foundation (associated with the German Free Democratic Party, FDP) has supported the process of establishing the Free Thought Forum (FTF) which holds debates on democracy-related issues. It also supports efforts to improve the environment for small and medium sized enterprises through the support for lobbying for institutional reform.⁵⁸ The Konrad Adenauer Foundation has its regional office in Amman, and mainly works through meetings, workshops and research, including with a number of Jordanian partner organisations.⁵⁹ Heinrich Böll does not have a specific programme on Jordan, but includes the country in various regional projects centering on democratic participation/civil society and gender and democracy.⁶⁰

Already two years prior to the *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons controversy, **Denmark** launched a Partnership for Progress and Reform in the wider Middle East. Within this framework, the bilateral Danish-Jordanian programme focuses on gender and children's rights, the institution of an ombudsman system in Jordan, media, decentralization, and human rights.⁶¹ A large share of the funding is distributed to/through Danish NGOs such as the Danish Association for International Co-operation, International Media Support,

⁵⁴ Calculated from EIDHR 2007, pp.329-334.

⁵⁵ EIDHR 2007, pp.329-334.

⁵⁶ <http://www.gtz.de/en/weltweit/maghreb-naher-osten/jordanien/9509.htm>

⁵⁷ <http://www.fes-jordan.com/web/index.php?q=jordan>

⁵⁸ http://www.fnst-amman.org/english/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=26&Itemid=39

⁵⁹ <http://www.kas.de/proj/home/home/76/2/index.html>

⁶⁰ <http://www.boell-meo.org/> The two remaining foundations are the Hanns Seidel Foundation and The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. The former works mainly on adults' education and the latter started its regional activities including Jordan, in 2008 only.

⁶¹ <http://www.amman.um.dk/en/menu/Partnership+Programme/ProjectsInJordan/>

KVINFO (Danish Centre for Information on Women and Gender), Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims and the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

In Jordan, **Canada** focuses mainly on education, but also has some governance-related programming on gender (worth CAD 4.6 million over five years) and small local projects with a focus on governance, human rights, and democracy (the latter through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives/Canadian Fund for Dialogue and Development managed by the Canadian Embassy in Amman).⁶² Moreover, the quasi-governmental Rights & Democracy (International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development) works on youth participation and encouraging reform of the Jordanian NGO law.⁶³

Other countries, such as the **Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland** and the **United Kingdom** have either regional programmes on governance, democracy and human rights that encompass Jordan or smaller embassy-managed funds that cover similar issues. The Netherlands, for instance, finances regional training for Arab journalists, activities aimed at improving the legal protection of journalists and the promotion of press freedom.

1.5 International NGOs and non-state initiatives

In the area of governance and democratisation, the Ford Foundation is the most long-standing private Western grant-making institution in the region. Although focussing on Egypt and the Palestinian territories mainly, it also provides funding to a number of Jordanian actors, mainly universities, think tanks and NGOs. The Open Society Institute has started grant making in the region, but has yet to extend its activities in Jordan in a significant way.

Many international NGOs specializing in a wide variety of issues, from budget transparency via women's rights and participation to the prevention of torture and media training, have established active partnerships with Jordanian organisations. Several international NGOs such as International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), Amnesty International, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and, in particular, Human Rights Watch, also cover Jordan, focusing inter alia on issues at the heart of a democratization agenda, such as the freedom of assembly and organisation and the right to free speech. International NGO reports on such issues have at times had wide echo within Jordan.

⁶² <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/jordan>

⁶³ http://www.ichrdd.ca/site/what_we_do/index.php?id=1897&subsection=where_we_work&subsubsection=country_documents&lang=en

2) Jordanian perceptions of Western democracy promotion

2.1 Introduction

How, then, are the various Western democracy promoting programmes, projects, and initiatives outlined in Section 1 perceived in Jordan? Here, this issue is examined in detail. This section starts by examining the main traits and evolution of the debate around foreign funding of NGOs, which has been the most controversial aspect of Western democracy promotion in Jordan to date. It then moves on to analyse the sometimes ambivalent stance of the Jordanian government vis-à-vis democracy promotion. Perceptions pertaining specifically to US and European democracy promotion respectively are treated under the subsequent heading. The final three sections of the chapter focus on the effects of the 2006 Palestinian elections on perceptions of Western democracy promotion, Jordanian perceptions of Western criticism of the state of democracy in the country, and attitudes towards international election observation.

This report centres on the perceptions of people who are directly or indirectly targeted by democracy promotion efforts and who often, through their activities, help translate them into actions on the ground. It is primarily based on a wide range of in-depth interviews⁶⁴ with key representatives of the parliament, civil society organizations and organizations sponsored by the state, political parties, the judiciary, media, and the academic world, complemented by a range of other sources such as media and NGO reports and academic work.

2.2 The long-standing foreign funding debate

In Jordan, the most contentious issue within the democracy promotion agenda has been Western funding of Jordanian NGOs. The debate regarding foreign funding of NGOs has a relatively long history in the country, starting in the 1990s when the government liberalized NGO access to foreign funds.⁶⁵ It was especially heated in the late 1990s, when a spate of controversies erupted. Among interviewees for this report, there was disagreement as to whether the debate has since become less fierce: some considered the issue as controversial as ever, while others found that things have calmed down. Whatever the development over time, there are still articles on foreign funding appearing in the press on a regular basis: the debate is thus still well and live. It is, at least in part, rooted in the legacy of the culture of national liberation that prevailed in the 1950s and 1960s [which] renders close association with Western institutions, whether governmental or non-governmental, susceptible to accusation of collaboration and treason.⁶⁶ Put crudely, the debate pits nationalists and

⁶⁴ Interviews were made by the author unless otherwise stated.

⁶⁵ Bint Al-Talal 2004, p.89.

⁶⁶ Kassay 2002, pp. 60-1.

followers of political Islam against more liberal-leaning actors. In practical terms, this means that the Jordanian professional organisations, a number of politicians and a small minority of NGOs oppose the majority of domestic NGOs and liberal politicians, with the media divided on the issue.

The professional organisations which have a special legal status in Jordan are financially independent as membership is compulsory in order to practice professions such as journalism, engineering, the bar, etc. With a large and steady income from membership fees and other domestic sources, they do not need any additional funding for their activities. They are also the most long-standing and, arguably, the most effective actors of civil society in Jordan. Since several years, the Muslim Brotherhood is strong within the most important of these associations, such as the bar and engineers' association. In contrast, many Jordanian NGOs, unable to raise funds domestically, rely heavily on foreign funding for their survival.⁶⁷

One of the first and largest controversies occurred a decade ago when the Jordan Press Association (JPA) expelled its own secretary general, Nidal Mansour, at the time also the editor of the weekly *Al-Hadath*. The reason was Mansour's founding of the Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ). According to JPA bylaws, accepting foreign funding is out-ruled, as is not working full-time as a journalist (e.g. by running an NGO part-time). The Ministry of Information then went on to ban *Al-Hadath*, allowing the weekly to resume publishing only after Mansour agreed to have his name as editor removed.⁶⁸ In early 2001, the High Court of Justice upheld the JPA's lifetime ban on Mansour to practice journalism.⁶⁹ Following this precedent, another journalist voluntarily quit the Press Association before founding her own NGO dealing with women and the media in the Middle East.⁷⁰

In mid-2000, Saleh Armuti, then president of the Bar Association, wrote to the prime minister asking the government to 'close down all centres and institutions that work in the field of human rights and women's rights and that receive financing from foreign embassies and agencies... and that conduct activities and seminars devoted to downgrade the respect for Jordan'. According to the letter, these organisations engaged in intelligence gathering that posed a threat to national security which 'falls under the heading of high treason'.⁷¹ The main target was Asma Khader, who has highlighted the problem of so-called honour crimes in Jordan.⁷² In another context, Armuti claimed that 'the donors have dubious ties with

⁶⁷ Trade unions, whose membership is, in contrast to the professional organisations, drawn from poorer segments of the population, seem somewhat immune from the whole debate on foreign funding, although this would need confirmation through additional research. 'The government or others do not use the foreign funding/foreign connections argument with us. They would not dare doing so because we are strong with good relations. We know that the international associations will stand by us. Moreover, we are open about whom we work with' according to the head of the Textile Workers Union (interview, Fathalla Omrani, President, Textile Trade Union, 16 March 2009).

⁶⁸ Committee to Protect Journalists 2001, *Bint Al-Talal* 2004, p.90.

⁶⁹ Committee to Protect Journalists 2002.

⁷⁰ Interview, Mahasen Al-Emam, President, Arab Women Media Center, 17 March 2009.

⁷¹ Cited in Kassay 2002, p.59.

⁷² *Ibid.*

Zionism and the CIA" as "they give hundreds of thousands of dollars to promote the normalization of relations between the Arabs and the Jews."⁷³ Armuti (outside Jordan perhaps most well-known for being on Saddam Hussein's defence team) has been one of the most adamant critics of foreign funding. In 2000 he reportedly went so far as to send a letter congratulating Hosni Mubarak for having jailed Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Director of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies and charged with illicitly receiving foreign funding.⁷⁴ However, Armuti, who presided over the Bar association during a period when the US provided extensive assistance to the Jordanian government for judicial reform, has not made democracy assistance aiming the judiciary a political issue. He thus stated in an interview that "funding for the government is different than that for NGOs and individuals, it's not at all unacceptable, as long as it is not conditioned."⁷⁵

Opposition to foreign funding of NGOs on the part of professional organisations continues until this day. "We are against foreign funding for NGOs, because foreign funding means taking the positions of donors. The governments of the Middle East are prime examples of this phenomenon of dependency; it is the same with NGOs", according to the vice-president of the Jordanian Engineers Association, one of the most important professional associations in Jordan. He also asserted that "it would not be a loss to Jordan if all Jordanian organisations accepting foreign funding would disappear." However, the criticism does not extend to Arab funding: it is "absolutely" more acceptable to take money from other Arab governments and private citizens than from Western donors. Nevertheless, behind a seemingly unconditional rhetoric, there is some nuance: "There are differences in degree: working with civil society organisations in the West is fine; the Jordanian Engineers Association has many ties with such organisations."⁷⁶ In 2008, Armuti again stated that "The successive governments have not done their duty of controlling [NGOs] because of pressure of outside forces" and that democracy assistance aims to "spread chaos in our Arab and Islamic countries and incite sectarianism through missionary organizations... with the pretext of democracy and religious and political freedom". He concluded with renewed calls for "the closure of these centres and investigations of foreign finance and foreign embassies in order to prevent interference in the affairs of the country."⁷⁷

The professional associations are not alone in their critique of foreign funding. Opposition has also come from the parliament and at times from the government. Such opposition is equally long-standing. For instance in the beginning of the decade, Ghazi Obeidat, then chairman of the Lower House Public Freedoms and Citizens' Rights Committee, wanted the government to investigate NGOs receiving foreign funding, as "it is against the law for Jordanian organisations to have links to foreign parties and receive funds from them because nobody gives you anything without wanting something in return."⁷⁸ With the passing of the recent new NGO law, such criticism was reiterated. In 2008, the Minister of Interior Eid Al-

⁷³ Cited in Mekki, 2000.

⁷⁴ Interview, Hussein Abu-Rumman, *Sijell* Weekly 12 March 2009.

⁷⁵ Interview by Mona Khalaf with Saleh Armuti, ex-President of the Jordanian Bar Association 27 April 2008.

⁷⁶ Interview, Abdullah Obeidat, Vice-President, Jordanian Engineers Association 16 March 2009.

⁷⁷ Cited in Ghwary 2008, translation from Arabic by Mona Khalaf and Google translate.

⁷⁸ Cited in Wiktorowicz 2002, p.123.

Fayez affirmed that certain NGOs in Jordan receiving foreign funds, work in directions contrary to their stated objectives, and spend money in unauthorised way.⁷⁹

Although stemming from the same Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Action Front (IAF) has recently taken a more cautious and diplomatic stance than the main professional organisations. We are not strict on not accepting foreign funding because that would close the door to mutual understanding and interaction. However, funding should not be directed against our community and values according to the IAF Deputy Secretary General Rohile Gharaibeh.⁸⁰ According to the Secretary General Zaki Bani Ersheid, the IAF differentiates between funding from the UN and funding from other international sources, of which only the former is accepted.⁸¹ Both stress that they do not mind participation in training and workshops on a case by case basis. In 2000, the party's then-Secretary General Abdel Latif Arabiyat used a fiercer rhetoric, stressing that the IAF is "totally opposed to foreign donations, which pave the way for interference in the country's affairs".⁸²

The media is divided on the topic of foreign funding, reflecting the ideological stance of the different newspapers. For some journalists, it is a non-issue: the foreign funding argument is just a way to criticize others, it is not that the critics think that there really is a problem.⁸³ Others take a quite different stance: foreign funding for NGOs is a way of covering the bad actions undertaken vis-à-vis Iraq and Palestine/Israel. It also disseminates fake ideas and issues that Westerners care for. For example, as concerns women's rights, the approach is Western, not Jordanian.⁸⁴ The *Al-Arab Al-Youm* newspaper has profiled itself as one of the more vocal on NGO funding. In a typical article, one of its journalists writes that some centres are organising events that call for normalisation of relations with Israel. Others are legitimising the American invasion to Iraq in 2003... NGOs have become an opponent to the state and above the law.⁸⁵ Most journalists, even many of those critical of foreign funding of NGOs, nevertheless participate in foreign-funded training organized by NGOs (including training organized by the CDFJ, the controversy surrounding its founding notwithstanding) and no newspaper has taken a stance against participation in foreign-funded training.

In addition to charges of treason or following foreign agendas, there is a set of critiques that focuses on the lack of control mechanisms and a well-defined and useful purpose of foreign funding, both of which breed corruption and ineffectiveness. According to this line of criticism, money is given to activities, such as conferences and workshops, which have no effect on the ground. Moreover, even such activities are not conducted correctly, with money siphoned off into private pockets. The critique is sometimes, it seems, simply a different way of criticizing NGOs for taking foreign funding and is then often combined with charges of treason and the pursuit of foreign political agendas, as in this succinct

⁷⁹ Cited in Arab News website: <http://3rbnews.net/content/view/1378/194/> translation from Arabic by Mona Khalaf.

⁸⁰ Interview, Rohile Gharaibeh, Deputy Secretary General, Islamic Action Front, 16 March 2009.

⁸¹ Interview, Zaki Bani Ersheid, Secretary General, Islamic Action Front Party, 17 March 2009.

⁸² Cited in Mekki 2000.

⁸³ Interview, Hussein Abu-Rumman, *Sijell* Weekly 12 March 2009.

⁸⁴ Interview, Faraj Shalhoub, Managing Editor, *Assabeel* 15 March 2009.

⁸⁵ Kheitan 2007, translation from Arabic by Mona Khalaf.

example from a 2007 article in the *al-Ghad* newspaper: some NGOs gain a good profit from deforming facts.⁸⁶

The critique, however, is also heard from NGOs and others with an otherwise more positive attitude towards foreign funding. 'Some NGOs abuse foreign funding and take the money for themselves. The impact of projects is entirely missing. This kind of abuse and corruption make NGOs weak in front of criticism from those opposed to Western funding' stressed the head of one NGO working on democracy.⁸⁷ Outside the NGO world, opinions are similar. 'So many NGOs get one-off funding. They undermine the whole effort and give a bad name to all NGOs. It is important that NGOs in Jordan be consolidated' according to one analyst.⁸⁸ Another keen observer of political life in Jordan agrees: 'foreign financing has become a serious cash cow and in many cases there is no genuine commitment for the actual projects.'⁸⁹ Critique also comes from leading politicians. Thus, the Minister of Social Development stressed that 'good governance within NGOs is very uneven, and there are signs of corruption.'⁹⁰ 'Many NGOs do good work, but sometimes there is corruption and abuse, such as double funding' according to a parliamentarian of the National Brotherhood block.⁹¹ It is not only the NGO world that is targeted by such criticism. One interviewee was also severely critical of the so-called royal NGOs: 'A large part of foreign funding goes to prominent persons, including royalty, in Jordan but no one knows how all that money is spent.'⁹²

The issue of controls comes up time and again: 'Transparency, goal-orientation, and monitoring are essential in funding; foreign funding must not become a business', according to one party leader.⁹³ 'Sometimes donors do not follow up and check how funding is used' according to a representative of the National Centre for Human Rights.⁹⁴ An NGO representative agreed: 'Donors must make sure to integrate evaluations and controls into their activities.'⁹⁵

⁸⁶ Al-Safadi 2007, translation from Arabic by Mona Khalaf. Similar opinions were expressed by a number of interviewees sceptical of foreign funding. Thus, according to a journalist from *Arab al Yawm*, a newspaper mostly critical of foreign funding, 'there is a lot of corruption in foreign funding, including the forging of invoices and overcharging with excess funds shared between private persons working for the relevant agencies' (interview, Fahed Al-Khitani, Journalist, Arab al Yawm 16 March 2009). Similarly, according to an NGO representative opposed to foreign funding, 'One human rights organisation bought a house with money from foreign donors' (interview, Hani Dahleh, President, Arab Organization for Human Rights in Jordan, 17 March 2009).

⁸⁷ Interview, Jamil Nimri, Head, Jordanian Commission for Democratic Culture, 14 March 2009. He was also critical of NGOs signing up as non-profit companies as 'it makes control of the internal structure of the organisation more difficult'.

⁸⁸ Telephone interview, Jordanian analyst, 26 March 2009.

⁸⁹ Interview, Ali Kassay, CEO, ACE House Communication Consulting Firm and political analyst, 29 April 2009.

⁹⁰ Interview, Hala Lattouf, Minister of Social Development, 18 March 2009.

⁹¹ Interview, Abdel Rahim Boucai, Member of Parliament, 18 March 2009.

⁹² Interview, Jordanian observer March 2009.

⁹³ Interview, Fayez Al-Rabei, Secretary General, Al Wasat 15 March 2009

⁹⁴ Interview, Ali Al-Dabbas, General Commissioner Assistant and Head of Complaints and Legal Services Unit, National Centre for Human Rights, 16 March 2009.

⁹⁵ Interview, Jamil Nimri, Head, Jordanian Commission for Democratic Culture, 14 March 2009.

NGOs have not remained silent in this debate concerning the legitimacy of their funding base. 'This is a political issue: Islamists and ultra-nationalists will never think it is a good thing to accept foreign funding. They demonize the West. But Islamists receive foreign funding from Saudi Arabia, the International Islamic Conference etc. and have done so for years. Liberals should have the same right to receive foreign funds' according to the head of an NGO working on democracy.⁹⁶ Many also point to the inconsistency of critics: 'people went to meetings financed by USAID even during the war [in Iraq]... at times, people have been bashing against foreign funding at events organized with the help of USAID.'⁹⁷

Others see the foreign funding debate as part and parcel of a campaign of state intimidation against those that seek democratic change. According to the head of the CDFJ 'they are targeting us not because of foreign funding but because of our work and because of the break-up of the official monopoly on information; spying and foreign funding is just one of several accusations that also include corruption, working with Israel etc. The intelligence services are behind it: every year in May after the publication of our annual report, there is a campaign against us. It is a kind of schizophrenia, we receive funding from the ministries and sometimes even from the police, we have the patronage of the royal palace, and then there is a campaign against us.'⁹⁸

Yet others see the critique as a consequence of misconceptions: 'The professional associations try to consider themselves as NGOs, although they are not voluntary and do not execute generally beneficial projects, but only projects for the benefit of their members... We try to work with them on specific issues such as legal reform, and try to explain to them that not all foreign funding is the same. During the war in Gaza, we could say 'look, these are our NGO donors, they are protesting with us'.⁹⁹ The issue of corruption is also perceived as exaggerated. According to a representative of a women's organisation, 'there have been problems in some cases and the government has taken action. However, the issues have been blown out of proportion.'¹⁰⁰ NGOs also stress a number of key ethical principles to follow: the importance of balancing funding; of applying for funding in terms of the needs of the organisation only; of not accepting funding that comes with strings attached; and of making public the sources of funding for the organisation.¹⁰¹

2.3 The ambivalent stance of the Jordanian government

The issue of foreign funding of Jordanian NGOs has been arguably the most sensitive aspect of Western democracy promotion also for the Jordanian government, although the extent of

⁹⁶ Interview, Jamil Nimri, Head, Jordanian Commission for Democratic Culture, 14 March 2009.

⁹⁷ Interview, Jamil Nimri, Head, Jordanian Commission for Democratic Culture, 14 March 2009.

⁹⁸ Interview, Nidal Mansour, Executive President, Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists, 15 March 2009.

⁹⁹ Interview, Amneh Al-Zubi, President, Jordanian Women's Union, 18 March 2009.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Natasha Shawarib, Executive Board Member, Sisterhood is Global Institute 26 April 2009. For a similar conclusion, see Wardam 2006, translation from Arabic by Mona Khalaf.

¹⁰¹ Interviews, Nidal Mansour, Mahasen Al-Emam, Amneh Al-Zubi and other NGO representatives.

control it has chosen to exercise over foreign funding of NGOs has varied over time. In the 1980s, Jordanian NGOs had to go through government channels to apply for foreign funding (mainly for economic and social development projects); in the 1990s the procedures were liberalized.¹⁰² In 1999, the public controversies regarding foreign funding described in the previous subsection led the ministry of social development to ask the prime minister to issue a circular to ministries, government bodies, and foreign embassies stating that all funding proposals must be cleared by the ministry.¹⁰³ Procedures were then again relaxed somewhat, but recently, the Jordanian government has again taken a more restrictive approach to the foreign funding issue. In the run-up to the 2007 parliamentary elections, the government sent a letter to all donors stating that they cannot fund Jordanian organisations without prior ministry consent.¹⁰⁴

Foreign funding has also been a key bone of contention of the new Law of Societies of 2008 (NGO Law). The NGO law adopted in late 2008 allows the minister to shut an NGO down if it takes a non-Jordanian donation without ministerial approval. Punishment of NGO representatives who keep or use funding without proper disclosure is also harsher if the funding is non-Jordanian (at least three months in prison) than if it is Jordanian (a fine of up to JOD 10,000 or approximately EUR 11,000).¹⁰⁵ The law also creates a Fund for Support of Societies allowing the government to pool funds at the Ministry for redistribution to NGOs. After domestic and international criticism (and allegedly pressure from many Western embassies in Amman), the government decided to propose amendments to the law. At the time of writing, it was debated whether these changes would indeed imply relaxed controls on foreign funding and effective recourse mechanisms for NGOs in cases of ministerial rejection of foreign funding.¹⁰⁶

At times, Jordanian officials have also made public comments on foreign funding. In an interview, Minister of Social Development Hala Lattouf said that donors should stop focus[ing] on elections and democracy issues and instead promote social issues and the empowerment of women, as this is what will make women stronger and achieve more of a voice. In her view, it is narrow-minded of Western democracy promotion efforts to focus on workshops on democracy in five-star hotels when the question is more about social opportunities and choices which will eventually lead to democracy. She stressed that Jordanians have to find our own model of democracy. The West should respect that. It is our choice.¹⁰⁷ Comments are at times fiercer. In February 2006, the Controller of Companies (of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, responsible for the registration of all companies active in Jordan) explained in the *al-Ra'i* newspaper that new, stricter regulation of non-

¹⁰² Bint Al-Talal 2004, p.89.

¹⁰³ Bint Al-Talal 2004, p.90.

¹⁰⁴ Echagüe 2008a, p.8.

¹⁰⁵ Law of Societies of 2008 Article 26 B and C (as translated by International Center for Not-for-Profit Law). Similar provisions have been inserted in new regulations on non-profit companies. These regulations prohibit receiving any assistance or donation or gift or funding from a non-Jordanian party without having obtained the approval of the cabinet (HRW 2007, p.25).

¹⁰⁶ Maayeh 2009, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and Human Rights Watch 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Interview, Hala Lattouf, Minister of Social Development, 18 March 2009.

profit companies¹⁰⁸ was necessary because "these [non-profit] companies ha[ve] become a Trojan horse for spotlighting criticism and for insulting national and official institutions í on the pretext of promoting human rights [through] written reports sent to [foreign] donors pretending to show í that they are a watchful eye on what is going on with the issue of freedoms [and] rights".¹⁰⁹

In contrast (and partial contradiction), the so-called royal NGOs founded by royal decree or through an act of parliament and hence not subject to the NGO law normally receive funding from a wide range of donors (Western governments, UN agencies and Arab donors), including on governance-related issues. Such organisations, usually under the patronage of a member of the royal family, have a "special relationship to [the] authorities and do not report to the Ministry of Social Development. This gives them much more freedom not only in their decisions over their activities, but also in direct access to foreign donors, which the other NGOs officially are not allowed to establish."¹¹⁰

Electoral assistance is another area in which the Jordanian government has shown some hesitation *vis-à-vis* the international democracy promotion agenda. For the 2007 national elections, it chose not to invite any international election observation team, although, for the first time, it accredited national NGO observers (who were nevertheless not allowed into the polling stations). As explained by a representative of the Ministry of Political Development, "international election observation would not be well understood by citizens as they would think international observers necessarily mean that something is wrong". Moreover, such observation is not needed in Jordan: "as the government, we think everything is OK". She also stressed the example of the 2006 elections in Palestine as demonstrating the limits of international election observation.¹¹¹ As outlined below, the Jordanian government's view on international election observation differs starkly from that of many political actors in Jordan. As we have seen, those on foreign funding, in contrast, mirror more closely the ambivalence found within Jordanian society.

2.4 The US vs. the Europeans

Jordanian public mistrust of American democracy promotion discussed in the introduction to this study is mostly reflected in the opinions of Jordanian political parties, NGO representatives, royal foundations, and the justice sector. Most, although not all of them express reluctance *vis-à-vis* their main international donor.

¹⁰⁸ A organizational format popular with many of the main NGOs working on human rights and democratization for its greater flexibility as compared to the Jordanian NGO status (for further details, see Echagüe 2008b, Human Rights Watch 2007, pp.23-26).

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Human Rights Watch 2007, p.24.

¹¹⁰ Simadi and Almomani 2008, p.42, see also Ottaway and Choucair-Vizoso 2008, p.67.

¹¹¹ Interview, Sawsan Tawil, Head of Project Management Unit, Ministry of Political Development, 18 March 2009.

The complexity and sensitivity of the issue is well illustrated by the thoughts of a leader of one of the royal NGOs, who explains: 'European funds are less contaminated than other funds. For example, NED is more problematic because of what is happening in the region. However, we try to differentiate between the foreign policy of a country and the goals of specific institutions in that country' At the end of the day, the most important is 'not to drift from what you want to do, not agree to do what donors want but to follow the line of the organisation.' Even so, the problem does not go away easily. 'On the one hand the resources from for example USAID can be very useful, but on the other hand, people would reject it if they knew where it is from. It is an issue to be transparent, to say where the money is coming from' it's difficult!¹¹² A representative of another organisation with a similar special status, the National Centre for Human Rights, holds a similar position 'We prefer to work with UN agencies and the EU because they respect human rights; funders should themselves respect human rights.'¹¹³

The same goes for many Jordanian NGOs. 'The consultative committee of our centre decided not to accept US funding' the Americans will impose their agenda' according to the head of a media NGO.¹¹⁴ Similarly, a Jordanian Women's Union (JWU) representative stated that 'USAID has tried to contact us through our branches, but we refuse to work with them. It is also our policy not to work with any organisation funded by USAID, IRI, MEPI etc.'¹¹⁵ JWU has also refused funding from the British Embassy because of the Iraq war: 'war is the worst thing that can happen to women.'¹¹⁶

It is also rather common to make distinctions within Europe, where preference is often voiced for northern European countries and Switzerland: the Mohammed cartoons have changed this somewhat. Such distinctions are often more 'wish-lists' than actual NGO policies, however. They are not expressed by NGOs only, but more widely amongst interviewees. Hence a typical statement by a journalist for the Muslim Brotherhood-leaning *Assabeel*: 'There are differences, American funding is suspect, but Scandinavian funding does not have an agenda behind it.'¹¹⁷

Others, such as the Arab Organization for Human Rights in Jordan will not in principle accept funding from abroad, in particular funding from countries 'with an imperial past' such as France, the UK, and the US. It also rejects assistance from other Arab countries.¹¹⁸ The organisation signed a 2005 pan-Arab petition refusing 'foreign funding, and the governmental and non-governmental organizations that are based on foreign funding, and their agendas, as they are tools to strengthen imperialism and fragment basic Arab issues.'¹¹⁹

¹¹² Interview, representative royal/national NGO March 2009.

¹¹³ Interview, Ali Al-Dabbas, General Commissioner Assistant and Head of Complaints and Legal Services Unit, National Centre for Human Rights, 16 March 2009.

¹¹⁴ Interview, Mahasen Al-Emam, President, Arab Women Media Center, 17 March 2009.

¹¹⁵ Interview, Amneh Al-Zubi, President, Jordanian Women's Union, 18 March 2009.

¹¹⁶ Interview, Amneh Al-Zubi, President, Jordanian Women's Union, 18 March 2009.

¹¹⁷ Interview, Faraj Shalhoub, Managing Editor, *Assabeel* 15 March 2009.

¹¹⁸ Interview, Hani Dahleh, President, Arab Organization for Human Rights in Jordan, 17 March 2009.

¹¹⁹ 'Towards Building a Resistant Arab People's Alliance'
<http://www.brusselstribunal.org/CairoConference290306.htm#1>

However, the organisation does not reject cooperation, including some funding, from Scandinavian countries and the UN.¹²⁰

According to some NGO representatives, however, NGOs exaggerate their hostility towards US funding: 99.9 per cent of those who say that they don't work with Americans in fact do if no strings are attached to the funding. In particular, they will work with those intermediary US organisations which receive USAID funds according to a representative of an NGO working on gender issues.¹²¹

Among political parties, the issue of whether to work with American organisations has been a topic of controversy. According to the leader of the liberal Alresalah Party, "Other parties deal with the Europeans only. We see it differently: we respect the Americans for their help, funds, and training although we disagree on the Israel-Palestine conflict. The US is still a model with its liberalism and the humanitarian aspect."¹²² The secular socialist party Hashed (People's Democracy Party) has also participated in some workshops organized by NDI and IRI, and are willing to continue doing so in the future. The issue was discussed within party, and it was found that it was not a problem as funding does not impose an ideology or come with conditions.¹²³

The moderate Islamist party al-Wasat has also participated actively in both NDI and to a lesser extent IRI programming, with a temporary suspension in relations with IRI as a protest against the Israel-Lebanon war in 2006. Trainings have included strategic planning, recruitment, constituent outreach, and message development both at national and municipal level.¹²⁴ Programmes were designed with the party and trainers have come from other Arab countries such as Morocco and Egypt.¹²⁵ "We have been criticized for participating in US-sponsored training. Taking funding from Americans is not acceptable to many people here. They link the funding with the agendas of the two political parties [the Democrats and the Republicans]" according to the Secretary General of Al-Wasat, who stated his intention of stopping collaboration with US donors, and was currently inquiring about alternative sources of funding for party development.¹²⁶

The IAF has not participated in party building projects, because of "sensitivities within the party, especially vis-à-vis the Americans", according to its deputy secretary general, Rohile Gharaibeh.¹²⁷ However, they do not reject contact with all American institutions. In February 2009, Gharaibeh went to Washington to participate in a Friedrich Ebert/POMED panel discussion on strategies for engaging political Islam, even though "this led to a media

¹²⁰ Interview, Hani Dahleh, President, Arab Organization for Human Rights in Jordan, 17 March 2009.

¹²¹ Interview, Natasha Shawarib, Executive Board Member, Sisterhood is Global Institute 26 April 2009.

¹²² Interview, Hazem Qashou, Secretary General, Alresalah Party, 12 March 2009.

¹²³ Interview, Khalil Al-Sayed, Member of political Committee Hashed (People's Democratic Party), 15 March 2009.

¹²⁴ For details regarding the cooperation, see Yacoubian 2007, p.9.

¹²⁵ Interview, Fayez Al-Rabei, Secretary General, Al Wasat 15 March 2009.

¹²⁶ Interview, Fayez Al-Rabei, Secretary General, Al Wasat 15 March 2009.

¹²⁷ Interview, Rohile Gharaibeh, Deputy Secretary General, Islamic Action Front, 16 March 2009.

campaign against the party led by journalists close to the government, who claimed that I was there to ask for help from America against Jordan.¹²⁸

Also in the justice sector, there is reluctance vis-à-vis American funding of judicial reforms. 'Perhaps 75 per cent of the US judicial reform programme serves US business interests [such as projects to shorten the backlog in the commercial court system]', according to one judge, who also stressed that 'nine-tenths of all programmes in the judicial sector are now with America: I wish it were Europe instead, not for political reasons, but because of the proximity of Europe, our common history and traditions.'¹²⁹ However, the criticism of American assistance in the justice sector has generally been rather muted: the Jordanian Bar Association has, for example, not extended its criticism of foreign funding of NGOs to judicial reform. This is perhaps surprising, given that the perhaps most vocal critic of foreign funding of NGOs and of the US, Saleh Armuti, until March 2009 headed the Bar Association. Privately, though he stressed that one reason for objecting funding for judicial reform could well be 'if it is a USAID-funded project.'¹³⁰

2.5 The 2006 elections in Palestine and the credibility of democracy promotion

Perceptions of Western democracy promotion among Jordanians interviewed for this report were not only influenced by democracy promoters' activities inside Jordan. In an unstable region such as the Middle East, regional issues were, quite predictably, regularly cited, including 'democracy promotion' through the Iraq war, the Algerian elections of 1991, Western support for Israel, etc. One factor, however, stood out as the by far most often cited: Western democracy promotion in Palestine, and in particular Western reactions to the Hamas victory in the 2006 Palestinian elections after international election-monitoring in the territory. That this issue should have particular salience is hardly surprising given the proximity of Jordan and Palestine and the many Jordanians of Palestinian origin living in the country.

Critique of the West, and in particular of Europe, in handling the aftermath of the 2006 elections comes from all quarters. Thus, a judge very active in the promotion of human rights in the Arab world stressed that 'when Hamas won the elections in Palestine, Javier Solana said in a statement that they were extremists. But when right-wing extremists recently won big in Israel, the EU says that it accepts the results.'¹³¹ A colleague from the National Centre for Human Rights goes further: 'It is unclear if donors really want to enhance democracy: look at the Palestinian elections of 2006. They were democratic but the results were basically rejected by the EU and the US.'¹³² The Minister of Social Development expressed similar distrust in the democratization agenda: 'As concerns Hamas

¹²⁸ Interview, Rohile Gharaibeh, Deputy Secretary General, Islamic Action Front, 16 March 2009.

¹²⁹ Interview, Mohammad Al-Tarawneh, Judge, 17 March 2009.

¹³⁰ Interview by Mona Khalaf with Saleh Armuti, ex-President of the Jordanian Bar Association 27 April 2008.

¹³¹ Interview, Mohammad Al-Tarawneh, Judge, 17 March 2009.

¹³² Interview, Ali Al-Dabbas, General Commissioner Assistant and Head of Complaints and Legal Services Unit, National Centre for Human Rights, 16 March 2009.

in 2006 and Algeria in 1991, there were elections but the results were not recognized by the West.¹³³ A parliamentarian puts it in rather similar terms: 'After the election victory of Hamas, the results were not accepted. This is not democracy! It is democracy tailor-made to the West.'¹³⁴ His views were echoed by a political analyst who found that there was now a 'greater degree of cynicism regarding the honesty of the West in promoting democracy and a widely held belief that the West is promoting merely propaganda, not only over the issue of democracy, but also human rights'.¹³⁵ On this issue, there are no differences along party or ideological lines. Hence the Secretary General of the IAF sums up the position of many interviewees by claiming that 'the credibility of Western democracy promotion diminished in the aftermath of the Hamas victory in the 2006 Palestinian elections'.¹³⁶

2.6 Western criticism of the state of democracy in Jordan

One of the few issues on which there is quite wide agreement in Jordan is the legitimacy of Western criticism of the state of democracy in the country. This is perhaps surprising given that criticism inherently focuses what is negative and lacking in Jordanian political life and the sensitivity normally surrounding anything that smacks of neo-colonialism. The main reason, according to interviewees, is that such criticism generally concerns problems that Jordanians themselves can observe and is, in that sense, not controversial. 'People accept criticisms from the West on human rights, the freedom of expression etc. because they make the comparison between citizens of the Western world and here' according to one journalist and NGO representative.¹³⁷ 'Human rights organisations have the right to criticize, it is within their mandate', according to the secretary general of the IAF, whose deputy echoes that 'there should be criticism; any government that issues laws contrary to human and civil rights should be criticised'.¹³⁸ Many interviewees also pragmatically noted that such criticism is good because it is generally effective, since the Jordanian government, and the royal family in particular, is very preoccupied with maintaining a good image of Jordan internationally. 'International criticism has made the government improve in the past'¹³⁹ and 'criticism is good because Jordan is very concerned with its international image'¹⁴⁰ are typical statements.

Even interviewees who took a quite critical stance towards democracy assistance and foreign funding of NGOs found such criticisms acceptable. Thus, the head of the Arab Organization for Human Rights in Jordan stressed that 'human rights organisations have the right to

¹³³ Interview, Hala Lattouf, Minister of Social Development, 18 March 2009.

¹³⁴ Interview, Abdel Rahim Boucai, Member of Parliament, 18 March 2009.

¹³⁵ Interview, Ali Kassay, CEO, ACE House Communication Consulting Firm and political analyst, 29 April 2009.

¹³⁶ Interview, Zaki Bani Ersheid, Secretary General, Islamic Action Front Party, 17 March 2009.

¹³⁷ Interview, Jamil Nimri, Columnist writer, *Al-Ghad*, 14 March 2009.

¹³⁸ Interview, Rohile Gharaibeh, Deputy Secretary General, Islamic Action Front, 16 March 2007.

¹³⁹ Interview, Khalil Al-Sayed, Member of political Committee Hashed (People's Democratic Party), 15 March 2009.

¹⁴⁰ Interview, Fathalla Omrani, President, Textile Trade Union, 16 March 2009

criticize any government; such criticism is beneficial because the Jordanian government is concerned about its image. Also, in their respective annual reports on human rights, the European parliament, the US State Department and the French government have the right to use all the information that they have at their disposal.¹⁴¹ A journalist from *Al Arab al Yawm*, generally critical of foreign funding, stated that 'international criticism helped put a stop to administrative detention of journalists'.¹⁴²

Some concerns regarding Western criticism of shortfalls in Jordanian democratic performance were raised, however. They concerned perceived exaggerations of problems in Jordan, double standards and lack of objectiveness as well as social value imposition (in particular when criticism concerned social issues and women's rights). Some interviewees also stressed that US government criticism had no credibility and that critique was verbal only, with no real pressure behind it.¹⁴³ Moreover, there was some concern regarding international NGOs not consulting actors closer to the ground: 'Sometimes foreign NGOs criticize without coordination with local NGOs. That does not help', according to a Jordanian NGO representative.¹⁴⁴

There has also at times been more heated reactions to critique from Western actors. For example, in January 2008, *al-Ra'i* columnist Tariq Masarwa charged HRW with being an agent of Western powers and a 'mercenary of US intelligence'¹⁴⁵ after the publication of a HRW report on restrictive new laws on NGOs and the right to assembly. A selective focus on women, terrorism, and/or the peace process with Israel is also considered sensitive.

2.7 International election observation

One of the apparent contradictions in Jordanian attitudes regarding Western democracy promotion concerns international election observation, for which there is generally enthusiasm in the country – apart from the government attitude as outlined above.

Political party representatives of all strands would welcome international election observation in Jordan. 'If elections are fair, we have nothing to hide so why not? It can be a way to promote Jordan. Moreover, no one can now say that the Palestinians did not elect Hamas' according to the leader of a liberal party, Alresalah.¹⁴⁶ A National Brotherhood parliamentarian, Abdel Rahim Boucai, held a similar view: 'I did not agree with the decision not to accept international election observation. Jordan has nothing to fear from fair elections'.¹⁴⁷ A similar stance is taken by a leftist party, Hashed: 'election observation is a

¹⁴¹ Interview, Hani Dahleh, President, Arab Organization for Human Rights in Jordan, 17 March 2009.

¹⁴² Interview, Fahed Al-Khitani, Journalist, *Arab al Yawm* 16 March 2009.

¹⁴³ Interview, Faraj Shalhoub, Managing Editor, *Assabeel* 15 March 2009.

¹⁴⁴ Interview, Natasha Shawarib, Executive Board Member, Sisterhood is Global Institute 26 April 2009.

¹⁴⁵ <http://anhri.net/en/newsletter/2008/newsletter0117.shtml>,
<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/01/13/deflecting-attention-jordan-s-repressive-laws>

¹⁴⁶ Interview, Hazem Qashou, General Secretary, Alresalah Party, 12 March 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Interview, Abdel Rahim Boucai, Member of Parliament, 18 March 2009.

positive thing; it would be good as it would force the government to organize good electionsö.¹⁴⁸ Other parties, while remaining quite positive to the idea, put up more conditions surrounding a possible international election observation mission. The secretary general of the moderate Islamist party Al Wasat stressed that any observation mission ömust be objective; it must have good knowledge of the local situation and be deployed throughout the country; it should start its work early and cooperate with NGOs; and election reporting should be immediateö.¹⁴⁹ Representatives of the main Islamist party were favourable to international observation, on the condition that international observers work closely with Jordanian NGOs. öInternational monitoring of elections is good and does not contradict local observation. International observers could reveal problems such as the forging of election resultsö.¹⁵⁰ However, öthe most important aspect of international observation is that there is some form of punishment if international election monitors reveal problemsö.¹⁵¹ IAF representatives expressed a strong preference for international NGOs or institutions being responsible for any future international election observation mission, as opposed to governmental bodies.¹⁵² An editor of the pro-IAF weekly *Assabeel* named the Carter Foundation as a possible alternative.¹⁵³

Even a representative of one of the main professional associations, the Engineers Association, staunchly opposed to Western funding of NGOs, found no problem with independent international election observation, as long as it is a civil society-based effort agreed on by all parties.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, NGOs were generally open to international election observation.

A couple of more dissident voices were heard. Thus, the head of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights in Jordan believes that öthe state should not allow international election observation as this goes against the principle of sovereigntyö.¹⁵⁵ A representative of the National Centre for Human Rights, one of the national NGOs, also took a more sceptical stance, stressing that it is öup to the government to decideö on international election monitoring.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁸ Interview, Khalil Al-Sayed, Member of political Committee Hashed (Peopleø Democratic Party), 15 March 2009.

¹⁴⁹ Interview, Fayez Al-Rabei, Secretary General, Al Wasat, 15 March 2009.

¹⁵⁰ Interview, Zaki Bani Ersheid, Secretary General, Islamic Action Front Party, 17 March 2009.

¹⁵¹ Interview, Zaki Bani Ersheid, Secretary General, Islamic Action Front Party, 17 March 2009.

¹⁵² Interviews, Zaki Bani Ersheid, Secretary General, Islamic Action Front Party, 17 March 2009 and Rohile Gharaibeh, Deputy Secretary General, Islamic Action Front, 16 March 2007.

¹⁵³ Interview, Faraj Shalhoub, Managing Editor, *Assabeel* 15 March 2009.

¹⁵⁴ Interview, Abdullah Obeidat, Vice-President, Jordanian Engineers Association 16 March 2009.

¹⁵⁵ Interview, Hani Dahleh, President, Arab Organization for Human Rights in Jordan, 17 March 2009.

¹⁵⁶ Interview, Ali Al-Dabbas, General Commissioner Assistant and Head of Complaints and Legal Services Unit, National Centre for Human Rights, 16 March 2009.

3) Contrasting Jordan and Morocco

Jordan, not unlike Morocco, receives democracy and governance assistance from a wide variety of donors: the United States, the European Union, individual EU governments, Western NGOs and multilateral institutions— although the United States is a significantly more prominent actor in Jordan than in Morocco, where European funding dominates. The targets of democracy promotion have also been similar in the two countries: NGOs, political parties, parliaments, the judicial sector, the state bureaucracy, and the media. Similarly to Morocco, respect for democratic principles form part of the main agreements and initiatives between Jordan on the one hand and EU states on the other. Moreover, Jordan has, together with Morocco, been among the most reform-oriented countries of the MENA region and hence important test-cases for democracy promotion.

There are also some basic commonalities in perceptions of Western democracy assistance in Jordan and Morocco. In both countries, there is a distrust of the United States as a democracy promoter and refusal, in some quarters, to accept US funding or take part in US government-sponsored programmes; given the larger US presence, the issue is more salient in Jordan than in Morocco. Also, Islamists in both countries manifest a greater reluctance to accept foreign funding than their secular counterparts. This reluctance is tempered by an eagerness to engage in dialogue and confidence building. Both Moroccans and Jordanians have mostly positive attitudes towards international election observation.

The differences between Jordanian and Moroccan perceptions of Western democracy promotion at times seem much more important than the similarities, however, and are outlined briefly below:

- Since ten years, there is an on-going— and at times heated— debate in the Jordanian media regarding democracy promotion, and in particular the issue of foreign funding of NGOs; it is still alive, with press articles appearing on a regular basis. There is no equivalent in Morocco, where the issue is notable only with its absence.
- Acceptance of foreign funding is regularly used as an argument to discredit NGOs and other actors in Jordan as traitors or vassals of foreign interests. Accusations of “under-the-table” dealings between donors and NGO recipients are rather common. In contrast, the argument has hardly ever been used in Morocco in recent years. Moroccan actors universally perceive foreign states as promoting democracy in their own self-interest, but, contrary to some of their Jordanian counterparts, do not conclude from this that there are any attempts to undermine the country or its independence, or that NGOs are obliged to follow the donors’ explicit or implicit agendas.
- The Moroccan government has not played the “traitor” card against NGOs or other actors accepting foreign funding. On the contrary, it has in practice encouraged NGOs to seek Western assistance, although maintaining some control and reporting requirements. The stance of the Jordanian government has been more ambivalent, as

the recent changes to the NGO Law and certain statements by officials and news outlets close to the government testify. In that sense, it seems that societal and state attitudes go hand in hand to a certain extent: in Morocco, both are relatively relaxed as concerns international democracy promotion, while in Jordan the picture is more mixed and complex.

- The Western isolation of the Hamas government after the 2006 Palestinian elections – perhaps the most democratic in the region ever – has had a much stronger impact on perceptions of democracy promotion in Jordan than in Morocco.
- Allegations of corruption and mismanagement of funds and questionings of the utility of democracy promotion projects – in five star hotels – are more common in Jordan than in Morocco. In Jordan, even NGOs call for stricter controls on funding. In Morocco, in contrast, NGOs complained that EU procedures and processes were considered too strict and ill adapted to a developing country.

What, then, explains these differences? Morocco is a country of the Maghreb with close historical ties to several European countries. Moreover, it has a large diaspora in Europe that maintains close contacts with the home country. As a consequence, Moroccans know European politics relatively well: this makes it easier to critically assess the grey zones of European policies and the mixed motives of European democracy promotion without believing in European infiltration of NGOs. The US has also showed relatively little interest in the country: although official relations are good, they are not close. In Jordan, US democracy promotion overshadows that of other actors to a certain extent, and it is far more controversial. Jordan also has fewer ties to Europe than Morocco and less intimate knowledge of the continent.

Moreover, Morocco, through its geographic position, is relatively sheltered from the main conflicts rocking the Middle East. That the 2006 Hamas elections and its aftermath should have a stronger impact on perceptions of Western democracy promotion in Jordan than in Morocco is hardly surprising given both Jordan's geographical proximity to Palestine and the number of people of Palestinian descent living in Jordan. Moroccans also have fewer links to the Gulf States, which are culturally further apart than Jordan and the Gulf. This has the consequence of making foreign funding from the main Arab Gulf donors perhaps no less – alien – than that of the West to many Moroccans, while this is less the case in Jordan.

It is more difficult to explain why charges of NGO corruption, mismanagement, and lack of effectiveness are more prevalent in Jordan. One reason could be that NGOs have not had any notable big successes in the country, while in Morocco the creation of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission and the reform of the *Mudawana* can at least in part be attributed to NGO advocacy. The lack of political impact makes it simpler to contest the usefulness of the work of Jordanian NGOs. Another reason, which would need verification, could be that the US, a larger donor in Jordan, spent money fast in the aftermath of 9/11 and did not control funding to the same extent as other donors. A third reason could simply be that because foreign funding is more controversial in Jordan, Jordanian NGOs have come

under closer scrutiny than their Moroccan counterparts and more accusations of this kind are used as one argument in a heated debate.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

The public debate around the legitimacy of Western democracy promotion in Jordan is very much alive: it is highly politicised and ever-present since at least ten years. Roughly, the debate – which has crystallized around the issue of foreign funding of NGOs – pits nationalists and followers of political Islam against more liberal segments of the political elite. However, behind the sometimes fierce and uncompromising rhetoric, there is often both nuance and contradiction. Nuance, as even the fiercest critics of foreign funding welcome cooperation, exchange, and training, and are often eager to cultivate international contacts. Nuance also because difference is often made between different funders and their respective agendas. US assistance is almost universally controversial; EU assistance, while not exempt of criticism and rejection because of political considerations, is more widely accepted.

Contradictions are apparent as well: there is considerable enthusiasm for international election observation, even among those very suspicious of foreign funding for NGOs. Similarly, critiques emanating from Western states and especially Western NGOs regarding lacunas in the Jordanian democratic system are also quite well received, including by many of those who are very protective of Jordanian sovereignty. Moreover, many critics of Western democracy assistance and in particular foreign funding of NGOs still participate in training organized by such NGOs. Similarly, organisations reluctant of US funding still at times accept it. The same kind of ambivalence towards the democracy promotion agenda is also discernable on the government side, which has shown reluctance in particular towards international election observation and foreign donors giving money directly to NGOs, while maintaining a generally positive rhetoric towards the agenda as a whole. In so doing, it takes a middle stance in between the overtly hostile Egyptian regime and the rather more relaxed attitude of the Moroccan leadership.

This means that Western democracy promotion navigates in rather troubled waters, and that caution is in order to protect the core of the agenda. Some recommendations in particular seem warranted:

- Currently, there is a paradox: the EU and smaller European countries are the most trusted partners among democracy promoters, while the United States continues to be widely distrusted as a democracy promoter in Jordan: no “Obama-effect” is discernable here. At the same time, the EU’s democracy promotion initiatives have a lower profile and are less political than those of the US. The EU and smaller European states could usefully try to take on a bigger role, as they are not perceived as having an “agenda” in the same way as the US.
- At the same time, a debate is warranted amongst US agencies as to the focus of its democracy assistance. Is it appropriate to continue with high-profile activities such as party training and assistance to politically active NGOs when such assistance could undermine them in the medium term? Jordan is a poor country with few resources available for organisations: the temptation to accept funds is thus great.

Therefore, care is warranted not only on the recipient side, but also on that of the donor.

- International donors must carefully check the internal structure of recipient organisations, in particular as regards their transparency and internal democracy. They should also critically assess the impact of the work on the ground, not least in order to protect NGOs against the criticism of doing nothing with the money that they are entrusted.
- Western donors should continue to demonstrate, and improve, transparency in their activities, partners, funding schemes etc. Moreover, they should make sure that they are at all times *hands-off* when it comes to priorities and agenda-setting, activities and project design, etc. as this is crucial to ensure the credibility of Jordanian NGOs in the longer term.
- Policy coherence (i.e. making sure that all policies towards Jordan promote or at least do not work against democracy and human rights) should be improved: economic assistance should work effectively in tandem with democracy promotion and security policy should take democracy into at least minimal consideration. This is exceedingly difficult for all Western countries, given their interest in short-term stability in the region, fear of Islamist extremism, and concern for the security of the state of Israel. However, it still remains a necessity to protect what is still viewed as core values in the Western world.
- Western states must avoid another *‘Palestine 2006’*: the effect on the credibility of democracy promotion of Western reactions to the Hamas victory in the internationally-supported Palestinian elections has been very damaging in Jordan. A more refined strategy vis-à-vis the so-called *‘Arab street’* is difficult to define, but over-due.
- Western states that support civil society and political party development in Jordan should also increase pressure on the Jordanian government to give some public space to the country’s NGOs and political parties. NGO and political party credibility can only exist if they are allowed to have some impact on public policy. Tolerating, but at the same time rendering utterly toothless some of the most important forms of political organization is short-sighted and potentially dangerous as it creates a vacuum between the state and its citizenry.

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