REPORT ON THE ESF EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP

'EURO-MED AND MIDDLE EAST POLITICAL ECONOMY: ASSESSING THE STATE OF THE FIELD'

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OBJECTIVES

Convened by Steven Heydemann and Eberhard Kienle in association with Giacomo Luciani the exploratory workshop Euro-Med and Middle East Political Economy: Assessing the State of the Field' took place as scheduled from 22 - 24 May 2003 at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence.

As originally planned, the workshop progressed in two stages. The first part was dedicated to papers discussing the state of the art of Euro-Med and Middle East political economy research from a wide range of perspectives. The second focused on how a new network of political economists working on the Euro-Med and MENA regions could address research deficits such as those identified in the first part.

The working definition of political economy was deliberately wide ranging, encompassing phenomena and social processes in which political and economic factors interact to shape outcomes. The intent in adopting such a broad definition was to be as inclusive as possible at this early stage in discussions of a research network, and to benefit from the experience of economists, political scientists and other social science disciplines (in particular demography and anthropology) in assessing the state of the field.

FORMAT AND PARTICIPANTS

As in similar such cases the list of participants had to be amended over time but most of those initially contacted attended the workshop (see definite list of participants and programme attached). Two among our initial invitees informed us in good time of unanticipated overlaps with other commitments and could be replaced, one had to cancel in extremis due to official commitments; all three remain associated with the project. Such continuity favoured continuous exchanges about the objectives and format of the workshop which proved useful for focussing the debates.
Unfortunately changes in the list of participants had some impact on their geographical mix by reducing representation from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. Nonetheless the final list included participants from Egypt, Israel, Turkey, the Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean parts of the European Union and the United States.

The vast majority of papers closely followed the convenors’ recommendations. Rather than systematically surveying the state of the art in given issue areas such as the political economy of regime transformation or of labour markets they emphasized selected thematic, theoretical and methodological issues that participants working on these issues had encountered in their own research. A few papers primarily reflected current research but still provided a useful basis for charting maps for future research needs.

The debates were constructive throughout, even and in particular when specific approaches and paradigms were questioned as to their bases and uses. A promising consensus emerged around two papers, one written by a sociologist focussing on the comparative advantages of simple quantitative methods as opposed to more complex ones, the other produced by a political scientist mainly highlighting qualitative methodological shortcomings in much of the contemporary political economy research on the Middle East and North Africa. It was also stressed that political economy issues in the MENA area need to be discussed comparatively and thus in close contact with colleagues engaged in similar research programs that focus on other parts of the world.

Thus, the two core conclusions of the state of the field review were the need for methodological upgrading of Euro-Med and Middle East political economy, across disciplines, and the need to link such research more closely with political economy approaches more generally. In addition, it was widely agreed that a network would be highly useful in raising the profile of Euro-Med political economy research within the social sciences, giving it more visibility and credibility, and providing a structure that is now missing for the organization of research and training activities. These concerns and outlooks shaped the subsequent discussion about the purposes, form, and content of a research network and the role it might play in the support and development of Euro-Med and Middle East political economy research.

THE NETWORK PROJECT

The diversity of approaches and indeed definitions of political economy represented at the workshop have far-reaching implications for the content and structure of the proposed network. One important line of debate concerned inclusivity versus focus in the composition and activities of a network. Some participants argued for a tighter, problem-centered conceptual identity, suggesting that this would enhance the network’s ability to define research agendas around specific concerns in Euro-Med political economy. At the same time, there was a general
recognition of the value of a more inclusive approach, including the opportunity to develop interdisciplinary work, to promote exchange of research across regions and approaches, and to raise standards of research across multiple fields. A second, related line of debate concerned methodological scope. This raised important questions about the boundaries of political economy as a domain of research, and what kind of criteria should be used to determine the methodological limits of the field. This debate echoed larger methodological concerns in the social sciences about what constitutes appropriate strategies of research, in particular the tensions between causal and interpretive approaches. Overall, however, this part of the workshop was extremely productive in reviewing a range of considerations that will need to be addressed in the subsequent development of a research network. It was especially useful to the convenors to have the opening round of this conversation take place among a group that was intellectually so diverse.

Following on these discussions, the task at present is to develop concrete proposals about how to reconcile large participation and membership with the intellectual diversity to be found in the large pool of potential network members. Inclusiveness remains important as the representatives of all intellectual trends face the same difficulties pertaining to information, communication, dissemination and training. Inclusiveness also remains important in order to prevent the various trends to develop into self-referential and autistic sects. At the same time, the progress of particular intellectual enterprises warrants a degree of exclusiveness to prevent them being permanently impeded by interparadigmatic debates of principle.

The solution that we are envisaging consists of a “network of networks” approach to questions of inclusivity versus focus. The network will be broad enough to encompass different conceptual, disciplinary, and methodological approaches. It will also provide an organizational framework that will encourage activities organized around more specific themes, approaches and debates. A first set of such more specific issues could give rise to a few workshops organized in conjunction with the annual Mediterranean meetings of the Schuman Centre at the EUI in Florence.

In light of discussions in the May workshop, social policy issues—including labor policies, welfare and social service provision, economic reform, and migration policies, among others—stand out as particularly valuable starting points for activities that could be organized in conjunction with the Mediterranean meeting in March 2004. As it appeared not least from the substantial papers given at the May workshop, these issues are not only chronically underresearched in the MENA area but in the light of research done elsewhere also particularly appropriate for attempts to methodologically upgrade political economy research on this area. They also link nicely to current Euro-Med policy debates in ways that will make such activities useful for a wide range of audiences.
As a matter of course, simultaneously progress must be made towards the establishment of the wider network itself. This raises the questions of participation/membership, activities and governance. In principle, participation should be open to all those interested in political economy issues: academics involved in relevant teaching and research projects, research students, practitioners in governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental agencies involved in development activities in the wider sense, etc.

Activities need in general to focus on improving communication and exchange between participants in order to contribute to the emergence of a specialized academic community or a community of debate. This includes critically communication with research students and trainee practitioners and therefore an important training component. The planned workshop on social policy issues (see above) would only be the beginning of a tradition of annual workshops dedicated to (i) the methodological and theoretical upgrading of work conducted by research students, and (ii) themes likely to shape future research agendas because of their academic or wider political relevance.

Governance must reflect the nature of participation and activities and should be as light and simple as possible. After necessarily informal beginnings elections must be held among participants/members to select a coordinating body. A certain degree of institutionalization is indeed unavoidable if the network intends to organize activities for which funds have to be raised and administered.

FUTURE FUNDING

The convenors contemplate to apply for funding from various sources that could be earmarked for specific aspects of the wider project. A future application for an ESF-funded network would be intended to cover the general infrastructure of the network and seed funding for specific activities such as workshops. The latter would however be the subject of additional applications to other funding bodies we are in touch with.

Attached:

- Final Programme
- Final List of Participants
FINAL PROGRAMME:

Thursday 22 May 2003

Presentation of Findings of Mediterranean Programme Working Groups:

13:00 Kamran Ali and Martina Rieker
   Trans-Actions: Tourism in the Southern Mediterranean

15:00 Steven Heydemann and Eberhard Kienle
   Networks of Privilege: The Politics of Economic Reform in the Middle East

19:30 Bus from Hotel to Restaurant:
   Trattoria Da Mimmo
   via San Gallo 57-59
   Florence
   tel: 055 48 10 30

20:00 Welcome Dinner

Friday 23rd May 2003

09:00 - 09:30 Eberhard Kienle and Steven Heydemann
   Welcome and Introduction

   Jakob de Haan
   Presentation of the European Science Foundation

09:30-10:15 Caglar Keyder
   Macroeconomic Approaches to Economic Development
   Discussant: David Waldner

10:15-10:30 Coffee break

10:30-11:15 Ray Bush
   The Study of Income Distribution in the ME and Euro-Med Regions
   Discussant: Jesus Nunez

11:15-12:00 Myriam Catusse
   Socio-Political Change and the Categories of Political Economy
   Discussant: Caglar Keyder

12:00-12:45 Eberhard Kienle
   The Political Economy of Regime Change
   Discussant: Giacomo Luciani
12:45-13:45  
Lunch

13:45-14:30  
Giacomo Luciani  
**New Politics of the New Economy**  
*Discussant: Reem Saad*

14:30-15:15  
David Waldner  
**States, Markets, and Development**  
*Discussant: Ray Bush*

15:15-16:00  
The Politics of Economic Policy Making  
*Discussant: Steven Heydemann*

16:00-16:15  
Coffee

16:15-17:00  
Reem Saad  
**Economics, Development, and Identity**  
*Discussant: Philippe Fargues*

17:00-17:45  
Jesus Nunez,  
**The Political Economy of Conflict**  
*Discussant: Eberhard Kienle*

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**Saturday 24th May 2003**

09:00 - 09:45  
Michael Shalev  
**Methods and Comparison in Euro-Med and ME Political Economy**  
*Discussant: Myriam Catusse*

09:45 - 10:30  
Massoud Karshenas  
**Labor Markets and Social Policies**  
*Discussant: Samir Radwan*

10:30-10:45  
Coffee break

10:45-11:30  
Philippe Fargues  
**Euro-Med Migration Issues**  
*Discussant: Massoud Karshenas*

12:00-13:00  
Lunch

13:00-18:00  
**From Planning Meeting to Research Network: Design, Governance, Programming, Funding, Outreach and Other Issues**

20:00  
Closing Dinner
ESF/SCSS Exploratory Workshop:
Euro-Med and Middle East Political Economy: Assessing the State of the Field
Florence, Italy, 22-24 May 2003

Final List of Participants

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