TOWARDS DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE MUSLIM PRACTICE

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" Winds of change"

The 20th Century has shown us global changes that have been never experienced before. For the first time mass movements for freedom, peace and prosperity appeared on the world scene. The World was witnessing rise and decline of aggressive nationalism, the democratization of the Westem Europe after the Second World War, mass anti-colonialist process, spread, and decline of communist idea. The "Winds of change"[1] are blowing from everywhere.

Today, many will agree that Islamic world with its billion followers is on the eve of radical changes in its history. These changes have to rationalize and democratize the traditional Islamic society and make it more relevant to the challenges of time.

Is Islam compatible with democracy?

The situation of Democracy and Human Rights in Muslim countries leaves a lot to be desired. Only two Muslim countries -Turkey and Lebanon - have secular state and free elections, but their Human Rights record has always caused concern among the World Democratic Community. Feudal system of Gulf Countries as well as

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repressive regimes of Iran, Iraq, Libya and many others enable some observers to come to hasty conclusion that Islam and Arab Culture in particular, are incompatible **with** Democracy. "Islamic Culture explains in large the failure of Democracy to emerge in much of the Muslim world", - writes Samuel P. Huntington in his sensational and controversial article "The Clash of Civilizations?"[2]. Furthermore, it is pointed out that Western Christianity is vital for success of Democracy.

The followers of this approach tend to forget that European atheistic philosophers accused Christianity of exactly the same thing that is being said about Islam now. Friedrich Nietszsche[3], for instance, called Christianity a religion that deprives a human being of will and kills everything human in him. These critics of Islam tend to write off the sustainable Western antidemocratic tradition rooting from Plato to Hegel, Burke, and Marx. They also tend to forget that up to 1950's, democratic and Rule of Law State in Europe was rather an exception than a rule.

Research approach to the sources of Judaism, Christianity and Islam **can make** it clear that each of these faiths has provisions that, if **need be, can** easily **be** interpreted both as democratic or authoritarian.

Democracy in Islam

Let's first identify what we mean when say "Islam"? Is it the heritage of great medieval thinker or obscurantism of Taliban in Afghanistan? Is it humiliation and corruption of repressive governments or idea inspiring people to fight for independence and dignity?

Despite a great deal of verity of sects and forms of government **in** Muslim countries, all Muslims agree that there is only one Islam **and*** its sources are to be found in Koran and Sunna - sayings and deeds Of prophet Mohammed. Studying the sources of Islam I have found **that they are** full of

principles of the freedom of choice, justice, human dignity, equality, religious and ethnic tolerance, governance by contract, popular sovereignty, Rule of Law, active attitude to life and Welfare State.

Let us look at these quotations from the Koran.

Equality among people and nations: "Men, we have created you from a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes that you should recognize each other" (s. 49: v. 13)

The sovereignty of the people: People and not the Ruler, or Church, or even the Prophet has sovereignty in their affairs. "I am placing on the earth one that shall be My deputy" (2: 31). "You command what is proper and forbid what is improper"(3:110) - i.e. the people, not someone above, have been ordered to exercise virtue.

The principle of mutual consent. The Prophet should not Rule by himself but try to get the mutual consent: "...and conduct their affairs by mutual consent (42: 38)", "Take council with them in the conduct of your affairs..."(3: 159). "And their business is (conducted) through consultation among themselves" (42:38); "...remind them, You are just a reminder, You are not to control them" (88:22).

Freedom of choice: Man in Islam has free will, according to which he can obey Gods order or not "This is true from God, so he who wishes let him believe, and he who wishes let him reject" (18:29).

Freedom of conscience: "There are should not be any coercion in the matter of Faith" (2:256; 10:99; 11:28; 22:40).

Privacy: "Do not enter any houses except your own homes unless you are sure of their occupants' consent" (24:27).

Active attitude to life: "...and had God so willed, He could have indeed put them down (those who stubbornly denied the truth) Himself; but He willed to test you all through one another" (47:4).

Family and respect to women: "...(in family) no soul shall have imposed upon it a duty but to the extent of its capacity"; "...(man and woman) have to run its affairs (in family) with mutual consultation and consent" (2:233).

Welfare state "And in their wealth there is an acknowledge right for the needy and destitute" (51:19)

Prophet Mohammed

Another source of Islam is Sunna - the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed. I want to bring to your attention the personalities of this man, who, if we look at the Arab political history before and after his life, of course had to be recognized as a great thinker and a statesman, whose ideas and deeds were far ahead of his time. Most interesting for the modern democrats is that this man, as a successful merchant, was one of the few medieval thinkers who understood and accepted the concept of ***privacy, social contract and peaceful resolution of conflicts*** to the full.

The Prophet stated that "There is no duty to obedience in sin". Also, this is not merely to Right to disobedience but to a divinely ordained Duty of disobedience[4]. So let me note that today only the Constitution of Germany has the similar provision.

"No Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab... nor has a non-Arab any superiority over a black man or a black man over a white man...."

"Difference of opinion within my community is a sign of God's mercy."

"If you try to find out the secrets of the people, then you will definitely spoil them or at least you will bring them to the verge of ruin." It is known that the Prophet Mohammed began his governing in Medina with a written contract on mutual duties 'between him and different groups of citizens including ethnic and religious minorities. The "Medina Contract" was a working social contract, but not only a scientific abstraction.

Finally, the statement, which is so important for the people struggling today for their rights, is as follows:

"If any one of you comes across an evil, he should try to stop it with his hand (using force): if he is not in a position to stop it with his hand then he should try to stop it by means of his tongue (meaning he should speak against it). If he is not even able to use his tongue, then he should at least condemn it in his heart. But this is the weakest degree of faith."

Are not all the above the roots of Democracy? And if we meet with despotism, obscurantism, and corruption in Muslim societies then it is nothing to do with Islam. One can see that today the democrats in Muslim countries can successfully benefit from these provisions in the sources of Islam.

I witnessed exactly such an approach in London's office of Al-Khoi Foundation (Charitable Muslim Organization). In March 1997 the whole of Britain very actively discussed an outstanding scientific discovery - the cloning of a sheep. Most of those who spoke on this matter were against cloning because of moral and religious reasons. SKY TV Channel addressed leaders of the 1 million strong Muslim community of the UK on this problem and Islamic intellectuals, after consultations within the community and with the religious leaders of Egypt and Iran, answered that the Koran does not prohibit, and moreover, encourages people as representatives of Allah on the Earth, to improve life and cloning is quite acceptable if it is done with proper moral motives.

Roots of the failure

As you can see the failure of Democracy cannot be explained by sources of Islam. Islam is not antidemocratic by nature. The deep reasons of all those failures are in our authoritarian conscience and all our concern should be about rationalization of it. Democracy is based not on the virtue of the Ruler and not on the good Constitution, but on the Civil Control conducted by the rational and demanding individuals.

It is my opinion that deep psychological reasons for the failure of Democracy are the same everywhere - in Islamic, African, Latin American,

and Communist countries. People of countries of the former socialist block are especially well familiar with these reasons.

We should know very well this "Escape From Freedom"[5], responsibility and loneliness in the world of simple and clear decisions, into the team environment that shares your responsibility, or under the protection of the Big Brother who takes away your freedom. This is an absolute priority of deductive thinking over inductive that has been

already well developed by TajMsmjn ancient China. This is a way of avoiding any conflicts, because we are not able to deal their settlement. Being one of the participants of the Human Rights Program in Columbia University, New York, NY, I witnessed that none of the East European participants of the Program (mostly non-Muslims) could force themselves to give real evaluations of lecturers of the Program and of the Program as a whole (including myself), whereas American students found that very easy and usual. It is obvious that religious extremism is not the first and probably not the last challenge that irrationality launches against the liberalism.

Attempts to reformation

Attempts at modernization and democratization of Islamic society became more intense as the Muslim East more and more lagged behind the Christian West. I had like to mention here the Islamic thinker and reformer Djamal-ad-Din Afghani who in the middle of 19th Century suggested a conception of a revaluation of Islamic heritage and rationalization of Islamic practice. Afghani stated that the West has more truly Islamic norms in its practice than the contemporary East.

In the same Century Muslim secularists and atheists became more active. The pro-European reform known as *tanzimat* has been enforced in the Ottoman Empire.

In the middle of 19th Century, in Azerbaijan M.F. Akhund-zadeh called for the openness of minds to the information coming from the developed World. "I am a friend of the Mankind" stated he. Akhund-zadeh supported the secularization of the state, called for a rejection of the outdated Islamic practice and replacement of the Arabic alphabet with the Latin, and that was done in the 1920s in Azerbaijan and Turkey.

In the beginning of the 20th century, the Crimean Tatar Ismail-bek Gasprinskiy worked out and implemented a project of a new secular pro-European system of education for Muslim countries.

In the Former Soviet Union, Islam was practically prohibited, and in Republican Turkey it was under a great pressure from the government. It seemed as if the way of solving the problem of modernization had been found...

However the attempts of atheists and modernizes to exclude Islam from social life have failed as well the attempts to place Islam under State control in such Islamic countries as Iran and Gulf States. Islam always remains the most important component of self-identification and universal shelter from any crises and stresses for the majority. Islam started to turn into symbol of the struggle against colonialism as well as despotism within the country. And last, but not least, Islamic socialism became an alternative both for Western capitalism and individualism, and the Bolshevik ideology, and was treated as a "Third" - authentic way for development. This third way of development was proclaimed by the nationalistic leaders of the 29 States of Asian and

African countries - participants of the Bandung Conference in 1955, and since that time these countries are being called the Third World Countries.

It is seen now that attempts of these nationalists to reform the country in the Third way from the "up", an attempt to build a Modern State with the traditional Islamic society, has also failed. It is obvious, because one cannot change everything with changing nothing. After facing hard economic and political crises people of Islamic Third World Countries turned even more to Islam as the only authentic form of Social life and a fair political system. Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran all Muslim societies are discussing the necessity of building an Islamic State.

But what should it be like, this Islamic State? As practice proves, with the traditional interpretation of Islam, the best result that this idea may provide is a system of the unlimited power of the majority, or in other word - Democracy without the Human Rights. Iranian Constitution provides a wide range of Political and Civil rights, however they too are fenced by the Islamic test. Article 24 of the Constitution provides for the freedom of expression "except when it is detrimental to the principles of Islam".

Reviewing the political and economic situation in so-called Islamic States one comes to the conclusion that they failed to give freedom and prosperity to its people. **New generation of reformers**

So, failures of Islamic society reforms in the 20th Century bring one the following conclusion: It is impossible to reject Islam, but if the understanding of it is preserved in its current authoritarian form, then all hopes for development will be ruined.

Understanding the necessity to respect Human Rights and the acceptance of pluralism as a vital driving force of progress became a turning point in the ideology of new reformers of Islamic practice. New Islamic intellectuals of the last 20 years know the principles of liberal philosophy no less than the Islamic doctrines, and they have started searching for the Islamic roots of pluralistic Democracy. Accepting Islam as a whole, as it is recorded in the Koran and Sunna, they try to reconcile the invariable text of the Koran with the changing circumstances of life. The State, they say, should be religious, but society should be pluralistic.

When I referred speaking above to the democratic provisions in **the** Koran and Sunna one can observe here that Islam has not ordained a special political order or legislative system, and the system of rule in Islam is based on independent judgment, called *ijtihad.* So the new reformers try to use this very democratic tradition in their aims exactly in **the** same way authoritarian and traditionalist did it: "...what is based on judgment can be replaced, - wrote the Egyptian pfofessor Moham**med** Khalaf-Allah, - "if new judgment is more in the public interest"[6].

One of the most prominent modern Islamic thinkers is the Iranian professor Abdul Karim Soroush. He supported Iran's Revolution and took an active role in revising university curricula during its early years. Since then, however, he has articulated ideas that regime considers highly controversial. Some of Soroush's ideas amount to heresy in the regimes' eyes but very popular particularly among the students. "Islam and Democracy are not only compatible, their association is inevitable," - argues Soroush.

"First, to be true believers - writes Soroush - one must be free. Belief held under threat or coercion is not a true belief. *Believer must also remain free to leave his faith.* This freedom is the basis of Democracy."

"Second, our understanding of religion is evolving. Sacred texts do not change, but interpretation of them is always in flux. Every one is entitled in his or her own understanding of Islam. Religious leaders should be free from financial support from the State and the community as well. Only such independence can prevent them - and Islam - from becoming compromised."[7]

Soroush wants to make followers of Islam more inwardly Muslim by enabling them to adopt a piety based on free adherence and personal commitment rather than custom, habit, and conformism[8].

Not only thinkers but also politicians are trying to reconcile Muslim practice with Democracy. Rachid al-Ghannouchi is Tunisian politician that founded 'The Movement de la Tendance" in 1981 with democratic program in Muslim contexts. Ghannouchi advocates an Islamic system that features Modernism and Democracy - including women's rights in every area. Islam's role is to provide the system with moral values. "Islam did not come with specific program concerning our life"- argues Ghannouchi, - "it brought general principles. It is our duty to formulate this program through interaction between Islamic principles and modernity"[9].

Another Muslim scientist Fathi Osman argues: "The main areas about which we have to be clear and articulate are: the relation between man and woman and between Muslims and non-Muslims. Nothing in the Koran or Sunna clearly supports such a claim that a woman has been created for family life and thus their natural place is at home"[10]. And it was reported in Sunna that the Prophet used to help in the housework when he was home after prayer.

The process has started

The activity of the Islamic reformers encounters with the tough resistance from the clergy and the authorities. Some of them were

forced to leave their countries and reside currently in the West. But the idea of reformation in Islam more and more is spreading in public conscience and in particular among youth. To stop the spreading of democratic ideas in the age of mass communication and freedom of movement is impossible. Besides, today when achievements of democratic countries are so obvious, there are few that can openly speak up against the idea of Democracy as itself.

King Fahd of Saudi Arabia directly addressed the question of Islam and Democracy in one of his interview to Al-Siasa Journal (March 1992, Kuwait): "The prevailing democratic system in the world, is not suitable for us in this region.... We have our own Muslim faith, which is a complete system and a complete religion. Election do not fall within the sphere of the Muslim religion, which believers are not suitable for our country, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia"

But another Muslim King, Sultan Qabus of Oman, in another interview with a Dutch paper in February 1993, argued that "Islam, in essence, is democratic. We believe in equal chances. We believe that our leaders, spiritual as well as secular, have to prove themselves to God and to people. We believe that civilians must be able to express their opinions freely. This is the spirit of Islam, in its purest form." That was a statement of the feudal King. Indeed, "nobody is an island", particularly, in the end of the 20th Century.

The discussion about Islam and Democracy goes everywhere in Muslim countries and particularly Muslim community's abroad. In my contacts with the London Muslims I heard different opinions on this subject but everyone was involved in discussion. "If we will lose traditions, then we will lose identity"; "We should refuse the medieval Islam"; "We could be like reformed Jews," - told London Muslims to me.

In London I have been witnessing another interesting development within Islam - the process of establishing of a dialogue between different trends and sects of Islam. Shia and Sunni of London could serve at the same mosque that previously was a big problem. Regular dialogue started among leaders of different sects of Islam on recon

ciliation and elaboration of common Islamic stand relying on the universal principles as well.

The process has started. And instead of demonization of Islam World Democratic Community has to support these progressive attempts, as welds to try to prevent the spread of medieval obscurantism. As then the US Secretary of State Warren Christopher declared in speaking to he UN-sponsored international gathering on Human Rights in June 1993, "We must not let cultural relativism become the last refugee of repression." That is the Muslim agenda for the West.

But the main role in this renovation process belongs, of course, to the Muslims themselves. First of all, Muslim intellectuals and intelligence should accept that - The *man* has unalienable *rights;* The Human Rights have priority over the collective interest; The Human Rights are universal and "others" are as equally human as we".

However, I guess, that just recognizing of the Human Rights concept is not enough for the process. Very important condition for the progress is the careful approach to the one's work. As a man who belongs to the Muslim culture, I have a right to say the following: "Muslims should understand that the real pride is a function of a product, that they work out, not of the false feeling of your uniqueness.

Muslims have to accept that the morality is not limited to family issues. When the Judge says "NO" to the President - that is the highest morality.

For a Muslim who looks at the West as the reason of all his failures, I have to say: "Imagine, brother, that there is no West, then look inside and around you. Whether we are perfect by ourselves?"

We have a long way to go with the process of our revitalization. Nobody will do our job for us. So let us find strength inside to be intellectually honest and intellectually brave.

NOTES

1. Phrase from the speech of British Prime Minister H. Macmillan (1957-1963), "Winds of Change", that proclaimed necessity of Britain's withdrawal from its colonies in Africa, Cape Town, February 3, 1960

2. Samuel P. Huntington "The Clash of Civilizations?", Foreign Affairs 72 (summer 1993)
3. See: Friedrich Nietszsche "Anti Christian."
4. Bernard Lewis. Islam and Liberal Democracy, A Historic Overview, Journal of Democracy, Volume 7, Number 2, April 1996.
5. See: Erikh Fromm. "Escape From Freedom"
6. Al Nass Wal Ijtihad Wal Hukm Fil Islam (The Text, Ijtihad and Government in Islam), Al Arabi monthly Journal, June 1984.
7. See: Valla Vakili. "Debating Religion and Politics in Iran: The Political Thought of Abdolkarim Soroush", Occasional Paper Series No.2, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, NY.
8. Robin Writes. Islam and Liberal Democracy, A Historic Overview, Journal of Democracy, Volume 7, Number 2, April 1996.
9. Robin Writes. Islam and Liberal Democracy, A Historic Overview, Journal of Democracy, volume 7, Number 2, April 1996. See also a Lecture by Rachid al-Ghannuchi, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London, 9 May 1995.
lO.Fathi Osman. The Problematic of Human Rights, A paper submitted for the conference on Islam & Modernity, London, July 4, 1996. 11.Ibid.

Xiilasd

İSLAM DÜNYASI DEMOKRATİK İSLAHATLAR ƏRƏFƏSİNDƏ
Hikmət HACIZADƏ

(Azərbaycan)

20-ci yüzilliyin ikinci yansı bizi görünməmiş dəyişikliklərlə qar-şılaşdırdı. Dünya tarixində xarakterinə, sür'ətinə və miqyasına görə belə dəyişikliklərə hələ rast gəlinməmişdir. Mürtəce millətçiliyin inkişafı və sü-qutu, kütləvi antimüstəmləkə hərəkatı, sovet sosializminin yayılması və if-ləsi - bunların hamısı Britaniyanın baş naziri Makmillanm məşhur sözləri ilə desək, bütün istiqamətlərdə dəyişikliklər küləyinin tüğyan etməsindən xəbər verirdi.

Bu gün çoxlan belə bir fıkrə gəlib ki, sayı bir milyarda çatan islam dünyası öz tarixində köklü dəyişikliklər etmək ərəfəsindədir. Bu dəyişikliklər dünyanın 50-dək ölkəsində ənənəvi islam cəmiyyətlərini demokratikləşdirməli və zamanın tələblərinə uyğunlaşdırmalıdır.