

EL Middle East Working Group

# PERSPECTIVES FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN LEFT



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# A message from Hanna Gharib, General Secretary of the Lebanese Communist Party

Comrades in the parties of the Mediterranean region, distinguished guests,  
Allow us on behalf of the Lebanese Communist Party to welcome you in Beirut, the capital of National liberation and Arabism, Beirut of the Popular Movement and national Resistance against all sectarian partition projects and their tools.

We are opening our fourth Mediterranean conference with an urgent need to exchange views concerning the nature of the international situation and the situation in our countries in particular and in the Mediterranean region in general. We hope that the outcome of our discussions will lead to a unified vision and a road map of what we can do together to promote our joint action.

We also wish that this conference will serve as a driving force for the peoples of the world and the countries of the Mediterranean awaiting for the left to play a broader and greater role to overcome their difficulties in confronting the challenges, first and foremost by their ability to engage in all means of resisting imperialism and its instruments.

The cause of the left at the international level, and to which no other cause seems to be prior-

itized, is the intensification of the struggle for the dismantlement of the unipolar world order led by the United States of America and the final transition to a new multipolar world order, ending a historic period of imperialist wars which aimed at solving the global crisis of the capitalist system. The exhaustion of the "Keynesian solution" while rising public indebtedness, the bursting of central banks' budgets and the worsening of unemployment have paralyzed policy makers in advanced capitalist countries and crippled tools aimed at saving capitalism in the face of a long-standing recession.

Hence, our conference today with its international identity is an opportunity to raise the banner of solidarity with the struggle of the peoples of the world and their resistance and revolutionary forces fighting for national and social liberation towards socialism, primarily the struggles of the peoples of Bolivarian Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba.

Our conference today is also an event for solidarity, to revive "Land Day" in Palestine and Syria. After Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the Zionist entity and transfer its embassy to it, his decision to annex the occupied

Syrian Golan to the Zionist entity rips to shreds all the relevant international resolutions including Resolution 242 and proving the failure of the theory of possible implementation of these international resolutions without resistance,

It is a conference to gather energies and unite the efforts of the leftist forces in the countries of the Mediterranean, in order for them to continue the struggle to topple the so-called deal of the century and support the peoples under occupation from Palestine to Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen, and to support the revolution of the Sudanese people resisting in the street for months, and with all the peoples of the Mediterranean standing in the line of fire, resisting authoritarian regimes which serve the Imperialist center.

It is a conference to assume our historical responsibilities in the face of the rise of conservative right-wing fascist forces in many European countries, which escalated as Trump came to the presidency of the United States. The EU countries have cracked down on workers' rights, and the peoples of Europe have paid the price for policies which are mainly the responsibility of the European Union and the International Monetary Fund.

This is accompanied by the escalation of the United States of America's offensive through its policies of imposition of economic sanctions, restrictions and increased custom fees and their consequences, particularly against Russia and China, as well as its withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran and the harsh sanctions imposed on it. It has also began to implement new sanctions affecting Lebanon and its economy.

Dear comrades,

The preparation of the program of the conference and its themes and topics came out based on many considerations including:

First, the urgent need for theoretical, political, economic, social and environmental research and scrutiny in the topics presented, in view of the diversity of opinions, which should be put forward and discussed through positive interaction.

Secondly, the situation of the vertical divisions that our societies suffer from today, despite the uprisings of our peoples and their resistance to the projects of the United States and its allies from the Zionist entity to the Arab reactionary regimes, to its dark fundamentalist tools, as this requires a common and clear understanding of the nature of the conflict in the Mediterranean countries and its consequences and challenges.

Third, the need to discuss how to confront the capitalist forces in the political employment of religion as a tool to control power with the rise of extreme right-wing currents in the countries of the capitalist center and the expansion of wars of aggression. This requires us as left-wing forces to clearly see their risks and to find out how to deal with their repercussions and consequences, in our countries.

The leftist forces are required today to present themselves as an alternative political and intellectual force capable of confronting capitalism, the forces of sectarian and ethnic extremism, and tyrannical regimes which competed to fill in the vacuum left by the failure of the neoliberal capitalist project. We all hope that our conference will serve as a platform for success in this direction.



# A message from Maite Mola, Vice-President of the European Left

I would like to start by thanking the Lebanese Communist Party for hosting us at the Fourth Mediterranean Conference. We are delighted to be here with our Lebanese comrades.

The Party of the European Left is made up of 35 European parties from a range of political families, including communists, greens and social democrats. We have held conferences in Italy, Turkey and Spain in the last eight years. This weekend in Beirut, around 50 of us will be taking part from Europe and from this side of the Mediterranean, all of us concerned by the situation in the two regions.

On the other side, the war in Syria is not yet over. The NATO and EU attacks have resulted in many fatalities and have forced people to migrate, abandoning their native countries. They have also been very poorly received in Europe, which took part in the very invasion that forced them to leave.

Mike Pompeo's recent visit to Lebanon, against a backdrop of US support for Israel despite its attacks on Gaza, during which he stated that Israel was a US project and not only an ally, was an insult to the Palestinian people, who

are enduring the colonisation of their state and the deaths of its inhabitants. The US has never helped Palestinian refugees in Lebanon return to their country.

Neither will it help the Syrians return to Syria. The Lebanese are a welcoming people. They have been living alongside the Palestinians since 1948 and with the Syrian refugees, behaving in an exemplary fashion. But the refugees have the right to return to their country, and the US and the EU are providing no help at all to achieve this.

Israel does not comply with international law. The UN Security Council has very clearly stated that the Golan Heights are not in Israel, while Trump says that they are under Israel's sovereignty. And while all this is going on, Israeli ministers are calling for more bombs to be dropped on Gaza to "impose peace," as they put it.

For all these reasons, we will be commemorating Land Day on 30 March here in Lebanon, against the occupation, colonisation and injustice suffered by the Palestinian people. We will condemn the expropriation of Arab land by the

Israeli authorities and commemorate the massacre by Israeli border guards of six Palestinians who were protesting against the confiscation of land on 30 March 1976.

We will also speak about problems shared with Europe, including the rise of the far right, unemployment, insecurity and the difficulty of achieving gender equality, while emphasising the importance of the feminist struggle, secularism as a social model, the right of peoples to self-determination, democracy and peace.

These subjects, and a number of others, will be addressed in the next few days and will provide us with a route map for the coming months, because we must not forget that we face an enormous, global problem, not just one specific to our regions. Looking at Yemen, Sudan, Venezuela and Brazil, for example, we can see that our two enemies, capitalism and imperialism, are strong. We must therefore aim to unite the left against them, in order to achieve a different, peaceful and secure world, in which human rights are respected and women and men live equally in society.



# A message from Inger Johansen, Coordinator of the EL Middle-East Working Group

Welcome to all participants and to our hosts from the Lebanese Communist Party,

My name is Inger Johansen. I am coordinating the Middle East Working Group of the European Left.

Our working group consists of comrades from different European left parties.

We took the initiative in 2011 to plan to organize Mediterranean Conferences of the left in order to strengthen the ties between left parties – socialist and communist – north and south of the Mediterranean.

Our inspiration was the “Arab Spring”. We visited Cairo in 2011 and met with new left parties and independent trade unions. We had hoped that the “Arab Spring” would have led to a more democratic and maybe socialist development. This is what the peoples of the region need and deserve.

There has been some improvement in Tunisia. But in Egypt and generally imperialism and reactionary forces took over. We have seen wars and repression. Despite this our working group

– together with comrades of the left parties of the southern Mediterranean – have formed a coordination group to organize Mediterranean conferences in order to keep up a dialogue and strengthen our cooperation.

This Mediterranean conference in Beirut is our fourth conference. We have had 3 previous conferences, one in Palermo/Italy, in 2012, one in Istanbul/Turkey, in 2015, the third in Benalmadena/Spain. We had hoped to organize more conferences in the south of the Mediterranean, but the political difficulties with organizing a big conference in the south with parties and movements working for democratic and socialist alternatives have simply met with too many stumbling blocks. One coordination group meeting in Cairo was cancelled at the last minute by the local authorities a little over a year ago. The Mediterranean conferences have achieved a lot of common understanding and deepened our relations, despite the political differences that we know are there.

Again, my greetings to all of you and many thanks especially to the Lebanese Communist Party for hosting this 4<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean conference. We are very happy to be in Beirut.



Hanna Gharib • Julia Wiedemann  
Maher El Taher • Yusuf Tuna Koç

# **RESISTANCES TO IMPERIALISM, CONFLICTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE ROLE OF POLITICAL ISLAM**

National and social liberation

Arms trade and defence agreements, militarization

The role of Political Islam in the future Middle East



# Hanna Gharib

## Lebanese Communist Party – Lebanon

Comrades in the parties of the Left in the Mediterranean region,

Dear Guests,

Objective historical circumstances saw to it that the Arab bourgeoisie took the lead at the beginning of the Arab national liberation movement in the confrontations that our region witnessed against the Balfour Declaration. However, this bourgeoisie practised clear national treachery through the growth of its dealings associated and in collaboration with the imperialist project which incubated the Zionist plan of settlement on Palestine's land. This prepared the way for the petit bourgeoisie to assume the leadership of this movement subsequently, although it too failed to achieve the real tasks of liberation in both its aspects: national liberation and independence on the one hand and development and social progress on the other. The imperialist project with its various tools used the colonialist nature of most of the Arab organisations and endeavoured to provide the incubating environment that actually supported the Zionist Entity and the terrorist groups of various persuasions and origins.

After a hundred years and an increase in the resistance to the imperialist project which today is represented by the so-called "New Middle East" project as a comprehensive and integrated hostile project to partition what the Sykes-Picot agreement divided up with the aim of establishing religious and ethnic statelets involved in internecine strife in order to guarantee the security of the Zionist entity and control of the riches and vital facilities in them, there is no option for us but to continue the resistance to this project, but with a counter project under an alternative leadership, since those who have brought us to where we are now cannot be relied on to achieve the tasks of national and social liberation for our peoples.

An Arab, progressive, pro-change, leftist liberation project embodying the slogan "Total Arab Resistance for Social and National Liberation," to counteract the imperialist and local reactionary forces' appropriation of our countries and put an end to the decline in our societies which their bourgeoisies and their allies are running. A project using all means and tools available - political, military, economic, social and cultural - in order to get us out of the mire of failure and dependency, uniting capacities around the centrality of the Palestinian cause, to put an

end to the Zionist occupation of Palestine and eradicate the imperialist military presence in the Arab region and set up democratic national regimes.

A project based on what the Arab popular intifadas have created as millions have gone onto the streets in numerous capitals demanding change and the toppling of regimes and, to a certain extent, these intifadas have formed a new qualitative stage in the Arab liberation struggle. They also represented a resounding cry from the people: “Where are you, the Left?” These intifadas could have toppled the dictatorial heads of regimes, but they were unable to do so due to the involvement of imperialism and its conspiring against these intifadas and also due to the weakness of the Left and the urgent need to develop its project and build itself up as a democratic alternative capable, with its vision and programme, of picking up the pulse of the street and linking national liberation with social liberation.

The US project based on religious and sectarian forces cannot be countered and defeated with sectarian and religious forces of the same nature, which is also not compatible with their programme by virtue of their sectarian and class structure, so they would ultimately find themselves meeting it halfway within a role or share in the framework of the New Middle East project – in the absence of the alternative project – within the context of the US project to preserve its interests and the interests of the Zionist entity, its security first and last.

Historical experience has proved that religious currents – including rejectionist Islamic cur-

rents – which have claimed the ability to fill the vacuum arising from the failure of liberal social and economic growth, mostly intended to oppose in the internal conditions of the peoples in their countries was the obliteration of social and class divisions and making them disappear, have attempted to control the popular movement, and to control the workers’ unions and repress them because of their direct political agendas, not to mention their natural tendency to repress general freedoms and restrict the secular and civil nature of the state, and prevent the liberation of women by retaining outdated personal status legislation.

Today, more than at any other time in the past, there is an increasingly urgent need for this comprehensive Arab resistance, after Trump’s decision to give Jerusalem to the Zionist Entity as its capital and to move his embassy there, and following his decision to annex the occupied Syrian Golan to the Zionist Entity with complete disregard for all the relevant international resolutions, dashing the hopes of all those counting on the implementation of these international resolutions without resistance.

So this project, by its nature, will strengthen the role of the Arab Left and crystallize its identity and the independence of its project and its stance, by means of which it will be open to all forms of collaboration and coordination with all the other forces of the resistance. The Left must have a clear identity, holding on to its values in standing up to imperialism and Zionism and in its struggle to dismantle the political, military and economic subjection to imperialism, devoted to democracy and to the struggle to establish resisting secular states and not in order to es-

establish states on a sectarian and religious basis that would provide a justification for the Zionist entity's establishing its "racist state" on a religious basis. The Left will be at the vanguard of the struggle against exploitation and for the interests of the labouring Arab masses struggling to improve their living conditions and in waging their battle for democratic change against repressive regimes, tyranny and exploitation. A Left capable of proving to these masses that its resistance against the enemy transcends the liberation of the land to the liberation of human beings from social and class exploitation.

Therefore, we propose this project and we are aware of the importance of working together to ensure everything required to permit the Left to seize the socio-economic, political and national cause and use all appropriate and necessary forms of the struggle, at the level of each country and at the general Arab nation level, and to head towards forming a balanced popular bloc producing a strong balance internally and at the Arab level. This is what we mean by a project to renew the Arab national liberation movement.



# Julia Wiedemann

DIE LINKE – Germany

The topic I will talk about is the EU Middle East policy, with a focus on arms agreements and militarization.

I will at first give you a general overview on the interests of the EU with a view on the Iran nuclear deal as an example.

Second, I will introduce you to the ongoing militarization of the EU with a view on the cooperation with Libya.

And third, I will give you a few information on arms exports, with a few more details on the case of Saudi-Arabia.

## **First: General Interests of the EU in the Middle East**

While talking about Europe's Middle East policy, it is clear, that there is no such thing as THE EU-Middle-East policy, depending on the region we observe different approaches and strategies. So one should speak about policies in plural.

What kind of interests does the EU have in the Middle East:

One interest is of course economy, to have access to markets, resources and energy. Another

is security, because without security this access would be difficult. And responding to Islamic terrorism, which has also hit Europe several times, there is an interest in curtailing it in the Middle East.

In terms of migration the EU has an interest to secure its borders, so migrants are not able to enter it, with all the tragedies this policy is provoking. The main motive of this policy is not the migrants and refugees themselves, but the inner-EU debates and the public right-wing populist discourse in EU countries. But we will have an extra session on this topic tomorrow morning.

This leads to the interest in stability in the Middle East region (Not to be mixed up with the idea of democracy and rule of law).

To defend its own borders, to build up partnerships with governments in the Middle East to increase its influence, the EU follows a common security and defense policy - also called CSDP - underlined by additional bilateral actions and by arms exports.

There is one example which expresses these interests. It is the nuclear deal with the Iran, or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), how it is called. The EU played a

big role in the negotiations. Not only because a nuclear Iran would be a threat to the whole region, but especially because ending the sanctions against Iran would open new opportunities for Europe's economy, and also because of Iran's gas and oil resources. So when in July 2015 it was announced, that an agreement had been found, the very next day Germany's minister for economy, Sigmar Gabriel, was one of the first politicians travelling to Teheran together with representatives of Germany's economy to have talks with the regime.

So, as I said before, the question is not, if a possible partner of the EU would be a democracy or would respect human rights.

Since 2015 exports from Europe to Iran had increased about 70 percent, and major companies had announced investments. But now we have the situation, that Donald Trump stepped back from this agreement and the US imposed new sanctions. In a globalised world with product chains running through several countries, sanctions on one country have effect on the economy of others. So also European companies trading with Iran are affected. And since a couple of weeks now, the EU is struggling how to bypass these sanctions.

## **Second: Militarization**

Due to the time it is not possible, to give you an overview on all the instruments of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy. But I want to mention some of the instruments.

One is PESCO - Permanent Structured Cooperation, established in 2017, which is a framework

for EU-countries who want to work closer together, which can mean, they prepare for operations or they engage in common armaments projects. One example is the new cooperation between Germany and Cyprus. Our defense minister paid a visit to Nicosia in the beginning of this month to express, that both countries want to work closer together - whatever this will mean - it was not clarified in the media yet. Another example is the development of a drone for the EU.

Combined with PESCO is a European Defense Fund, worth 12 bn., and research and development projects on armament. These are first steps to form a European army with European weapon development.

Another instrument are European Missions. The European Union is currently deploying sixteen missions and operations, 6 military, 10 so-called "civilian" missions. One example is the operation "Sophia", named after a Somali refugee girl, who was born on a German navy vessel. In the self-description of this mission it is said:

"The mission core mandate is to undertake systematic efforts [...] to disrupt the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks in the Southern Central Mediterranean and prevent the further loss of life at sea."

So on the one hand, within this mission several thousands refugees had been saved from drowning and had been taken to Europe. But the other part of this mission is the training of the Libyan coast guard. Since European countries like Italy refused to take refugees

who were rescued at sea, and others refused to take longer part in that mission, the rescue-operations are stopped now. The EU decided two days ago, not to extend the rescue missions, but to stick to the training and intelligence part in supporting the Libyan coast-guard. For the Libyan coast-guard it is not clear, who is in command of, who is corrupt, who is shooting at refugees boats, who is accused of violation human rights - this coast guard shall bring back refugee boats from the sea to Libya, where they will be kept in camps under inhuman conditions, sold as slaves, will be sexually abused, and so on.

So for the EU human rights are irrelevant, when it comes to strengthen the walls of the fortress of Europa.

### **Third: Arms exports**

I would like to give you some Data from Stockholm international peace research institute.

The five largest exporters in 2014–18 were the United States, Russia, France, Germany and China -> accounted for 75 per cent of all arms exports

The top five West European arms exporters are France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy—together accounted for 23 per cent of the world's arms exports in 2014–18.

For four of these countries, the region that accounted for the highest growth in exports was the Middle East. French arms exports to the region rose by 261 per cent between in the

last five years compared to the five years before, while German exports grew by 125.

The biggest supplier is Saudi-Arabia, which is since 2015 military active in Yemen together in coalition with other Gulf countries, and Egypt among others, and which is supported by France and Great Britain.

In Yemen we have a huge humanitarian crisis. 1.8 million children are suffering from acute malnutrition. Medical network collapsed, 80 percent of the population in humanitarian need. Four years of war, 80,000 people killed of violence, but exports to Saudi-Arabia, Egypt and other Gulf countries still increasing.

Then, one journalist got killed, Jamal Kashoggi who was murdered by Saudi-Arabia. And then things changed.

This event caused an outcry and a public debate on the cooperation of European countries with Saudi-Arabia. Germany and some other European countries decided to stop their arms exports to Saudi-Arabia. Just yesterday the German government decided to extend this export ban – for now. But there is no consensus among European countries on that issue.

Another problem is, that the arms industry is already globalized in a scale, that it will not be much affected. For example the German company Rheinmetall has also companies in Italy and South Africa, they keep on providing Saudi-Arabia with ammunition. So we strongly need a European approach on stopping arms exports.

# Maher El Taher

## Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – Palestine

Dear Comrades,

Members of the Fourth Mediterranean Conference for Parties of the Left held in Beirut Permit me to offer you the deepest and warmest comradely greetings in our struggle to the brother Lebanese Communist party and its leadership and General Secretary, comrade-in-arms, Hanna Gharib on the success in holding this conference on Lebanon's beloved soil and on the soil of Beirut, the capital of steadfastness and resistance, the capital of martyrs, giving and sacrifices. Permit me, comrades, to salute you and convey to you the greetings of your comrades in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, at their head comrade-in-arms Ahmad Saadat, the Secretary General of our party who, together with our steadfast prisoners in the jails of the Zionist Occupation, is waging a battle for freedom and confronting terrorism, the battle of steadfastness, challenge and insistence on the continuation of the struggle. I also convey to you the greetings of the Palestinian people who today are writing their history in the flesh and blood of their patient steadfast sons, saying to the leaders of the US-Zionist terrorism, Netanyahu and Trump: the land is our land and

Jerusalem is our Jerusalem and the olives are our olives and the mosque is our mosque and the church is our church. Palestine is ours, from the sea to the river, we will fight and fight until it is all liberated.

Dear Comrades

The Palestine cause is facing major strategic dangers, unprecedented since 1948. Dangers connected with the Arab reality surrounding the Palestinian cause, the reality of disunity, division, sectarian and religious conflicts, civil wars, the deviation of the struggle away from its main directions and the destruction of many of the Arab countries.

Accompanying this reality is the Palestinian-Palestinian division that has been going on for more than 11 years and has had serious negative impacts on the Palestinian cause.

In the light of these circumstances, Israel and US imperialism under the leadership of Trump have seen that there is a golden opportunity to eradicate the national rights of the Palestinian people and so have offered

the so-called “deal of the century” which has so far not been made public officially, but is being implemented on the ground, and in its essence is aimed at wiping out the Palestinian cause in all its dimensions.

Whether, with regard to the position in the Occupied Territories of 1948, by decreeing the racist so-called “nationality law” which considered Israel to be a state for Jews only and enshrined in law the development of settlement as part of the constitution, with all this threatening our people in historic Palestine; or with regard to the Palestinian refugees in the diaspora, as displacement planning has become obvious, as has seeking refuge in far away places of exile, and striking UNWRA with the aim of eradicating the right of return completely; or with regard to the Occupied Territories of 67 and striking any essential components of a future independent Palestinian state where there are 700,000 citizens, and the machinations to separate Gaza from the West Bank are continuing.

The Zionist Entity is endeavouring to normalise relations with the Arab states, especially some of the Gulf countries.

Dear Comrades,

Following the US administration’s decision on Jerusalem and the Golan, we are now faced with a new stage in our international relations as Israel can, according to US President Trump, expand as long as her se-

curity requires it. Trump is thereby laying the foundations for a new international system being erected on the ruins of the international system founded after the Second World War.

There is no international law or state legislation, rather a laying of the foundations of a new basis for international relations on the legislation of aggression, expansion and holding on to any land that can be occupied and considered the spoils of war, as happened in the Middle Ages. We do not think it unlikely that Trump will declare the West Bank to be Israeli land.

There is no doubt that US imperialism is going through a recession and is facing the emergence of a multipolar world that is putting an end to the US control and hegemony which has prevailed since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist states. Trump is behaving like a raging bull when confronting the changes at global level.

The Israeli Entity is digging its own grave with its own hands. Our people are steadfast on their land and fight and resist and offer up the martyrs, Basel al-Araj, Ahmed Jarar, Muhind al-Halbi and Umar Abu Layla, young men confronting the occupier with rare heroic deeds. The Return Marches in the Gaza strip will be going on and continuing, and Syria’s steadfastness and the axis of resistance will continue and succeed.

We have no option but total Arab resistance in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and the whole region to regain Palestine, the Golan, the Shebaa farms and the Kfar Chouba hills, especially since the impossibility of reaching political solutions with the imperialist Zionist plan has become clear. Coexistence with its role and function in the region is impossible. It is inevitable that the struggle must continue in all its forms to liberate the Arabs and the Jews from this Zionist imperialist project based on expansion and aggression.

# Yusuf Tuna Koç

ODP – Turkey

Today we live in a world where imperialism is as real as in the times of World Wars. From Middle East to Eastern Europe, everywhere in the world, people are forced to fight against each other for the benefit of the imperialist powers. Especially Middle East has become the war zone of the imperialist actors for the sake of their thirst on war and the sources of these countries. In most of these cases, the conflict is indicated as a fight for democracy while all the instruments and the made-up actors are anything but democratic. Today we are talking about whether the ISIS is finally defeated or evolved something else, like how it evolved from Al Quade. However, the actual problem is lying in a deeper ground. Al Quade or ISIS or any other jihadist group wasn't fallen from a tree. They are the logical consequences of a grand scheme of things from an older time that we didn't actually past. Imperialism has been more active since the fall of the eastern bloc. Since then, from Middle East to the Balkans, especially the former alliances of Soviets were in the immediate danger from imperialist powers. Because of that USA remained as the most powerful and influent actor, it seemed like the conflict was over, the theories of the 20th century are useless now and the imperialism is no more, even it was the beginning of a far worse era. Now we live in a

world there is not a real threat or an equal force against imperialist forces.

The idea of a global world, where the maximal conflicts have eventually come to an end, and of that we are living in the best possible world that capitalism can offer was the delusion that imperialism needed. This is how their actions became legit in the eyes of the world. Therefore, from Afghanistan to Syria, it is actually a fight for dominance, and because of the corrupted liberal hegemony on intellectual discussions it seemed like democracy eventually came upon those countries. And the main driving force of that so-called democracy was the political Islam. Today it seems ironic that an ideology of oppression can be called as a democratic force, but the problem is that most of the people didn't find that ironic when it was important. The idea of using political Islam as an hegemonic power dated to the invasion of Afghanistan. Back in the day, CIA supported the founding of Al Quade and then used them as both a military force against the enemies of US and as an actor of the political Islam in the region. Since then, the jihadist ideology expanded and transformed into sometimes more legalized forms and sometimes organizations like ISIS. This was called the Green generation.



Now, we live in a region where the more legalized forms of political Islam, which was called conservative democracy, gain body in Muslim Brothers in Egypt and in AKP in Turkey. Both these actors seemed as the democratic forces that would change the autocratic structures in their countries, while the consequences are far from that. The West colored them as orange revolutionaries of the old world. However, they were just the mere allies of the destructive imperialist forces. Their ideologies aimed a society where only identities counted and an influence of that there is no class or class struggle, only the fight between identities. This is how they became the actual enemies of democracy. Muslim Brothers lost their power to a more authoritative power, to a coup, and Erdoğan keeps destroying the remained democratic faculties of Turkey. Now most of the world sees the situation as it has to be. However, we should not forget that this is what will eventually happen when the political Islam gains power and nothing else. Because when the identities fade in instead of class, the democracy eventually falls. And this is not the case just for political Islam.

In Syria, the so-called clash of civilization claimed by the imperialist forces became real. It became real because of the same neoliberal ideology that gave legitimacy to the actions of imperialism for the sake of the so-called democracy. What actually happened was dividing a country. And what seemed to happen was democratization of a country by – ironically – armed groups which were supported by the imperialist actors. Now we are in the eighth year of war, what was a so-called a fight for democracy then turned into a war against ISIS. And

this is because the supported groups lost their legitimacy and their masks so fast that the ISIS became the monopoly in the islamist/jihadist groups. Now, after eight years no one really talks about the Free Syria Army, which was indicated as a democratic force of political Islam once, because that ideology reached its full potential in the war conditions and turned into the ISIS phenomena. This is the failed history of political Islam/Green generation project.

However, that failure didn't mean that imperialists also lost in the country. Actually, they divided the country and gain hegemony which was their main goal. Maybe there is no islamist group that they can use but now, after their fight against ISIS, YPG became an ally to those forces. Even though they were an oppressed group who claimed their righteous independency in the region, an alliance with the most destructive forces in the region cannot bring any peace to neither Rojava nor the rest of the Syria. This is what seemed to happen when US declared that they will withdraw from the country, which meant actually exposing the Kurdish region to Erdoğan's ultra nationalist dominant politics. That was the realisation that imperialist forces can't be trusted in any necessity or condition. Now, withdraw is not on the table for the US, therefore there is no open threat for YPG, but it doesn't matter that it will never happen. Furthermore, the treat of imperialism is still on the table for the rest of the region, because YPG is one of the important actors in the country that give legitimacy to US. This and the whole Syrian war again show us how imperialism remained powerful and destructive as it was in the age of world wars. This also means that one of the prior subjects for the socialists is the fi-

ght against imperialism. We see how Israel, an illegal country, invades Palestine and oppresses their people with violence. We see how the world remains silent because of the legitimacy that neoliberal ideology gave them for the benefit of imperialists. In Turkey, we fight for democracy to a fascist dictator which gained his power and legitimacy from the same imperialist forces. Therefore, the fight against imperialism remains as one of the most important and immediate missions of socialists in all the world. And for that, we should recognize what are the actual intentions and the conclusions of the imperialism. They are not only about today's Middle East, it is the same imperialism that creates the war migrants in reality, it is the same Imperialism that creates the racist, anti-migrant movements and leaders in the West, which showed its destructive potential in New Zealand. This is the same imperialism which pushes for a coup in Venezuela today. The fight against imperialism is a fight for humanity and socialism in all world.

Tomorrow is the 48th anniversary of the last battle of Turkish revolutionary leader Mahir Çayan and his 10 comrades in their fight against imperialism where they lost their lives. I want to finish with a quote from him: "Their powers and means are nothing to us. They are few and we are millions. We have nothing to lose, but there is a whole world that we will win."

Arkan Bader • Nadjat Hamdi

# **A LEFT APPROACH TO THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION**

Self-determination,  
independence and class struggle  
Occupation, colonization  
and the right to self-determination



# Arkan Bader

## DFLP – Palestine

Firstly: a quick briefing on the right to self-determination

The right to self-determination is an international political term. Political science identifies it as the right of every society to have a distinct group identity as a people or ethnic group, through which it determines its security, economic, social and political aims and selects the political system that suits it, whether a presidential one or parliamentary one, in order to achieve its well-being and requirements and to manage its life without any foreign interference. In other words: every people in the world is entitled to govern itself and choose its own political regime without oppression or pressure from other political regimes. In order to implement this right, it is presupposed that the people concerned will be residing in their homeland and constitute the majority of the inhabitants.

That is, the right to self-determination is an international legal right and is considered to be one of the most important principles of human rights. More specifically, the concept means independence and the establishing of a sovereign state, because independence is the ultimate aim which peoples aspire to achieve

and it is the exerting of this right which is considered a statutory right, founded and decreed by all stipulations and principles in contemporary general international law. One of its conclusions is also that preventing peoples from determining their fate, denying it to them and preventing them from practising their sovereignty and independence, and imposing circumstances on them is rejected internationally, and the occupation by force of the territories belonging to another is a denial of the right to self-determination.

Secondly: the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

1 – The Palestinian people's cause is rooted in the dispersal of its nation between one part living in the state of the Occupation and on its historical land (1948), another part under the occupation of 1967, and a third part in the areas of refuge and the diaspora. Although numerous resolutions have been issued by the United Nations, including (theoretically) resolution 181 which granted it the right to establish an independent Palestinian state on parts of its homeland, Palestine, and resolution 194 which stipulated the return of its refugee sons to their homes and properties

from which they had been fleeing since 1948, nevertheless the Palestinian people, due to Israeli intransigence, and imperialist support of the state of the occupation and its Zionist programme, is still unable to liberate its land, exercise self-determination and establish its own fully sovereign independent national state and live like other peoples, enjoying its national sovereignty.

The Palestinian people in the current reality are paying a high price for the Zionist programme which could not have cleaved its way if it were not for Anglo-American support at the time of the mandate and the success of the United States in drawing the world to consent to the partition of Palestine, extremely unjustly and unfairly for the human, political and national rights of the people of Palestine. In the opinion of legal advisers, the resolution on partition (181) is illegal and is considered null and void because it stipulated the setting up of two states at the same time, yet the State of Israel came into being but not the State of Palestine. Consequently, it is still null and void and has not been implemented in full. Not to mention the fact that it was issued when the Palestinian people was still living under the mandate and its political rights were restricted and it was not given the opportunity to express its opinion through exerting its right to self-determination on its land.

Nevertheless, within the framework of legal debate, one can employ resolution 181 (as stipulated by the International Court of Justice in The Hague with its advisory decision about the racist segregation wall in the Occupied Territories of 67) as a weapon in de-

fending the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, in an independent state, and a return of the refugees to their homes.

2 - In the light of the Palestinian national renaissance within the contemporary revolution and the growth of national liberation movements around the world, the increasing influence of the Soviet Union and the decrease in the imperialist and colonial influence, the Palestinian question has attracted the interest of the international community, as represented by the return of the Palestinian question to the United Nations by virtue of its being a question of a people under occupation fighting on behalf of its freedom and independence.

The Palestinian national question has succeeded in imposing itself as a main item on the international community's agenda, as dozens of resolutions have been issued concerning it, the most important of which are:

1. 136 resolutions by the UN General Assembly.
2. More than 70 resolutions by the Security Council.
3. Resolutions of the Social and Economic Council and the Human Rights Committee.
4. UNESCO resolutions
5. World Health Organisation resolutions and others.

Thirdly: some of the most important resolutions are:

- Resolution 2535 (10/12/69/ General Assembly) recognition of the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights.
- Resolution 2649 (8/12/69/ General Assembly) recognition of the Palestinian people and its inalienable rights according to the UN charter.
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- Resolution 2963 (13/12/1972) Re-affirmation of the above in stronger terms.
- Resolution 3089 (7/12/1973) confirms that the Palestinian people has equal rights and has the right to self-determination on the basis of the UN charter.
- Resolution 3210 (14/10/1974) sent a signal when it stipulated that the Palestinian people is the principal party affected by the Palestinian question, following which the Palestine Liberation Organisation entered the UN as the representative of the Palestinian people,
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- Resolution 3236 (22/11/74) and its title “Resolution on the Rights of the Palestinian People” has become the fundamental and historical document on the Palestinian question, as it stipulated critical points of interest, amongst which was that the PLO was granted the capacity of observer member in the United Nations. This is a capacity without precedent, not previously granted to any liberation movement in the history of the United Nations. Amongst the most important things it stipulated was the fact that it confirmed the right of the Palestinian people to re-

claim its rights by every means in accordance with the purposes of the United Nations’ charter and its principles.

Also amongst the most important things determined by this resolution were the following:

- A. that the land of Palestine is a homeland for the Palestinian people
- B. that sovereignty over the land of Palestine is the property of the Palestinian people and this sovereignty is not affected by the Occupation.
- C. that the Palestinian people has equal rights just like the other peoples of the world
- D. that it is the right of the Palestinian people to reclaim a full restitution of its rights, by all means available within the framework of the United Nations’ charter.

The General Assembly also requested that the Security Council take legal measures against Israel should the General Assembly resolution not be implemented; however, the US veto is still rendering this null and void.

Fourthly: the right to self-determination and the need to struggle to obtain it.

The right to self-determination by its nature does not stop at being a mere legal right but is a right that transcends the bounds of United Nations’ resolutions and the bounds of counting on international support; besides this it gives peoples the right to struggle in all its forms to obtain this inalienable right.



This summary is based on a series of international principles, amongst them the right of the human being to defend himself and his homeland, its sovereignty and its land. This is what was affirmed by the UN General Assembly as a legitimate right of the Palestinian people in terms that are absolutely clear and without doubt; amongst them are the following resolutions:

1. Resolution 2621 (12/10/1970) affirmation of the right of colonised peoples to struggle by all means necessary in their grasp against colonial states which repress their aspirations. It is also their right to request assistance and receive support in confronting actions aimed at preventing peoples from obtaining their right to self-determination, freedom and independence.
2. Resolution 2326 (1974): The Palestinians, as a people with inalienable rights, including the right of return and of self-determination, possess all legitimate means to achieve their rights including military, political and national struggle and other kinds, if the other means fail.
3. Resolution 3070 (30/11/73) affirmed the right of peoples to use force and all means for liberation and, consequently, all forms of the Palestinian struggle, political, media, cultural, mass means and military ones; these are legitimate struggles approved by the United Nations in its charter and resolutions. Various different international laws also permit them, which undermines the claims of the imperialist powers allied with Israel such as the Unit-

ed States, the European states and others and their stigmatising of the struggles of the Palestinian people as terrorism when real terrorism, according to international legal logic, is force which prevents peoples from regaining their freedom and living their lives independently within the context of self-determination.

Fifthly: self-determination and the Oslo Agreement:

The national programme (the programme of return and self-determination and the independent state) constituted a translation into political, programme and struggle terms of the legitimate and inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people. Indeed, many of the United Nations' resolutions are based on what appeared in the Palestinian National Programme and what it contained by way of legitimate aspirations of a people under occupation, a dispossessed people in refugee camps, a people living in the shadow of a Zionist state with a system of fascist racist laws. It drew up the aims of the Palestinian struggle in its three areas. Under the umbrella of this programme the Palestinian national question made observable progress in its struggle and the Palestine Liberation Organisation stormed international forums bearing the rifle of the struggle in one hand and the national programme in the other.

However, the Oslo agreement constituted an overturning of the national programme, and likewise an overturning of the international legal resolutions relating to the Palestinian national question and which guaranteed

to the Palestinian people its full inalienable national rights to independence, sovereignty and return. It moved the question in its entirety on to negotiations which were unproductive on the Palestinian side, whilst forming a political cover for the practices of the Occupation and its settlement projects. The Palestinian people was deprived of its right to the struggle (viewed as terrorism) and its right to resort to international law with a claim that this constituted an infringement of the Oslo agreement and by its nature a unilateral measure which would affect the results of the negotiations for a permanent solution. At the same time, the Occupation authorities resorted to all forms of policies in the field which to a great extent played a part in creating facts on the ground, the nature of which would not only affect the negotiations on a lasting solution but would also cancel the need for such negotiations and impose a new reality on the Palestinian people and on the negotiator who was still, despite the passage of more than a quarter of a century, betting on the remnants of Oslo, and render null and void the resolutions of the national and central councils which, if implemented, would restore the national programme, the programme of resistance and intifada, and internationalise the question at the United Nations and the International Criminal Court.

#### Sixthly: summary

1. The Palestinian negotiator must abide by the resolutions of the national and central councils which stipulated ending work on the Oslo agreement and withdrawing recognition of the state of the Occupation,

stopping security cooperation with the army of the Occupation, dismantling the link with the Israeli economy, withdrawing the labour force from Israeli projects and reclaiming the inhabitants' register and land register from the civil administration of the Occupation and stopping trading using the Israeli shekel.

2. Bring back the national programme, by awakening the Intifada and all forms of popular resistance by means of switching to an all-out Intifada and national disobedience so that the Occupation packs up and leaves and dismantles the settlements.
3. Take the issue to the United Nations, as per the relevant legitimate resolutions and call for an international conference with a specific time ceiling and binding resolutions guaranteeing the Palestinian people its right to self-determination on its own land and to establish its independent national state with full sovereignty, with Jerusalem as its capital, and the return of the refugees to homes and property that they had fled from 1948 onwards.
4. In the self-same context, develop the struggle relations between the two sides of the Palestinian Homeland (48 + 67) by finding a struggle formula that will raise the levels of coordination, and unify the struggles, taking into account the political and legal particularities of each side.
5. Re-build the PLO on a coalition basis, and on the basis of national partnership and putting right relations between its

factions, ending the policy of standing alone and isolation, such that it becomes an overarching framework for all components of the Palestinian people and its social and political forces.

6. Draw up an Arab and international foreign policy using the struggle approach for the Palestinian people on the basis of all methods that serve the national cause, stripping the legitimacy from the Occupation, isolating the state of the Occupation by viewing it as a state of racial discrimination and removing it from membership of international community.

# Nadjet Hamdi

## Polisario – Western Sahara

Knowledge and understanding of the Western Sahara question is a matter that requires a fundamental understanding of the three following facts, because they constitute the legal and political aspects of it.

Firstly, the question of the Western Sahara is the issue of eradicating colonial rule, as the province was classified as a non-self-governing province by the United Nations in 1963 when the Western Sahara was still a Spanish colony. This means that the Sahrawi people are supposed to enjoy their inalienable right to self-determination and decide on the status of their country in a free, democratic and fair manner.

Secondly, the cause of the armed conflict in the Western Sahara is the double aggression of Morocco and Mauritania and the occupation of the Western Sahara resulting from this in 1975. This occupation is considered a violation of international law and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice issued in The Hague in 1975. We can mention that the opinion of the International Court of Justice concluded that there were no ties of sovereignty between Morocco and Mauritania on the one hand and the Western Sahara

on the other and that the right of the Saharan people to self-determination could be implemented, according to the UN General Assembly's resolution 1514 issued on 14 December 1960 containing a statement about guaranteeing independence to colonised countries and peoples. The text of this resolution corresponds with the situation of the Western Sahara by virtue of its being a non-self-governing territory and under colonial rule.

Thirdly, the outcome arising from this illegal occupation and from the violation of international law is a colonial war on the one hand and a legitimate resistance on the part of the Saharan people under the banner of the Polisario Front on the other.

These three facts constitute the complete framework for understanding the true nature of the conflict about the Western Sahara in its legal and political aspects. From there one can reach the substance of enabling a true and just lasting solution to the question.

## **The Saharan question and the United Nations Organisation**

The United Nations decreed at the outset of its taking up the issue of the Western Sahara at the beginning of the sixties in the last century the necessity of completing the operation of eradicating colonial rule from the region in accordance with the United Nations charter and its laws.

On 07 December 1963 Spain (the colonial power at the time) accepted the implementation of the principle of the region's self-determination and at that time assiduously sent in annual reports about the state of its colony, in compliance with the United Nations' request. In 1965 the General Assembly requested Spain, the power governing the region, to take the necessary measures to eradicate colonial rule from the Western Sahara. It was a request repeated in subsequent UN resolutions. All these resolutions stipulated the call to the governing power (Spain) to provide the necessary conditions to guarantee that the inhabitants of the Western Sahara could exert their right to self-determination and independence and create a suitable political climate for a referendum to be held on the basis of guaranteeing freedom, democracy and impartiality. Spain was to provide the necessary facilitations for the United Nations' mission so that it could play a part in organising the referendum and Spain would refrain from any action that would delay the work to put an end to colonial rule.

Since the sixties and to this day, the UN has been working assiduously to issue annual res-

olutions, whether at the level of its General Assembly or in the Security Council, all of them stipulating the need to implement the principle of self-determination in the Western Sahara. Despite all those legal stipulations, Spain has not performed its legal obligation or its moral duty to the Sahrawi people and their land like the other colonial powers but instead threw them both into a spiral of instability via an illegal agreement joining it to Morocco and the regime of Mokhtar Ould Daddah in Mauritania, by means of which the province was divided between the two neighbouring countries in return for Spain obtaining shares of the natural resources.

According to international law, Spain remains administratively responsible for the province because this agreement does not cancel its administrative authority over it. Likewise, the agreement did not hand over sovereignty to any of the parties signing it.

The new colonial power (Morocco) also continued with its role of being obdurate and blocking the course of international law and the course of the settlement in the Western Sahara which led to many of the developments in dealing with the question. However, these developments never deflected the issue from the principle of getting rid of colonial rule.

In order for the United Nations to determine the legal situation of the Western Sahara, it resorted to requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the Moroccan and Mauritanian claims to the province and the effect of those claims

– if proven – on the principle of self-determination. The famous advisory opinion of the Court was issued on 16 October 1975. It demanded the immediate organisation of a referendum on self-determination and independence and at the same time vehemently rejected all the Moroccan claims concerning the Western Sahara. Despite the court's clearly and unequivocally refuting Morocco's claims to sovereignty over the Western Sahara, Morocco then invaded and occupied parts of the province by force on 31 October 1975, in clear violation of its obligations to implement the charters of the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity and thus violently blocking the process to get rid of colonial rule.

Over the past 28 years Morocco has not only had the audacity to block the self-determination referendum decreed by the United Nations and the negotiations sponsored between the two parties to the conflict but has dared to implement permanent expansionist policies aimed at illegally changing the current situation in parts of the Sahrawi Republic under its military occupation and for which the United Nations does not acknowledge any sovereignty or legal authority on the part of Morocco over the Sahrawi Republic. These practices include, by way of examples which are by no means exhaustive, the reinforcing of the Moroccan military presence, the holding of elections and the organising of conferences by the Crans Montana Forum in the occupied territories of the Western Sahara and the moving of thousands of Moroccan citizens to the province in order to change

its demographic nature and its administrative composition.

In this regard, since its occupation of the Western Sahara on 31 October 1975, Morocco has been perpetrating widespread violations of human rights against Sahrawi civilians in the occupied parts of the province.

Just like the repressive and discriminatory policies which the apartheid regime adopted in South Africa, Morocco has adopted a systematic and chauvinist policy and genocide in the occupied Sahrawi territories, with the aim of not only occupying the land by force but also of exterminating the people of the province using all means. The human rights violations which the Moroccan authorities are practising include the disappearing of Sahrawi human rights activists, the torture of prisoners of conscience, arbitrary detention, police brutality, intimidation and extrajudicial execution. The occupied territories in their entirety are still under a military blockade and a complete media blackout at a time when the Moroccan authorities are preventing non-governmental organisations and the international media and observers from entering the province. These continuous human rights violations have been documented by numerous international and African human rights organisations and the Secretary General has cited them in his reports about the Western Sahara.

Morocco is continuing its greedy exploitation of the Western Sahara's natural resources illegally with the connivance, for the most part, of foreign entities, in a blatant violation of the

permanent sovereignty of the Sahrawi people over their natural resources. It is important to stress that the legal opinion of the African Union from 2015 made clear that the natural resources of the Western Sahara are the property of the Sahrawi people and that Morocco does not have the right to prospect for and exploit any natural resources, renewable or non-renewable, in the occupied territories of the Western Sahara, or to sign agreements/contracts with third parties regarding these resources.

It is also important to mention the historic ruling issued by the European Union's Court of Justice in December 2016 which ruled that – in line with the principle of self-determination – the European Union and the Kingdom of Morocco cannot include, in any form whatsoever, the Western Sahara in their trading relations without the prior consent of the Sahrawi people. On 27 February 2018 the same court issued another ruling establishing conclusively that the Western Sahara is not part of Morocco and that the agreements signed between the European Union and Morocco cannot be applied to the territories of the Western Sahara or to its territorial waters. Morocco is still constructing the wall of shame that extends a distance of 2700 kilometres and is protected by more than 7 million anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines, despite the ceasefire which is monitored by the United Nations in the Western Sahara and which is in force and has been so for more than two decades.

## **The Sahrawi Resistance to the Occupation**

In confronting the delaying tactics which the Moroccan state has been pursuing in order to block the work to end colonial rule in the province, the Sahrawis have continued, under the banner of their legal and sole representative, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and the Rio de Oro – the Polisario, their heroic resistance to the colonial presence and then the Moroccan occupation. This occupation that rendered destitute and killed thousands of Sahrawis and bombed them with napalm and white phosphorus in the seventies of the last century and is still violating the most basic of their human and political rights.

Despite the challenges of migration and occupation, the Sahrawi Republic, a founding member state of the African Union, has established a modern society aspiring to the values of social justice, democracy, equality between the sexes, tolerance and the rule of law and is reinforcing them. The Sahrawi people can be justly proud that they have established this society based on equality where each citizen can play a full part in public affairs and where women can perform a fundamental role in all aspects of economic, social and political life.

- The free Sahrawi territories, over which the Democratic Sahrawi Arab Republic exerts full sovereignty, have gained increasing importance in the public policy of the Sahrawi government which is exerting major efforts to provide the infrastructure and security necessary to Sahrawi citizens who live in those areas.



- The Sahrawi Republic is also exerting continuous efforts, in coordination with friendly and neighbouring countries, to deter and prevent any illegal activities connected with international organised crime and other security threats. In view of the great expertise of its armed forces, the Sahrawi Republic has played an effective part in reinforcing and activating the regional security framework in line with its obligations as a member state of the African Union. It has also continually strengthened its relations with a large number of friendly countries in the world. Especially in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean region, Asia and the South East Pacific.

### **The latest developments**

On 27 April 2018, the UN Security Council adopted resolution number 2414, by virtue of which the mandate of the UN Mission for the Referendum (MINURSO) in Western Sahara was extended for a period of six months and we are still hoping that this time the Security Council will offer its full support to the personal envoy of the UN Secretary General, Mr Horst Köhler, in his efforts aimed at getting the negotiations back on course and moving them towards their ultimate goal represented in reaching a lasting, just and peaceful solution to the question of eradicating colonial rule in the Western Sahara in line with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and of the Organisation for African Unity/the African Union .

It is worth referring to the fact that the Moroccan escalation and its proceeding ruthlessly to force, as a whole is nothing but another cycle in the cycles of the policy of extortion and defiant behaviour, which has so far not been met, unfortunately, by the required strong response on the part of the UN Security Council. This includes, by way of example, of which there are many, the rejection by Morocco of human rights monitoring within the context of the task of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), the expulsion of the civilian component of the mission, including a mission of African Union observers, an attempt to change the status quo in the Guerguerat' district, and imposing the carrying of Moroccan number plates on the UN mission vehicles, as well as stamping the passports of the mission's officials upon their entering and leaving the Western Sahara, and continually challenging the authority of the MINURSO mission on the scope of its mission.

In the absence of a strong response from the UN and the international community to Morocco's expansionist policies in the Western Sahara, the existing occupation authority is continuing its practices with impunity. It is illegally attempting expansion by force to annex free territories from the Sahrawi Republic. There is no doubt that this position is considered a defiance of international law and of the United Nations' doctrine on eradicating colonial rule. Ultimately, it could undermine the credibility of the United Nations and its authority in dealing with the question of the Western Sahara. The existing occupation authority is still not sparing any effort in under-

mining the inalienable right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination and independence, and in this has resorted to continual manipulation, disinformation, extortion and terrorising. Therefore, the United Nations and the international community as a whole must shoulder their responsibilities and send a strong message to Morocco informing it that the inalienable right of peoples to self-determination and independence cannot be forever a hostage to the obduracy of an occupying state that has repeatedly failed to meet its international obligations.

- The complete eradication of colonial rule from the Western Sahara by guaranteeing the inalienable right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination and independence will certainly give an additional boost to the ongoing efforts aimed at confronting the challenges of peace and security on the continent. It will also be an important starting point for achieving the desired regional and continental integration, which is unavoidable for a unified, peaceful and flourishing Africa.

Here one ought to mention the fact that the younger generation no longer has too much expectation in the light of the silencing of the media, Moroccan policy and unconditional backing from Paris whose interest and influence has prevailed over the principles for which the French revolution occurred. The question which presents itself remains and that is: how long will the patience of the Sahrawi younger generation continue when they put their trust in the international community but its trust was met by Morocco's intransi-

gence and the United Nations' weakness over the dossier?

Finally, I affirm that our best bet to win the battle and to overcome the challenges of this stage is the strength and determination of our people to seize their legal right to freedom and independence, deriving from belief in the legitimacy and justice of our cause, and I cannot fail to take this opportunity to direct a call to all comrades to support the struggle of the Sahrawi people who are still encountering colonialist aggression which enjoys the support of expansionist imperialist forces who are still nostalgic for the age of colonialism, the exploitation of peoples and the plundering of their treasures.

Anna Mikkola • Kamal Hamdan  
Aroub Al Masri • Mar Sabé

# **IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEES: NARRATIVES ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN**

EU policies increasing oppression,  
drowning and misery of migrants

Narratives from the region

Syrian refugees, reconstruction  
and prospects of return



# Anna Mikkola

Left Alliance – Finland

I was recently in Tunisia, visiting an old friend who works for the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) there, who, as you know, assist governments with returning migrants, among other things. On the same visit I also met with some NGOs, operating in the field of enhancing border management and data collection, and are funded by the EU – mostly the EU emergency trust fund for Africa. As I am sure you are aware, this is technically development cooperation money that is being used to curb unwanted or so called illegal (unregulated) migration to the EU from North Africa.

The EU's interest in funding such operations along its borders in the Mediterranean is of course purely and simply to stop irregular migration, whatever its root causes may be. This overall policy is not only out dated and poorly suited for the political realities of the late 2010s of those Mediterranean countries where irregular migration originates – and of course, whenever EU (or individual member state) funded border management succeeds in blocking a route, the route will merely shift to another place. This has to my understanding happened now for instance to the route from Libya to Italy, where the Northern League is claiming the significant reduction in migration flows to

the country a political victory – but the route has merely shifted westwards, to Spain.

So, using development cooperation funds to control migration flows is not addressing the root causes of migration; which, depending on the country in question, range of course from unemployment and lack of opportunities to human rights violations, conflicts and war – conflicts and war where the EU more often than not is actually one of the players as well. That is to say, from the EU's perspective stopping irregular migration is the key point, assessing whether migrants have need for refugee status or secondary protection comes somewhere far after that. And of course, using development cooperation funds to develop the economic and social realities of origin countries is also secondary.

The failure of the EU's approach is particularly evident in how it chooses to treat young, still maybe fragile democracies, or democracies still in the making, along its borders: the EU's security oriented framework for controlling all migration completely undermines and fails to take into account the kind of societies it tries to dictate policy to – these societies and governments might not be in any position to control

emigration in the way EU would like them to. In a way, from the EU's perspective on migration, it would actually be best if its neighbouring countries were all dictatorships or at least quite authoritarian, because then the EU could solve the irregular migration "problem" merely with some old fashioned diplomacy – i.e. money – indeed much like it has done with Turkey.

This is very evident for instance now that the EUNAVFOR MED or Operation Sophia has been discontinued. This was an EU military operation in the Mediterranean, which in its early days at least carried out rescue operations as well as trying to control smuggling. There was a lot of pressure from Italy to cease the operation, and that was now done, with the message that the tasks carried out by the EU will in the future rest in the hands of Libyan border control forces, despite the numerous reports of human rights violations and violence taking place in the operations of those forces.

One of the EU policy suggestions that are still regularly brought up in the discourse at least in Northern Europe is the idea of reception centres that would not be in the EU, but in the neighbouring countries. Somehow this idea seems to live on, despite no neighbouring country actually consenting to the plan. Outsourcing the whole affair is a fundamentally EU thing to try and do – especially since within the EU, the member states are incapable of agreeing on how to deal with irregular migration with a common policy.

Oppressive EU practices in treating migrants and especially refugees are not limited to the Mediterranean. I know this is a Mediterranean

conference, but since I am from a Nordic country and since I think some comparison could be enlightening as well, I think I will speak a little bit about what's going on in the North.

During the 2015 so called refugee crisis many Northern European countries implemented border controls, which actually continue to this day. These would be countries such as Austria, Germany, Denmark and Sweden. This is also de facto reality in France, which has been in a state of emergency due to an increased terrorism threat since 2015. With these re-established and continuing to be in place border controls these countries are basically violating at least the spirit of the Schengen treaty, but also taking measures to ensure that the Mediterranean migration issue stays in the Mediterranean countries as much as possible.

Not only that, Northern European countries have taken measures in immigrant policies – that is to say how they treat migrants already in the country – which aim to make them less desirable as destinations, but of course translate into questionable human rights situations.

Denmark has officially confirmed a policy of reducing asylum seekers into the country, because they want to save money – this is outspoken official policy. It is unclear exactly how this reduction is going to be realised. At the same time, Denmark has also decided to put those asylum seekers, who have received a negative asylum decision but who according to Danish laws cannot be forcefully returned to their country of origin due to the high probability of them facing torture or death, on a small island in southern Denmark where they will have no

uncontrolled contact with the rest of the country. These kind of immigrants are not wanted in Denmark and they have to understand it, the Danish migration minister has said.

In Sweden, the reaction to the so called refugee crisis, in addition to implementing border controls, was to tighten legislation so that asylum seekers and their family members now have a restricted possibility to obtain a permanent status in Sweden. According to the new policy, permanent status is now tied to integration goals, with “economic self-sufficiency” as a pre-requisite - which is obviously in conflict with conventional thinking on asylum, or even international treaties.

So in Northern Europe European oppressive policies are twofold: first trying to stop immigration in the first place, and then making immigrants’ lives difficult if they do happen to make it.

In immigrant policy, the same happened in Finland: tightening of asylum and family reunification regulations. Most asylum seekers arrive in Finland via Sweden, but in 2015-2016 a total of 1700 asylum seekers crossed the Russian-Finnish border into Finland. Yes, I imagine that is a hilarious number here in a Mediterranean conference, but in Finland it caused a widespread panic: the Russian border is leaking, and there’s about 1400 kilometres of it, all land. So the Finnish state did what any other EU country would have done: sent high level administrators and top politicians to Moscow to discuss it, among other things like energy policy, and topped it all with a presidential call. And so the “problem” ended. So this was a pure old fashioned exer-

cise with an authoritarian neighbouring country with the tools to control migration flows both within it and out of it. Naturally there was very little concern with what happens to the actual asylum seekers in Russia now.

Migration patterns and their underlying dynamics are a complex and constantly shifting matter. Understanding them and appreciating their different natures while respecting human rights above all is key to any sustainable policy. Partly the EU’s oppressive and restrictive border policy is a direct result of the the failure of an EU level asylum policy: The Schengen Area, the Dublin Regulation, and the burden-sharing system all spectacularly failed in 2015-2016, creating a situation where a number of countries simply ignored EU regulations on asylum, and only a handful of countries receive the vast majority of asylum seekers and irregular migrants in general. Whether those regulations were ideal to start with is a different matter, what the crisis demonstrated was that national interest superceded co-operation almost immediately, and the EU basically was divided into two (or maybe 3) groups of countries refusing to understand each other on the matter.

Currently there are the Southern EU states, receiving most of the migrants and each struggling in their own way to cope with the numbers, and the Northern EU states who have basically closed their borders and largely opted for maximising the obstacles immigrants face in integrating in order to affect the general will to even try and move there. This is a rough generalisation of course. This of course all then goes hand in hand with the rising popularity of the extreme right.

It is my personal opinion that in the long term the only solution to the EU's current failing policies that disrespect human life and human conditions, is an actual common EU asylum and migration policy, but in the complete opposite direction than the one the EU member states seem to be going for in their willingness to please the far right. That is, a common policy based on and directed by human rights and a willingness to understand root causes and address them insofar as they create issues both for origin and destination countries, a policy that allows enough legal routes into Europe and of course a policy that actually uses EU money on supporting democracies and rebuilding in neighbouring countries instead of undermining them.



# Kamal Hamdan

Economist – Lebanon

## **1 – Introduction: about the phenomenon of the worsening “refugee crisis” globally as a result of the failure of neoliberalism?**

In its modern history the world has not witnessed a worsening in the size of exodus crises and the flight of populations to the extent that it has witnessed during the past decade according to the evidence from statistical data issued by international organisations affected by immigration and refugee issues in the world. One must not hesitate to say that the growth in this phenomenon has formed – in one of its basic aspects – an indivisible part of the consequences of the failure of universal neoliberal policies, and in their local form, which have destroyed the economic systems existing in countries of the South – with the collusion of the “elites” of these countries – and dismantled the social fabric associated with them and unleashed a rise in the rates of exploitation and unemployment, especially amongst the young. This has resulted in them becoming convinced that the present and the future are hopeless, to the extent that there are no longer any alternatives but for deadly travelling across borders and seas. This is the case with the migrations taking place for more than a decade across the Mediter-

anean basin. When these limiting economic factors coincide with other factors connected with the breaking out of political and civil conflicts inside the countries of the South, the tragic picture of emigrations and migrations becomes more complete in their volumes and effects.

Neoliberal policies and their high social costs have given prominence to trends amongst the inhabitants of the countries of the South, varying between two extremes fraught with unlimited social misery and uncalculated existential risks: the first extreme, the tendency of inhabitants – especially in Africa – to forms of withdrawal and isolation within what is left of the structure of the dismantled local economy and polarised on class lines incapable of producing goods and services for exchange. The second extreme is their tendency to risk emigrating in search of work opportunities and an alternative life amidst dangers and fears of dying daily awaiting them on the borders of the destination countries and their northern shores. Often what has happened and is happening is that this bitter reality is hushed up and its deep historical structural factors, which are embodied in the imposition of absolute economic liberation policies,

the universalisation of structural correction programmes and the undermining the role of the centralised state.

The ruling capitalist organisations in the destination countries are aware that the prime motivator for international migration is economic, most countries lose migrants to due to the effects of imperialist control and their local consequences. Sustaining this control requires in all circumstances expansion to be continued by getting their hands by all means on the capabilities and resources of the countries from which the refugees are pouring, together with seeking to become stronger by freeing the trade of goods, services and the movement of capital but without permitting the migrants to stay in the states of the centre. This position of rejection is not only linked to considerations about differing ethnicities, identities and their challenges to the social fabric but is also linked with the fact that the cost of supporting the refugees and taking care of them in the countries in question is more than ten times the cost in their original countries. All the history of the relationship between states of the European Union and the South and West of the Mediterranean bear witness in one way or another in this manner of the severe consequences produced by neoliberal policies combined with pushing hard without equal conditions towards making logic prevail and the mechanisms of the free market in southern countries and the resurrection of racist currents in western societies.

## **2 – Lebanon and the size of the migration phenomenon and diverse evidence of it:**

With regard to Lebanon, the most striking challenge is in the very high rise in Syrian migration it has seen, amounting currently to approximately a million migrants, that is, something representing more than a quarter of the total number of residents in Lebanon, most of which was achieved during a record time period of no more than two years (2012 – 2014) something which no country in the world has seen the like of in modern times. One should also bear in mind that the differing estimates for the number of Syrian migrants raise legitimate questions as to what extent they include all migrants, the ones registered by the state and international organisations or the unregistered, and the extent to which they are also included in the central stock of Syrian workers who were accustomed to working in Lebanon a long time before the Syrian crisis erupted. Also, the extent to which the stability of the waves of migration or lack of their stability following the course of the Syrian conflict and its effect on the movement of the migrants from/to Lebanon in general. This is in addition to the extent they have taken into account the migration of Lebanese and Palestinians the other way, from Syria to Lebanon. In the international comparisons, the volume of the Syrian migration or exodus to Lebanon relatively-speaking would represent approx. 80 million immigrants or migrants if it were in a country such as the United States of America or 190 million if to a continent such as the European continent.

### **3 – Some basic characteristics of the Syrian migrants to Lebanon**

A social mix formed from a majority of workers and poor or below average social groups have come from the areas of the conflict, especially from the rural areas which were paying a heavy price for the liberal policies imposed which the Syrian government approved at the start of the first decade of the third millennium. These groups to a great extent appear weak and fragile, the whole family has this appearance, the children and women and those with special needs are affected in particular. These form approximately 70% of a total number of migrants. More than a third of the migrants – half of them are children – are living in crowded places under deplorable housing conditions lacking basic public services and facilities: water, electricity and sewerage, not to mention health and education services. The number of those migrants who are living in small improvised shanty camps is estimated at approximately 190,000 whilst approximately two thirds of the migrant families rely on various forms of residential renting. In the past year (2018) an increasing number of Syrian refugees have been forced to move from their places of residence to live in places not fit for habitation due to their increased poverty and being unable to pay their rent. Reference is made to the fact that polarisation and distribution areas for the Syrian migrants to Lebanon coincide more or less completely with the map for the distribution of the poor sections of Lebanese society, that is, in the outlying governorates (more than 70% live in the Beqaa', the North and the South) and in pockets of poverty around the main towns

and within them. This is what poses a special kind of task for the Lebanese Left in its way of dealing with this precise question, especially regarding the Syrians working for pay so that the “conflict over scarcity” – given the central authority’s weakness and capital interests in control – does not turn into a bitter war between the poor workers themselves, the Syrians amongst them and the Lebanese.

### **4 – On the size of the migrants’ social and economic bill in Lebanon:**

It is difficult to distinguish accurately between the effect of the Syrian crisis and that of the Arab regional crisis on the Lebanese economy, knowing that deep elements of the economic crisis in Lebanon were in existence and atrociously so before the events erupted in the region. The regional crisis and its repercussions have played a part in exacerbating this crisis and have led to Lebanon losing a percentage of the remittances coming in from Lebanese expat workers and, more seriously, it has also lost a significant portion (approximately 40%) of the direct foreign investments and in the flow of capital as well as in exports, especially of services to neighbouring countries, particularly to the Gulf countries. Estimates of the value of the cumulative losses in domestic production since 2011 have varied between 15 billion dollars and 18 billion, according to official Lebanese sources. At the same time this decline in outflows was accompanied by an increase in the number of the unemployed to the tune of approximately 220,000 more unemployed, so that the unemployment rate in Lebanon is currently 20%. It also coincided with approx-

imately 170,000 additional Lebanese joining the army of the poor in Lebanon so that their total number now exceeds the million threshold. In addition to the above, the public deficit has grown uncontrollably, so that it now represents more than 10% of gross domestic product, whilst the percentage of public debt has crossed the threshold of 150% of GDP. The most salient repercussions of the crisis have been seen in the extraordinary increased pressures on the infrastructure networks and basic public services where these networks are not being maintained and developed, and the increased additional demographic weight associated with the Syrian migration crisis.

However, the most prominent negative results associated with the crisis are those associated with the Syrians' migration resulting in the parallel increase in the informal labour supply because of them. Bearing in mind that Lebanon was originally suffering from high unemployment rates (11% in 2010, that is, on the eve of the Syrian crisis, according to the World Bank study) and from an annual gap between total supply and total demand for labour which was more than 50% over the minimum estimate. Currently there is unprecedented competition in the labour market between poor Lebanese labourers and poor Syrian workers, with the Lebanese bourgeoisie benefiting from this competition, making it easier for them to substitute cheap non-Lebanese labour – especially Syrian – to replace Lebanese labour which is pricier. This factor is playing the role of a “time bomb” set to exacerbate everything affecting the migration crisis and its repercussions for Lebanon the longer the doors remain quasi-closed to the

orderly return of specific groups of Lebanese expats to the Gulf countries due to political and sectarian calculations in these states connected with the conflicts in the region, especially the Saudi-Iranian conflict.

## **5 – On the obligations arising from international donors regarding the migrants:**

It is well-known that annual meetings of the international aid-giving organisations – especially the European ones, not to mention the host countries – are held in Brussels to discuss the volume and type of support allocated to the Syrian migrants and the host countries. The last one was convened on 12 March 2019. Despite what was issued by these meetings about support obligations in principle, what has actually been achieved for Lebanon up to September 2018 meant that official Lebanese circles have not received more than 52% of the finance decided on within the framework of “The response plan for the refugee crisis” (3RP) signed by Lebanon and certain international bodies. The majority of the support is concentrated on financing the urgent aid work for the refugees (and partly for the hosts) which covers the minimum food, health, educational and housing requirements. By contrast, only very little was allocated for development purposes. In the light of previous support policies, there are no strong guarantees that the funding gap will be filled in the near future even after the last Brussels meeting decided on the sum of 6 billion dollars for the Syrian migration dossier and the states hosting them in the region, including Lebanon. In parallel with that, the chances of the Syrian refugees obtaining sup-

port from members of their families remaining in Syria are receding because the latest reports indicate that three quarters of Syria's inhabitants are currently in need of support and humanitarian aid, including 6 million refugees inside Syrian territory itself. Generally, it is becoming apparent that the basic tendencies of international support policies by and large (and Western European in particular) remain governed until now by the following formulae: controlling or preventing refugees from being absorbed into western countries, in the Central Powers, action – via distributing small amounts of financial support – to keep them in the host countries, and opposing or not facilitating their safe return to the areas ready to receive them in their countries, with the tendency towards using these trends as a card in negotiations for a political solution to the crisis.

## **6 – On the background and interests in the international politicising of the Syrian refugees' dossier:**

The dossier of the Syrian refugees has become a pivotal area in which international, regional and Arab, as well as Lebanese, “players” are attempting to posture, each to the extent of their abilities and starting out from the angle they believe will serve their strategic interests, especially in a historic period during which the world is moving by degrees (even if amidst volatilities and resistances) – from a unipolar order – revolving around the United States - to a multipolar order, amidst the resurgence of embryonic forms of the Cold War and the appearance of relative cracks in international alliances.

**From the US angle:** strategic courses with clear characteristics are prominent, the most prominent of which is the “deal of the century” and the unprecedented support for Israel's expansionist practices (such as the US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and removing the description of occupied from the Syrian Golan region), and the attempt to unleash all forms of enduring normalisation between Israel and the Arab states, starting with the Gulf states. Following the change in the situation in the Syrian military arena, the US administration is endeavouring to keep varied and interconnected working papers, amongst these are: blocking the return of the Syrian refugees to their country in an attempt to impose a solution to the Syrian crisis in line with American interests and those of its allies in the region, increasing differences between Turkey and Iran and Russia on the issue of resolving (or not resolving) the dossier of Idlib and the North East of Syria and the intensifying the policy of sanctions and the blockade directed at Syria and Russia and especially Iran, not to mention continuing to point out the danger of partitioning Syria and the federalisation of Iraq and the continuation of the war on Yemen and making active use of the carrot and stick policy towards Lebanon that they rely on.

**From the European angle:** The lack of clarity and the confusion in the positions and the great disparity in interests, as well as the semi-permanent tendency to join the US position, the intensification of the social and economic crises in this continent, all of these are factors playing a part in increasing the cracks and weakening the effectiveness of the



European role in the region's crises, despite the fact that Europe constitutes the geopolitical and cultural neighbour closest to this region from an historical point of view.

**As regards the axis opposed to US policy:**

it continues to accumulate a pile of strong cards, by their nature of an obstructive nature, and perhaps will thwart the plans of the US administration in the medium term. On the one hand Russia has anchored its geopolitical positions in Syrian and other countries in the region via its direct military presence and the intensification of its collaboration in many forms with these countries and its clear positioning on the warm Syrian shores of the Mediterranean, in addition to its involvement in huge and promising projects in the sphere of oil- and gas-based energy in Lebanon, Syria and Iran. On the other hand, Iran - despite the policy of blockade and stringent economic sanctions - has managed to achieve a geopolitical breach by being able to connect its land borders to Syrian, Iraqi and Lebanese territory, including sites with strategic importance in any potential confrontation with Israel. From a third direction, the rocket arsenal and the deterrent force which the resistance in Lebanon has come to possess have grown greatly, including smart missiles ... in the light of these facts, the chances of enabling the translation of these trump cards in the course of the conflict in the region, including the facilitation of the safe and gradual return of the Syrian refugees to their homeland, are increasing especially after the Russians had prepared a detailed programme for this purpose enjoying the support of a not insignificant number of Arab and regional countries

affected (even if it is still facing many obstacles).

**7 - On the background to the politicisation in Lebanon:**

It seems that the positions of the ruling Lebanese political spectrum is divided vis-à-vis the dossier on the return of the Syrian migrants; this division is governed by a number of intersecting dimensions and standards and can be summarised on three levels:

- A part of the division is linked with the conflicting alignments of each of these Lebanese factions towards the conflict going on between the two opposing axes in the region, the axis of the US and its allies on the one hand, and the Russian-Iranian-Syrian one on the other hand. One team from the Lebanese factions is endeavouring to speed up the return of the refugees, aware of the internal repercussions to this thorny dossier such as a natural crowning for the change in the balance of power on the ground inside Syria. In contrast, the other team is trying to delay this return and to use it as a card in the service of its particular internal interests and also in service of the interests of its regional allies in the theatres of confrontation in the numerous troubles going on in the region.
- As regards the second part of the division, it goes back to the internal parties gambling on employing the Syrians living in the region as a tool to influence the development of the precise (and chang-

ing) demographic balances which, from the historical angle, were, and are still, constituting a nightmare for many of the Lebanese political powers whose influence and power are derived directly from the spread of their religious and sectarian “masses”, and the level of their mobilisation and ideologicalisation to project identities and narrow-mindedness without “internationalism”.

- However, there is a third dimension to the division, attributable to direct and clear class interests, as a basic group of hard core Lebanese bourgeoisie are benefiting from the continued presence of this terrible amount of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, with the intention of keeping high levels of consumer imports to ensure the needs of a million Syrian refugees (that is, one million extra consumers) are met, and also with the intention of maintaining the factors which reduce the purchasing power of a wide section of the Lebanese workers by the fact that open and hidden competition is taking place in the labour market between the Lebanese poor and Syrian poor.

The greatest thing feeding the factors of Lebanese division is the reckless and direct US interference in the affairs of this country, which has recently been tending to escalate from the exertion of pressure on Lebanon at Brussels the ministerial conference (held at the beginning of March 2019) with the intention of discouraging a request for a programme for the return of the Syrian refugees, not to mention repressing its desire to take

part in the workshop on the reconstruction of Syria, to the intensification of the bundle of penalties and the financial, economic and political pressure which the US administration claims is directed at Hizbullah whereas they have negative repercussions on the Lebanese economy as a whole and on a wide range of groups in Lebanese society, to an influx of US envoys to Lebanon within a few weeks, culminating with a visit by the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, which openly revealed the attempt to place impositions on Lebanon. It confirmed the blatant US bias in favour of Israel in the operation to redraw the borders of the marine area belonging to each of Lebanon and Israel. Some European governments are taking part in the building up of this western pressure on Lebanon via the British decision to consider both the political and military wings of Hizbullah a terrorist organisation in as well as the repeated French warnings to Lebanese officials of the likelihood that the financial commitments that had previously been decided on at the CEDRE conference (March 2018) would be frozen.

## **8 – The migration dossier and the tasks of the leftist powers in the region:**

The leftist and democratic powers and movements in Lebanon and the Mediterranean region are called upon to coordinate and activate their joint efforts in order to put an end to the risks of the widening of the circle of armed conflicts and wars in the vital part of the world, which is considered to be a point of connection between the East and West. Efforts must be aimed in the direction of fundamental priorities, amongst which are:

- Pressure on the governments of countries affected by the Syrian crisis – South of the Mediterranean and North of it – in order to speed up the safe return of the refugees to the Syrian areas in which the armed confrontations have come to an end, with no insistence on tying this return to the final political solution or producing a reconstruction operation. This pressure should take place at the same time as the priority of directing any Syrian construction effort and any international support available to the re-construction and repair of the infrastructure and housing in the areas for the return itself. It is also imperative that there should be an outcry against the continuation of the severe economic sanctions on Syria, which the Syrian people in general, but especially the workers and low social groups, consider the number one burden they have to bear.
- Urgent efforts – with the collapse and defeat of the evil extremist forces and their protectors – to enfold this return within the framework of the most general and most comprehensive efforts aimed at producing a political solution to the Syrian crisis. This is a solution which must preserve the unity of Syria's territories, its people, its state, its institutions and its very diverse social fabric. It must respect public, personal and political freedoms and recognise the legitimate and full rights of minorities and repair the parliamentary, municipal and union bases of representation, and guarantee democratic participation in political life on the basis of a more developed and transparent constitution.
- Encouraging the positions of the Lebanese social and political personalities and communities which demand placing the return of the migrants at the heart of the priorities, in view of their acute repercussions on the Lebanese situation as per what has appeared in this paper. This means supporting Lebanon in its efforts to neutralise this burning dossier from the attempts employed politically by external forces engaged in the Syrian crisis and the region's crises in general. In addition to this, to support Lebanon in its request to participate in the workshop for rebuilding Syria on condition that this participation is focussed using productive Lebanese human resources, expertise and capacities and not using the logic of middlemen, intermediaries and dubious super deals.
- To clearly condemn the projects of an hegemonic nature which the US administration and the European extreme right and their allies in the region keep launching, especially the deal of the century project and what results from the United States moving its embassy to occupied Jerusalem and its unilateral declaration of accepting Israel's annexation of the Syrian Golan. This matter constitutes a clear challenge for all the international resolutions and conventions connected with it. Also, to condemn the US political and economic pressures on Lebanon and support the rights of this country to its waters and its resources situated on the lines drawing up the borders between it and Israel.



# Aroub Al Masri

Party of Popular Will – Syria

## **The return of the refugees as a national dossier**

The return of the Syrian refugees... one of the principle headlines that has come to the surface since the summer of 2018 after Russia announced its initiative for the return of approximately 1.5 million refugees who have expressed their wish to return from the region at least. And, of course, in opposition to the Russian position, there is the Western position which, as in the re-construction ... is laying down restrictions and conditions for its involvement and approval for the operation to return the Syrian refugees to their country! The United Nations, and behind it, the Western position, primarily the United States and the states of Western Europe, are all repeating a united position on the question of the return of the Syrian refugees to their country: if it is tied in to the political process in Syria and with conditions in place for return to be voluntary as well as security for the returning refugees. This position might seem to be “humanitarian” in form to a certain extent, and subject to the restrictions of the UNHCR but behind this “humanitarian” position there is a great deal of politicisation. The dossier of the Syrian refugees is a proper political dossier.

## **Local inflexibility is blocking return**

The return of the refugees is a dossier which will take precedence over the other dossiers, specifically those dealing with terrorism and with the US military presence East of the Euphrates. However, this dossier actually requires major changes inside Syria, at the service and economic level and at the democratic political level. Indeed, these people require a whole group of guarantees: for the return to their places, what is meant by the minimum limit of equipping them and providing services to them, the guarantee of their safety, the deletion of the security dossiers, and the achieving of political settlements on their status where the return is actually a risk for them. Solving this national dossier and moving it away from Western international investment for blocking the solution requires a national mentality in the country with a wide view and not an extremist one, this is what the complete solution of the Syrian crisis requires, and it is imperative that the solution is imposed on the forces of local extremism as well as on the West.

The number of Syrian refugees tops 6 million, the majority of them in the region are primar-

ily in Turkey and then in Lebanon, then Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. This is in addition to the significant number of Syrian refugees in Europe amounting to near enough one million refugees.

This means that the number of refugees is approximately half the number of Syrians present in their own country who number just over 18 million according to international estimates.

### **Using the marginalisation of refugees for escalation purposes**

The number of Syrian refugees, amounting to nearly a quarter of all Syrians, means that those people are a significant bloc of people, subject in the limitations of their life and the fate of their stability to all the circumstances, laws and the political changes in the international treatment of the refugee dossier. The circumstances of these people improve with the improved flow of international aid, professed via politicised intermediaries mostly. Their conditions also deteriorate according to the economic, political and international parameters within the states specified.

By way of example, approximately 400,000 of these people live in very difficult conditions in camps. They are directly dependent on international funding and the flow of payments and in practice they constitute extremely marginalised, unstable communities. They are ready for political recruitment by “international aid parties”. This is apart from approximately 11,000 Syrian asylum seekers pending in Europe. This opens up all kinds of

possibilities for using their difficult circumstances and their lack of stability for escalation purposes including militarily.

### **Using the refugee bloc in the elections**

The large numbers of refugees present outside the country means the possibility of using this broad tranche for political purposes directly in the Syrian settlement. Such as using the electoral power of those people and influencing it in such a way as to then impact on the transparency of the electoral process which is supposed to be taking place in Syria. The numbers of these people might tip the scales when deployed to support a politicised body belonging to those supplying international aid and assistance, with the West and the Gulf forming the basic weight financing the dwindling UN assistance for these refugees.

### **No return weakens the settlement**

From the Syrian national aspect reaching a political solution whilst a quarter of the inhabitants are refugees abroad and unsettled, may play a part in voiding this settlement of its substance if the purpose of it is the unity of the country and its stability, and seeking a return of its national unity and trust in the political regime formed at the end of the political process..., then the presence of a quarter of the inhabitants outside this process, not taking part in it and pushing it, causes it to lose much of its momentum.

This is besides the general humanitarian and national needs represented in the right of

these people, like other Syrians, to compensation for the size of the losses and deterioration which has affected their homes, jobs, villages, land and turned them into a tool attracting international politics.

### **Internationally: who supports the Return and who doesn't?**

UN resolution 2254, as a road map for the settlement to the Syrian crisis, was formulated and pushed for by the international forces which want an effective solution to the Syrian crisis ... it contained within its clauses the return of the Syrian refugees to their original places of abode without the resolution linking this return to a timetable or a specific stage.

On that basis as well, the international forces, which do not display anything other than delaying tactics over solving the Syrian crisis are delaying the question of the return of the refugees.

Despite the fact that the question of the refugees constitutes an internal political problem for each of the states sheltering Syrian refugees, nevertheless US pressure in particular is so far preventing progress in this process. The Europeans, by way of example, are not saying clearly that they want to make use of the well-qualified Syrian workforce that is helping them in their labour markets. On the contrary, they are leaving those refugees subject to domestic competition locally and as a tool for political use in the political settlement for the Syrian crisis dossier. This was until the French and Germans announced that they are tying the

question of the return to the post-election period.

Turkey, which contains approximately 3.5 million refugees wants to return them with its set conditions and to the areas it sees fit, which contravenes the UN resolution. As for Jordan, it does not seem sufficiently in agreement so far and Lebanon remains the only country "keen" to return the Syrian refugees after they have become the scapegoat to blame for the economic failure of the Lebanese model established on international debts!

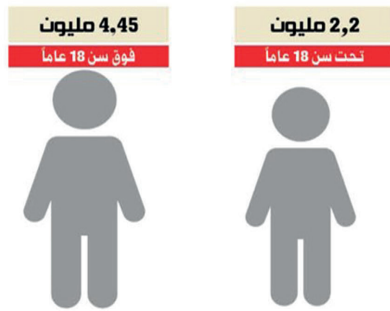
The start of the Syrian refugees' return means a serious reduction in the level of the internationalisation of the Syrian conflict and the level of the intervention by numerous states also dealing with the Syrian refugees by using them as cards in their hand.

Finally: the extremists from all sides are not overjoyed at all at the return of the Syrians to their country because they know for certain that the repression and the armed men that stole their voices and hopes - which have not ceased and will not cease until a complete radical change has been achieved - will fill Syrian territory afresh, but this time with a level of consciousness and much superior organisation for which the Syrians have paid very high price.

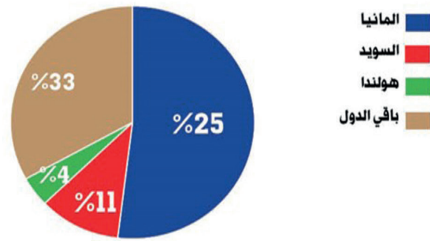
## مجموع اللاجئين السوريين في الإقليم وأوروبا



### التوزيع العمري



### توزيع مليون لاجئ سوري في أوروبا



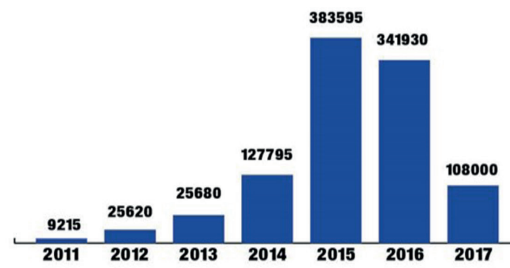
أكثر من نصف اللاجئين السوريين في ألمانيا وحوالي 547 ألف، بينما تليها السويد بحوالي 118 ألف لاجئ، ثم هولندا بحوالي 40 ألفاً، والباقي موزع في أوروبا.

بلغ عدد طلبات اللجوء السورية المعلقة في أوروبا دون رفض أو قبول 111 ألف طلب، 77 ألف منهم في ألمانيا بينما بلغ مجموع طلبات اللجوء المرفوضة 9500 طلب

### توزيع 6,6 مليون سوري على دول اللجوء الأساسية



### أعداد اللاجئين السوريين المسجلين في أوروبا بين 2011-2017



### Total Syrian refugees in the European region:

1 million, the number of refugees recorded in Europe between 2011-2017; 5.6, 5.6 million refugees - the number of Syrian refugees recorded in the region 2018 - 8; 6.6, 6.6 million refugees recorded in 2018

**Age distribution:** 4.45 million over 18 years old; 2.2 million under the age of 18 years

### A million Syrian refugees distributed in Europe

[blue] Germany [red] Sweden [green] Holland [brown] remaining states

More than half of the Syrian refugees are in Germany and approximately 547,000, whilst Sweden has around 118,000 refugees, then Holland with approximately 40,000 and the rest are distributed in Europe

The number of Syrian asylum requests pending (not rejected or accepted) in Europe is 111,000; 77,000 of them are in Germany whilst the total number of requests for asylum rejected is 9,500.

### The distribution of 6.6 million Syrians over the basic states of refuge: Turkey 53%; Lebanon 15%;

Jordan 10%; Germany 8%; Iraq 4%; Egypt 2% Sweden 2%

### Numbers of Syrians recorded in Europe between 2011-2017

-25% Estimates of the European Commission indicate that the number of Syrian asylum seekers had reduced in the first quarter of 2018 by a quarter compared with the 2017 levels

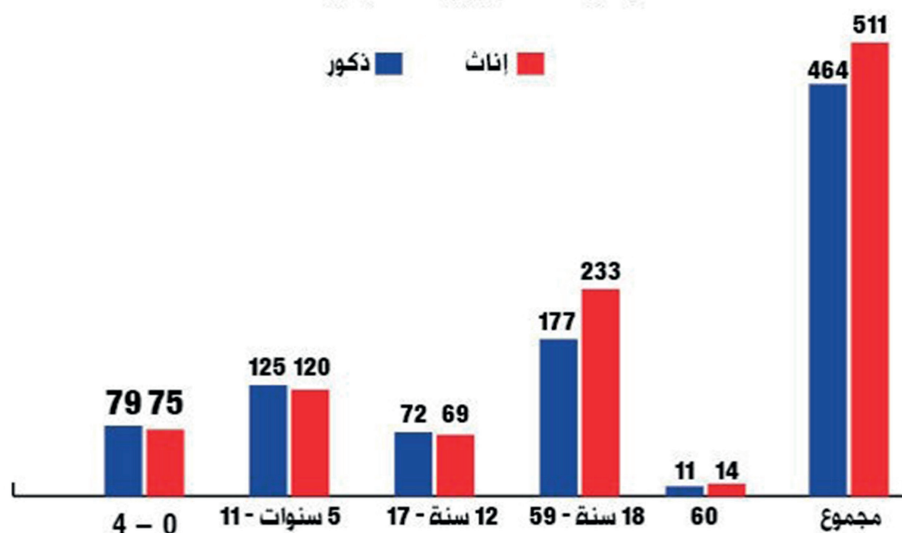
-70% The numbers of Syrian child asylum seekers in Europe in 2017 reduced by 70% from the peak year of 2015

365; 365 thousand is the number of Syrian refugee children below the age of 18 recorded in Europe between 2011 - 2017; 684; 684 thousand is the number of Syrian refugees over 18 recorded in Europe between 2011 - 2017

European Commission estimates indicate that the number of Syrian asylum seekers has reduced in the first quarter of 2018 by a quarter of the 2017 levels



## عدد اللاجئين السوريين في لبنان - ألف نسمة



The number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon - in 1000s

[red] Females [blue] Males

4 - 0 years

5 - 11 years

12 - 17 years

18 - 59 years

60 years

Total

[bottom left:] The number of male refugees in Lebanon

[bottom right:] The number of female refugees in Lebanon

464459

عدد الذكور اللاجئين في لبنان

511543

عدد الإناث اللاجئين في لبنان

The geographic distribution of Syrian refugees in Lebanon

[place names in Arabic on the map of Lebanon]

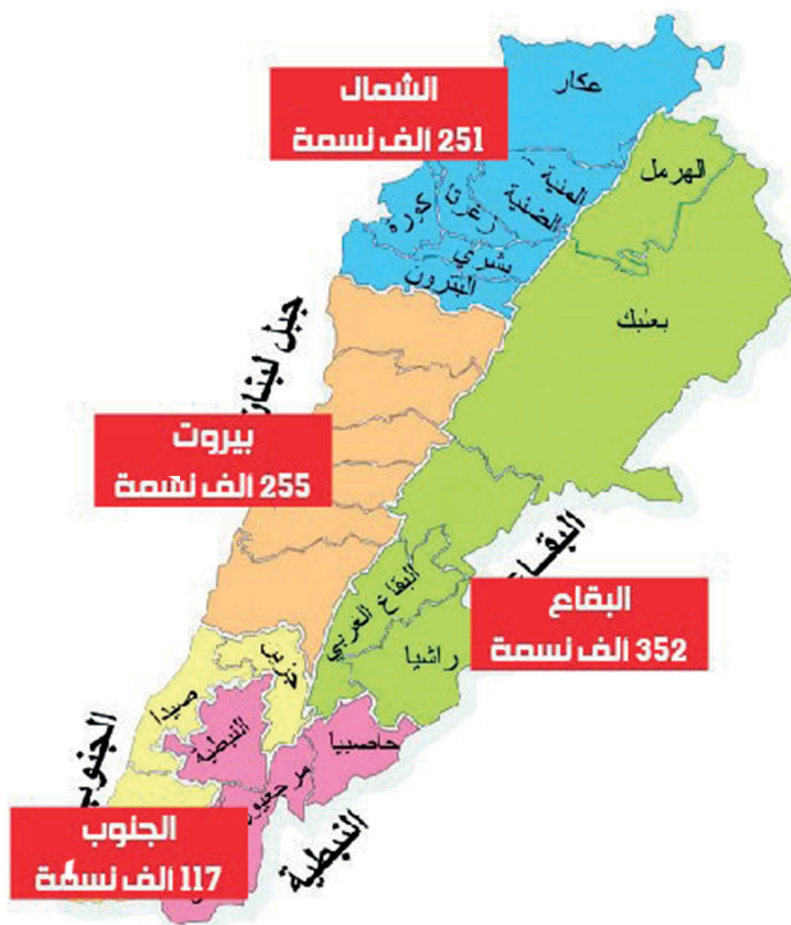
[white on red, top:] The North, 251,000

[middle, left:] Beirut, 255,000

[middle, right:] The Beqaa' [Valley] 353,000

[bottom of map:] The South, 117,000

## التوزيع الجغرافي للاجئين السوريين في لبنان

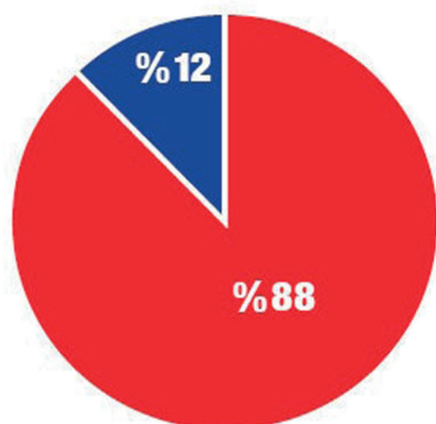


Funding of the refugees in Lebanon - 2018

[red square, key:] Decrease

[blue square:] Funded

## تمويل اللاجئين في لبنان - 2018





#### 8% of the Syrian refugees are still in camps

464000

Some estimates indicate that the refugees in Europe and those leaving neighbouring countries have not been crossed out in the refugee records in these countries, which might reduce the actual number

Other estimates indicate that a large part of the Syrians in the region have not been recorded as refugees

**From which towns did the Syrians leave:** The International Organization for Migration recorded the governorates from which the Syrian refugees left up to the month of 11/2016 when the numbers in the region were about 4.8 million

**[from left to right:]** Tartus, As-Suwayda, Quneitra, Raqqa, Dar-ra, Latakia, Idlib, Deir ez-Zur, Hamaa, al-Hasakah, Damascus, Homs, Rif Dimashq, Aleppo

# Mar Sabé

## OPEN ARMS – Spain

In January 2018, a bit more than one year ago today, our ship Open Arms rescued over 900 people in only 15 days. It was winter, the conditions at sea were not easy. We had to stay adrift for three days waiting for an answer from countries in Europe to be able to disembark the rescued people to a port of safety. We were only following international maritime legislation.

This is only one example for a mission on board of Open Arms, our vessel that has rescued about 6.000 people in few months.

This same boat is currently blocked in Barcelona merely for political reasons. The organization hosting this conference invited us to come to Beirut with the boat in order for you to meet our crews and to come on board and see how we operate. We did not get the authorization to bring the boat to Beirut from the Spanish authorities. These same Spanish authorities that are now under a socialist government, the same government that only 8 months ago was being congratulated by representatives and societies from all over the world because of the welcoming of the 630 people rescued by the Aquarius. At that moment, to open Spanish harbours and to accept migrants seemed to be a good political move. Currently, this same government is now

stopping similar boats in a context of political tension and national and European elections approaching.

This is another step towards the criminalization of the solidarity that has been growing in Europe during the past two years, especially in those countries where the extreme right has come into power. But the notorious thing here is that, for the very first time, a government officially operating under the left-wing category has decided to hinder the defense of human rights.

As you may know, there are different migratory routes on the Mediterranean; today, I want to focus on the route going from Libya to Italy, the Central Mediterranean route, the deadliest that exists.

Nowadays, as has already extensively been discussed by professionals, journalists and NGOs spokespeople, the scenario which search and rescue non-governmental organizations are confronting is strongly hostile and has been worsening in the last two years.

At the moment, the number of non-governmental organizations at sea have exponentially de-

creased and all of us have witnessed many repressive actions that exceed the expected regulatory procedures, as well as attacks on media carried out by politicians, institutionalized abuses and continuous actions aimed at defaming and creating a false narrative, not to mention a systematic criminalization of all of us.

It is extremely worrying to see how many actions are carried out with impunity. Let me share a couple of examples with you:

There have been armed attacks at sea by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, the same which have caused an unspecified number of deaths. Those who are continually financed by the EU states, such as Italy and France.

There have been blockades in ports where different humanitarian ships have been held without a normative basis or decree and without any explanation.

There have been restrictions to access Italian ports without any ministerial decrees or official communications.

The denial of supplying first aid as requested by our ships in a forced stand-by with people on board, leading to long waits to disembark people in a port of safety.

There have been prosecutions and investigations by many Italian prosecutors who, after years, have not reached yet any reasonable point. Among many others...

It is also important to pay attention to the targeted blackout of information on what is really

happening both in the Mediterranean Sea and in Libya. In fact, it is currently impossible to know how many people are dying or how many are intercepted and reported in those concentration camps that are continued to be called "detention". UNHCR has publicly denounced extreme violations of human rights in Libya, especially in those detention centers.

This is the very little retrievable information about what is currently happening in Libya, but it is important here to point out that if there are no NGOs at sea, there is nobody witnessing what is happening. We do protection by presence because when we are there, we not only follow the laws and defend human rights, but we force all the actors on scene to do so.

With the repression against the NGOs, there is a clear objective: Whatever has happened and is currently happening on the Mediterranean (as well as in Libya) is impossible to find out, impossible to be witnessed. Why is that? Where are the brave policies to really defend human rights no matter what? Why have we, as Europeans, normalized situations of silence, torture, violations of human rights that should have never been normalized?

Nowadays the humanitarian NGOs that work in the deadliest Mediterranean route do not get any support from the authorities, not even when it comes to receiving information about people who are taking risks for their own life. Moreover, there are disagreeing indications, depending on the authority from which those come.

Usual rescue procedures at sea are currently widely distorted.



The duties that engage the authorities to maximize resources to perform rescues in the shortest possible delay and disembarking the people rescued in a port of safety, are not put in place because it has been delegated entirely to the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, and, hence, it is still hidden that, following the normative, they are the competent authority for coordinating the assistance of the SAR zone.

The reality is that the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, which we know of doubtful origin, does not even answer the phone calls, or at least those that come from the NGOs.

For example, last week, only 1 out of the 8 numbers that were contacted by the land staff of Moonbird (the plane of the German NGO Sea-Watch) replied, but without being able to say a word in English.

Lately, the assistance that can potentially be carried out at sea by NGOs, takes place in total loneliness, only counting on the support of the other NGOs at sea and in the air.

Currently, only NGOs are the ones making sure that lives and human rights are protected. And we are being silenced and prosecuted.

Moreover, once a rescue is finally done following international maritime legislation, a port of safety to disembark the rescued people is not given. There are even representatives of the European governments declaring that the people who have been rescued must be taken back to Libya, showing a total ignorance of the regulations and a disregard for the human being.

Once people are rescued, our ships, as we have seen before, remain adrift for days and, moreover, weird situations arise in which the authorities, with the political aim of blocking us, come up with strange procedures as, for example, to say that by staying many days at sea we go against International regulations that dictate that people must be disembarked in a port of safety as soon as possible.

For example, in the last mission of Open Arms, before the boat was stopped in Barcelona:

- Malta replied to our request to disembark denying it. The Italian MRCC never replied our phone calls neither emails. France neither. Greece replied to our calls but telling us to call other countries. Tunisia did not reply, and Spain told us to go to Algeciras, the farthest option they could have given us. That forced us to navigate three additional days. Moreover, another boat of ours, the Astral, had to go supply the Open Arms because we did not have enough food, water nor blankets to face the long trip with more than 300 rescued people on board.

For the past two years, we have seen how arrivals in a port of safety have been delayed and delayed. We have always expected, and still wait, for the opening of investigations by the prosecutors; as we know that those who violate the regulations are certainly not the NGOs.

To sum it up, the challenges of the Search and Rescue at Sea that NGOs face at this time are completely the opposite to what they should be.

The huge contradiction is that the NGOs that are actually defending human rights at sea and witnessing and denouncing its violations are

being prosecuted and blocked in European ports out of political decisions that make no sense. We have a boat stopped in Barcelona and were not even allowed to come here to show it to all of you, to take all of you closer to the reality of what the Central Mediterranean Route is facing every day.

We made a decision when our NGO started operating 3 years ago: We said that we would not stop until there is no life adrift. We have now a boat stopped but not an organization, so we will continue with our promise as long we have the support of this part of society that stands up for human rights. I would also like to ask all of you now to decide what do you stand for.

Kostadinka Kuneva • Fathi El Fadl • Abdel Nasser

# **THE STRUGGLES OF WOMEN AND SOCIAL AND DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLES OF THE PEOPLES**

Mobilisations of International Women's Day  
Workers' struggles and trade union organization  
The ongoing popular revolt



# Kostadinka Kuneva

Syriza – Greece

Let me start by quoting a text that was written a few months ago.

*“The Mediterranean is our sea. It is the sea that connects 26 countries from three different continents, the sea that gave birth to great historical civilizations, each one of which has made their own significant contribution to arts, science, culture and thought. The Mediterranean basin serves through the centuries as a bridge between West and East, North and South, western and Arabic culture, Christianity and Islam. Almost 500 million people of different nationalities, races, colours, traditions, customs, religions and languages compose the colourful and rich cultural mosaic of the peoples of the Mediterranean.*

*The Mediterranean, the sea that connects us, is destined to be a sea of peace and cooperation. Unfortunately, today it is building up to a sea that hurts and separates us. In addition, it has become a watery grave for tens of thousands of immigrants and refugees who try to reach safety and shelter in the “fortress of Europe”. It is also a hotbed of tension and rivalries for its natural wealth. And, worst of all, it covers an area in which some of the bloodiest and most serious con-*

*flicts of our times are taking place: the war in Syria, the most ruthless international war of modern times, the ethnic cleansing in Palestine, the longest and bloodiest ethnic cleansing in modern history, as well as the military occupation of Northern Cyprus, the longest military occupation of an independent country in the last decades.*

*The demand for a Mediterranean sea of peace, coexistence and cooperation remains highly topical – while, at the same time, the lack of an active peace movement in the region is highly concerning. What I’m suggesting is to combine all our efforts and ideas in order to set up a network of women’s organizations, collectivities and personalities from all the Mediterranean countries that will plan and launch a campaign –on national as well as international level- towards a Mediterranean of peace, cooperation and understanding.*

*I’m inviting all of you who are participating in Middle East Working Group of the Party of the European Left in Bilbao to adopt this initiative by making a declaration drawing on “Women for a Mediterranean of Peace”, which can soon start being shared by all different sides so that within a year from now*

*it can be ready to get co-signed by women's organizations, movements and personalities from all the Mediterranean countries. Ideally, this initiative could culminate to an international meeting/forum. From my part, as an MEP of the SYRIZA party and the European Left, but also as someone who knows the immigration issue firsthand and from personal experience, I assure you all to continue my best efforts for peace in the Mediterranean region and to do everything possible to turn the Mediterranean Women's Forum into reality."*

This text was prepared for the occasion of the 2nd Forum of Progressive Forces that was held last November in Bilbao, Spain. At that time the Mediterranean Forum was still at the plan stage and my comrades from the Party of the European Left correctly pointed out that this forum would offer the best opportunity to gain support for this proposal. So here we are now, in Beirut, at the Mediterranean Forum, which gives me the opportunity to repeat this suggestion and to talk about it.

Why do we need a special women's initiative for a Mediterranean of peace? We surely need such an initiative in order to develop a peace movement in the troubled areas of the Mediterranean region, to stop the bloodshed in Syria, the genocide of the Palestinians as well as the military interventions and civil wars in Africa, and also to achieve the restoration of democracy and civil rights, to put an end to the awful phenomenon of slavery which is blooming again in North Africa. Such a movement cannot be exclusively female or male. Neither left nor moderate. It is universal.

Unfortunately, with all that is happening lately in our sea, the Mediterranean, and most importantly, the refugee tragedy, there is no doubt that we are experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. We have experienced many decades of Cold War between the superpowers of the planet, a world divided into two large camps equipped with nuclear weapons that could devastate the whole mankind. Nevertheless, all these decades of the Cold War and nuclear threat, that gave rise to a large and diverse peace movement, passed almost bloodlessly. Thirty years after the official end of the Cold War, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Africa are in an even worse situation and the people living in these regions are suffering unbelievable tragedies. More than half of the world's refugees come from three countries that are located in these regions, and if we also take into account the permanently displaced Palestinian refugees, then we're talking about 70% of the world's refugee population.

These facts are very well known to most of you. I have read that here in Lebanon almost 1 out of 5 residents is a refugee. This country, along with Turkey and Jordan, hosts millions of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and other countries of this region that have suffered huge damage due to the military interventions of the West. And I must say that I feel ashamed that in Europe, which I represent, the conservative governments are hypocritically fighting over the accommodation of insignificant numbers of refugees within their boundaries. However, I am proud of the solidarity that has been demonstrated by my own country, Greece and its society – at the very time of a severe economic crisis.

However, I insist on the particular female dimension of the refugee tragedy which I believe is the key element of the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean. According to UN figures, women refugees who arrive in Europe cover about 35% of the total amount of refugees that reach Europe. But in the Middle East as well as in Africa women account for over 50% of the total number of refugees. This indicates the additional difficulty that women have in making the risky journey to Europe. And the fact that more than 50% of the refugees in Africa and the Middle East are children, whom their mothers unwillingly part from, makes the refugee issue first and foremost a female issue. In addition, women and children are more exposed to the dangers of abuse, exploitation and trafficking.

On the other hand, in the host countries, incl. countries in Europe like Greece which I know from personal experience, the solidarity and support shown towards refugees is mostly a female affair. You don't need any complicated ideological or political analysis to explain this. The protection of life lies at the core of female nature. I deeply believe this is true. One more reason is that we are currently going through a period of time in which the women's movement, with its different characteristics in every region and country, is struggling for its revival. The attempt to declare the 8<sup>th</sup> of March a day of Global Feminist Strike is internationally well known.

In my opinion, these traits allow women to take a leading role in forming a broad peace movement in the Mediterranean region – a movement that will put an end to all military interventions, that will urge Europe to assume its responsibilities in dealing with the human-

itarian tragedy and the refugee crisis, that will stop all weapons sales to Saudi Arabia, that will contribute to a definitive and fair solution of the Palestinian conflict, that will stop the looting of the wealth of Africa, and that will give to all the people of the region the opportunity to democratically organize their countries without dictators and bloody civil wars.

I envision a large meeting of women's organizations, movements, institutions and figures from all Mediterranean countries, along with distinct female personalities that have a significant influence in their countries, in a large forum that will result in a "Women's Manifesto for the Mediterranean of Peace". This forum must include collectivities, activists, trade unionists and women from all social strata and all religious communities, with respect for cultural diversity: An authentic meeting between East and West, for the defense of the fundamental right of life, against war, intolerance and racism. This meeting might very well lead to the development of a "women's network for the Mediterranean of Peace", with strong presence and activity in the region and globally. We don't want to add one more NGO to the hundreds that already exist, but to create a network that will be the driving force of an active international movement.

We, the left-wing forces, definitely have the potential to contribute to such an initiative, without imposing hegemonies and patronages. We may start in the simplest way: all we have to do is to register all women's communities that exist and play a significant role in each country and begin to discuss with them about this idea. I am personally willing to contribute in every way.

# Fathi El Fadl

SCP – Sudan

Wishes and greetings from the Sudanese masses who are engaged in a relentless struggle to wrench their rights topple the dictatorial regime and rebuild the country on a sound basis desirous of freedom, peace and social justice.

We want to inform of the ongoing struggles in our country, and generate the needed international solidarity to help fetter the hands of the regime, to halt the killings of the peaceful protesters, detention, torture and harassment. Suffice to say that since I left my country on the 27th of March, 75 peaceful demonstrators were killed, over one thousand were treated for injuries sustained as a result of the security forces use of excess force tens of hundreds were detained since the beginning of the uprising on the 19th of December last year. The victims of the regimes repression include people from different walks of life, political leaders and activists, young people, students, workers, peasants, professionals, university lecturers, doctors and lawyers.

We appeal to all progressive parties and organizations, the world over to redouble your solidarity actions to help bring the misery of our people to an end to topple the regime and establish the democratic alternative.

Albashir's regime which military coup in 1989, through a Muslim Brotherhood military coup, is facing the most serious challenge to its rule. Now entering the fourth month of nationwide protests calling for an end of the regime are continuing in defiance of the national state of emergency declared by the president on the 22nd of Feb.

The dictatorial regime has responded to the peace protests with brutal security crackdown. Peaceful demonstrations have been fired on by live ammunition. In a vain attempt to defuse the crisis, Albashir has resorted to one of his old failed manoeuvres, dismissing the national government and appointing a new one with some new faces, but the same old bankrupt policies. He also installed military and security officers in all provinces governorships, issued a number of emergency decrees banning protests, established emergency courts and deployed large numbers of security forces on the streets.

Despite the show of force by the regime, the daily protests continue unabated, with support from nearly all sectors of the society. Youngsters have joined the front line of the demonstrations women who have suffered harassment and humiliation by the regime represent more fifty percent of the demonstrators.



These forces are shaping the Sudan political landscape, and the protests have become a social and cultural phenomenon, reflected in art, poetry and social greetings.

However despite the cracks in the regime, which are reflected in the departure of certain former allies from the government, and growing resentment to the use of excessive force. Al-bashir is still in power thanks to its main base of support among the repressive organs of the state -the security forces, the army and its armed thugs called the peoples militias. In addition it enjoys great moral and material support from the governments of the Peoples Republic of China and the Russian Federation. At the same time despite the shy criticism expressed by the governments of the troika-USA, Britain and Norway, as well as the EU, on the grounds that the regime is cooperating on the issues related to terrorism, peoples smuggling and the environment, which is a big lie. It is other political and economic interests, especially the competition with China and Russia to control the natural resources of Sudan. France, Egypt, Qatar and each looking to have a strong foot in the country are interfering and lending support to the regime.

Sudanese economic crisis – the initial catalyst for the protests - is deep rooted in the institutional corruption, resulting from the privatization of the productive sectors and massive spending on the security apparatus and arms at the expense of the basic services.

The protests are not about economic hardships, however. They are the result of the culmination of years protests against the regimes repres-

sion, confiscation of democratic liberties and freedoms, corruption and atrocities in Darfur, Southern Urdufan and the Blue Nile.

So far the regime's response to the deepening crisis is on the one hand increasing the repression on the peaceful demonstrations, coupled with printing money and trying to address the economic crisis through security measures, which tried before and have failed.

The crisis in the country is the regime itself. The only solution is regime change and the first step is for Albashir to step down or be removed.

With the continuation of the mass protest actions, unity of the masses at the grass root levels, opposition forces managed to resolve their differences and undertook firm steps towards establishing a unified center to lead the joint actions of the opposition countrywide. Furthermore they issued a unity declaration: For Freedom and Change. All groups within the National Consensus Forces, Sudan Call Alliance and the Professional Alliance are now strongly united within one national center calling for the regime's down fall, the establishment of a transitional government for peace and accountability.

The declaration provides for an organizing center and a political platform to work on transitional plans and articulate alternative policies. Recent developments have shown that the emerging unified center have withstood the tests posed by the regime and the pressures of some forces within the international community to sue differences and splits with the ranks of the opposition.

Today we can safely say that the unified center groups all the opposition forces including the armed groups. They are working as a coherent political body leading the street protest demonstrations.

Conscious of the need to avoid the chaos seen in other countries in the region, all the opposition forces, including the armed groups have emphasized the peaceful nature of the mass protest actions.

As we stated earlier, our main aim is to solicit your full support to our people's struggle. We kindly ask you to do everything in your possibilities to help stop the terror and violence of Al-bashir's regime, to demand the immediate and unconditional release of all political detainees, to put pressure on the governments of the USA, Norway and Britain as well as the EU to stop their indirect support of the regime. To demand the Chinese, Russian, French, Egyptian, Qatari and Turkish governments to stop supporting the war machine of the dictatorial regime. To our fraternal progressive European parties, members of the European parliament we appeal to be more vocal and pressure the parliament to influence the EU to stop its cooperation with the dictatorial regime. Finally we request audience in the European parliament and /or its socialist body. Thank you.

# Abdel Nasser

## Egyptian Teachers Union - Egypt

### Teachers in Egypt

Teachers did not have a voice that was heard in Egyptian society from the 1951 strike until 2006 when thought began to be given to the idea of opening up the sphere of foreign investment in education and launching a law guaranteeing quality and accreditation. This is the law that is considered as Egypt's qualification for an agreement liberating the service trade and there is also law 155 of the year 2007 known in the media as the Teachers' Special Cadre Law. With these laws began an independent movement for teachers bearing the slogan of improvement in teachers' pay and free elections in the teaching professions union and the rejection of the so-called Teachers' Special Cadre Law. At the heart of this movement were teachers in elementary education and technical education, which are the two groups that have suffered most from the deteriorating conditions for teachers which can be summarised on a number of levels.

#### 1 – The socio-economic level:

Teachers are suffering from low pay as, at the start of his appointment, a teacher receives about 69 dollars a month whilst the high-

est salary for a teacher does not exceed four times this figure.

#### 2 – Working conditions:

Many teachers suffer from great difficulties inside many schools, such as school buildings which do not meet the minimum standard required to deliver good quality teaching.

#### 3 – Governmental trade union organisation:

Trade union organisation is loyal to the executive authority as it is the teaching professions union, membership of which is compulsory, and the law governing it does not create any opportunity for the existence of genuine representation of teachers. Amongst teachers' demands is a change to this law to create a real opportunity for teachers to run their union: at present the union is being run by an unelected facilitation committee.

In this context an independent teachers' movement started back in 2007 in the form of teachers' leagues and associations which became independent unions in accordance with the declaration of union freedoms; amongst them is the union which I represent and

which used to contain 14 unions in the various governorates of Egypt. However, these unions have had their legal character terminated due to labour unions law number 213 of the year 2017 which imposed regularisation on them in a short period of no more than 60 days and placed many obstacles in their way, both before the law was issued and after it. Many teachers were also subjected to much arbitrary treatment and pressure, such as sending them before courts on the basis of personal reports from the Minister of Education, stopping them from working, withholding their salaries for two months or more until the official investigations were complete, interrogations because of views they had expressed on social media sites or appearances on television as well as covert pressures. We therefore are saying that the teachers' movement in Egypt is now acting without the protection of a legal umbrella and is strengthening its presence, and the arbitrary treatment and severe pressure colleagues are subjected to for the most basic rights can only be due to the lack of a law or a true will to accept the idea of the existence of independent unions for them.

Mamdouh Habashi • Said Sougty • Ghassan Diba

# **THE NEO-LIBERAL TRADE AGREEMENTS IN THE REGION AND THE CAPITALIST CRISES**

The EU - Mediterranean partnership agreements

The neo-liberal agendas

EU and Morocco agreements

Mass destruction and nuclear weapons



# Mamdouh Habib

## Popular Alliance – Egypt

### **New properties of neoliberalism in peripheral states - Example Egypt 2018**

#### ***Is that all because of the inadequacy of the regime?***

*"... The goal is to destroy - and I say destroy - not just the governments, but also the states and societies of one country - that could become a threat with the definition of the US."<sup>1</sup>*

Egypt is currently undergoing a turning point with great consequences. During his relatively short reign, Sisi destroyed Egypt politically and economically. He destroyed the already meager remnant of the constitutional state, indeed of the state as a whole.

The prevailing militarization has seized the legislature and the judiciary and brought the media in line. Millions of middle-class Egyptians have slipped below the poverty line, the poor now have to fight with their daily hunger, and services such as health care, education or housing can only be afforded by the elite.

Oppositionists of any color, i.e. not just Islamists, are in many old and newly built prisons.

All the money of the country, worked out and loaned, goes to the construction of the luxury retreats of this elusive elite. Whether it is the new capital or the summer residence city on the Mediterranean, a high wall of reinforced concrete protects this elite from the intrusion of ordinary people.

So, one expects the inevitable collision with the population, therefore one builds these new cities like fortresses. They never want to experience the "Nightmare" of Tahrir Square 2011 again, whatever the costs would be. The Egyptian army is slowly becoming an enemy of its own people.

For the West, Sisi has proven to be the best and most capable enforcer and administrator of its political, geostrategic and economic interests in and around Egypt. This is the reason why, as far as human rights and the rule of law in Egypt are concerned, the West closes its eyes and supports the Sisi regime.

Since his oath on the 2014 constitution as President, Sisi has made no secret of his failure to take this constitution seriously. This attitude was reflected in constant and systematic vio-

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1 From the Speech of SAMIR AMIN in the IPB Conference, Berlin September 30<sup>th</sup> 2016

lation of almost all articles of this constitution. His declared understanding of democracy: "We cannot afford that now because we are waging a war on terror".

This means that for the government all oppositionists are terrorists because they contribute to the destabilization of the state and therefore belong behind bars. It also means that any criticism of the military or police is considered an "insult", punishable under the newly enacted law with up to 5 years imprisonment. And if you can quote Sisi himself in this case, this criticism is synonymous with "high treason."

His understanding of economic development consists of mega-sized national projects, such as the new capital, new water passage on the Suez Canal, new regional highway routes in the desert, etc. etc. All were carried out without feasibility studies, as these studies take time and "we have no time".

"Normal" neo-liberal economic policy is not new in Egypt. With his legislative package in February 1974 Sadat has launched this policy, his so-called "Open Door Policy". All his successors have consistently continued. The total subjugation of the entire domestic, foreign and economic policies to the conditions of the IMF with all its consequences of austerity is only the Sisi variant of this "normal" and long-known neoliberalism. Sisi went qualitatively a step further for even more brutal yield.

In the four years of his first term, the economy was not only paralyzed, but hyper indebted. He has made more debts in these 4 years than all of his predecessors together since Nasser, so that

soon almost half of the state budget is allocated only for the servicing of these debts (38% according to the Egyptian central bank), and the trend is rising.

Sisi insists that the West will never let the Egyptian economy collapse. For the West as well as the Gulf States and Israel, Egypt is so geo-strategically important that they all want to maintain that state. For a variety of motives, they all want a completely dependent begging Egypt, too weak to live but again too strong to die.

Since the entry into force of the 2014 Constitution, the budgets of the two Ministries of Defense and Military Production have been removed from the budget. As a result, they are not subject to any public control, i.e. these and the so-called "special funds" are not accountable to any state institutions. Since then, the control of the budget balance only covers 32.8% of gross national product. The remainder of the expenditure (67.2%) is not subject to any supervision by the National Audit Office or any other public-authority control.

During this period of Sisi rule (2014-2018), domestic debt increased from 1.6 to 3.6 trillion EGP and foreign debt from 46 to 92.6 billion USD, despite the drastic currency devaluation in November 2016 (from 1 \$ = about 8 EGP to 1 \$ = about 18 EGP).

In order to serve the enormously increased debts, the regime accelerated the privatization rolling mill to an unprecedented extent. Recently, the large profitable state-owned companies were sold in dubious transparency-free procurement procedures.



Then came the blow with the law for establishing the "Egyptian State Fund", which:

- swapped state property with public property,
- enlarged the definition of state ownership to include not only land, but also lakes, rivers, antiquities and all economic facilities and assets,
- puts the state over the law and thus the board or president of this fund over the law,
- formulated explicitly and unequivocally that all acts of this Fund are "private property" of the state, i.e. according to the law for individuals and not under public law, although the state should be the owner,
- as a result; is not accountable to the National Audit Office or any other public expenditure control authority.

Egypt is not the first country to found such a fund. However, the objectives are always the better performance for the sustainability of certain economic sectors, the variation of sources of income to guarantee the rights of future generations ... etc. No fund of this kind was created to plug the deficit holes in the state budget, on a desolate economic base around assets of the people without a minimum of transparency to sell. A well-known economist (Ibrahim Nawar) has put it this way: "This fund is like the president of his own, takes assets whatever he wants, manages them as he pleases and distributes the income to whom he wants".

*But how can you do that in a country like Egypt?*

The answer is simple; the dictatorship. Since assuming power in 2013, General Sisi is expanding his dictatorship. More than 60,000 political prisoners who are not only Muslim Brothers, but from all directions of the opposition (Amnesty International Information). After securing the support of his political course from the West, the Gulf and Israel, Sisi went on to perpetuate his rule.

For some months, the Egyptians have been experiencing a sad comedy called "constitutional change". On stage, the regime's professional claqueurs, whose marionette strings are quite visible, perform. It was suddenly said that Sisi cannot leave his post after his second - and last in terms of the constitution - term of office, since he has started major projects, thus he has to end them. Then a package of constitutional changes was put in place that not only makes the president's term virtually infinite, but also gives him control over the judiciary.

Once bitten, twice shy, the Egyptians are well aware, how impossible to get rid of the "Pharaoh", they have a psychic complex. Precisely for this reason, the constitutional assembly of the 2014 constitution unanimously decided to explicitly protect exactly the article with the presidential term from change. That is, as soon as an application to amend this article is made, it is immediately unconstitutional.

The prescribed procedure for a constitutional amendment provides for a "social debate" for at least one month. This debate takes place in the "own" parliament, behind closed doors, exclusively by handpicked claqueurs of the regime,

not a single dissenting voice. Except for the uncontrollable Internet media, all the media heard, seen and read 24x7 repeat the necessity and the inevitability of these changes.

All public authorities, schools, companies, whether large or small, state-run or private, are coerced or blackmailed by the "state security" to deliver people to the referendum ballot box. Whether these people tick the box YES or the box NO, does not really matter, say the blackmailers grinning, because the results anyway are provided by the computer of the Ministry of Interior, the main thing the regime cameras can show crowds on the voting day ... etc.

This attempt to perpetuate Sisi's rule is precisely the crossroads I mentioned at the beginning, between the illusion of democracy and total hopelessness and a dark future for human rights and political self-determination. It draws before our eyes a dark future also after Sisi. The Egyptians are subject to a dictatorially destructive regime carried by a heavily armed group, ready to use their weapons to defend their raping exploitation of their land and against their own people.

# Said Sougty

Voie Democratique – Morocco

## **Neo-liberal trade agreements in the region and capitalist crises**

### **1 From advanced dependency to neo-colonial submission**

The agreements have been negotiated with an imperialist power seeking a return on its capital. A task facilitated by regimes embedded and installed in order to safeguard the interests of global capitalism.

“...surplus capital will be utilised not for the purpose of raising the standard of living of the masses in a given country, for this would mean a decline in profits for the capitalists, but for the purpose of increasing profits by exporting capital abroad to the underdeveloped countries. In these underdeveloped countries profits are usually high, for capital is scarce, the price of land is relatively low, wages are low, raw materials are cheap. The export of capital is made possible by a number of underdeveloped countries having already been drawn into world capitalist intercourse...” Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*

The case of the agreements between the EU and Morocco says a great deal about their neo-colonial aspects, with the EU favouring its own interests in a country with a neo-colonial production system controlled by a comprador class.

When Morocco gained its independence, its government opted for inclusion in the European trading and international capital investment area, establishing a so-called open economy that would nail its colours to the mast in the early 1980s, when the structural adjustment plans dictated by the IMF were applied; this was excessive economic liberalism, negating freedoms in order to reassure capital.

In an issue of *Le Monde diplomatique* of March 1998, Pierre Bourdieu described liberalism as “a programme for destroying collective structures which may impede the pure market logic”. The cross-cutting policies associated with FTAs are based on more flexible working, reduced public spending and a sharp drop in labour costs.

This trend has been amplified by the launch of negotiations for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (**DCFTA**).

After joining the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in May 1987 (Marrakesh Treaty) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) in April 1994, Morocco signed a free trade agreement with the EU in 1996, which entered into force on 1 March 2000. The first objective was to create an industrial free-trade zone (FTZ) by 2012, exclusively for manufactured products. For agricultural and fisheries products, trade liberalisation was negotiated separately and came into force in October 2012.

This process ended with the signing of a Mobility Partnership (MP) with the European Union on 7 June 2013, ratified by Morocco and nine Member States (France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom).

On 24 July 2014, the EU and Morocco signed the second Fisheries Protocol (the first expired in February 2011 after two extensions). The protocol was suspended on 14 July 2018, following a ruling by the European Court of Justice in February 2018, stipulating that the fisheries agreement protocol did not apply to the waters of the provinces of Western Sahara. It was then put to the vote again and adopted on 12 February 2019, this time without passing through the EU Court of Justice, as European liberals were concerned about the cooling of relations.

## **2 Agreements negotiated behind closed doors: democracy is sidelined**

The DCFTA is likely not only to overturn rules relating to our health and food, the en-

vironment, employment law, personal data, public services, trade and agriculture, but also to exacerbate the effects of changes to legislation designed to tailor the economy for the needs of foreign capital: more flexibility, more privatisation and sharp reductions in labour costs.

And yet nothing official has been announced regarding the negotiations. The mandate of the Moroccan negotiators and the plans underpinning their work remain secret. What is Morocco negotiating for within the context of the DCFTA? Who is negotiating on behalf of Moroccans? What is the schedule for the negotiations? Can no-one provide specific answers to these questions?

The way the DCFTA negotiations are progressing demonstrates the blackout that the European Commission has imposed on the citizens' fundamental right to information. On the websites of the Commission and the Parliament and on that of the EU Delegation to Rabat, there are just a few brief press releases announcing the rounds of negotiations, and a Q&A document on the DCFTA published by the EU Delegation to Rabat.

The same applies on the Moroccan side, showing contempt for the public and particularly for parliament, which has no jurisdiction or power.

This lack of transparency also brings to mind the opacity of the FTA negotiations with the USA. There is nothing new about this situation. There were complaints about the lack of transparency in the negotiations between Morocco and the EU as long ago as 1994.

But on the business side, in February of this year, the Minister for Foreign Trade was quick to “reassure business leaders” of multinationals in the EU area and the Moroccan General Business Confederation (CGEM) regarding the content of the negotiations. In the case of the DCFTA, he even established an ongoing dialogue with these representatives of business.

The cult of secrecy has been the norm in the trade agreements negotiated by the European Commission for many years. Without Wikileaks, the contents of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA)], the Transatlantic Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA)] and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) would never have been disclosed to citizens. The question of democracy is central to the fight against these free trade agreements in both the North and the South.

### **3 The disastrous consequences of the free trade agreements**

The EU imposed the following terms on Morocco:

- Economic specialisation, essentially in the production of raw materials or semi-finished mineral products and agricultural products which are very water-intensive (e.g. oranges, watermelons and tomatoes), subject to draconian conditions (e.g. quotas, export schedules and binding rules).
- Subcontracting, particularly in industrial production (especially car assembly) or the manufacture of accessories for cars

and aeroplanes; low value-added specialisation accompanied by over-exploitation of labour and destruction of the environment, particularly water resources. This lack of development has driven the best Moroccan managers to emigrate to Europe and young people, in general, to emigrate in secret, risking their lives. Moreover, this specialisation has also resulted in very strong dependence as regards basic food products (wheat, milk, sugar and oil). In terms of agricultural products, five kilos of tomatoes have to be exported to import one kilo of wheat.

This economic specialisation has generated a structural trade deficit with the EU, exacerbating economic and political dependence vis-à-vis the EU, with serious repercussions for society.

In addition, the imposition of neo-liberal policies by the international financial institutions and the EU has led to the dismantling or privatisation of the public sector, particularly public services, the challenging of rare social advances (the labour code and other social legislation), and further deterioration in the social situation of the population and the environment.

- Job insecurity: lower wages, flexible application of employment rights and increased exploitation of workers.
- Plundering of natural resources: raw materials, fishery and water resources, etc.

- A dramatic decline in numbers of farmers and a massive rural exodus to the cities, inflating the industrial reserve army, putting pressure on already low wages and fuelling rampant real estate speculation, to the detriment of productive investment.
- Nature has not been spared either, as the free trade agreements harm environmental protection and animal welfare.
- Collapse of the education and public health systems.
- Mass unemployment which also affects graduates of higher education.
- In political terms, alignment with the EU's positions and the role of policeman, protecting its southern borders.
- To sum up, the free trade agreements are neo-colonial agreements, devised to serve the interests of the Western countries and their corporations. Combined with the servicing of debt, war, plunder, etc., they are colonial tools to dominate peoples. They help to weaken the political sovereignty of the Southern countries.
- They have contributed to dismantling public services, destroying the fabric of production, both industrial and agricultural, increasing the trade deficit, generating food dependency and enabling EU companies to profit from the tax breaks, labour and cheap land available in the Southern countries.
- In Morocco, it is the big landowners who make use of this, with the upper bourgeoisie, mandated by the multi-colonial powers, and the predatory Makhzen, which compromises all of the autonomous economic and social development of our country and reinforces the despotism necessary to impose on the people the disastrous economic and social repercussions of these agreements.

#### **4 Outlook for the struggles on both sides of the common fight against capitalism**

Today, the indicators are red for the education sector and for poverty (Morocco ranks 126th on the Human Development Index), unemployment, corruption and plundering of riches. Debt stands at more than 93% of GDP. Meanwhile, the royal holding company has monopolized fisheries, mining and agricultural wealth.

Not a day goes by without demonstrations.

It is clear that the EU, as it is today, is a construction serving the interests of multi-colonial powers, rather than people. It would therefore be deluded to believe that equitable relations can exist between the EU and the Southern countries as things stand.

Only the EU people's struggle for a Europe of the people can ensure equitable North-South relations.

Against this backdrop, leftist movements on both sides have an obligation to regroup and unite to step up the fight for a world of justice and human dignity. This fight could be based on the following areas:

- Placing human beings and the universality of human rights at the heart of social and bilateral exchanges between states, making international solidarity our main watchword.
- Strengthening civil movements fighting for human rights, the environment, development, feminism, etc.
- Taking inspiration from regional blocs that enable people to protect themselves more effectively, such as ALBA in Latin America.
- Encouraging initiatives to develop fair trade, by developing local circuits for exchanging agricultural products that support regional products, and expanding the fields of social economy, local exchange systems or barter networks to challenge the global trading system.
- And finally, regarding migration, “working and living together” was for a long time confused with a right to difference, without any membership of the common space; which is often understood by establishing internal boundaries promoting communitarianism. Our shared future lies in equal rights and the fight for a fair society that has gone back to its secular, welcoming values. It is within our reach to break down these walls of fear and the stereotypes erected by capitalism and move towards a world of justice, democracy, peace and fraternity.



# Ghassan Diba

Lebanese Communist Party – Lebanon

## **EuroMed: Towards a Progressive Alliance for the Mediterranean**

I would like to discuss some aspects of the EuroMed partnership agreements partly in the context of globalization, free trade, trade agreements, the EU and EZ, the state of development of SMCs, and I will have few words to say about the notion of imperialism in this context. I am afraid that my comments may seem fragmentary to some, but I believe at this stage of analysis that is the best way to approach the subject and solicit debate from the audience and from the fraternal parties of the left in the Mediterranean.

## **The Crisis of Capitalism**

First, I would like to discuss the different aspects of the crisis of capitalism which may bear some consequences for our discussion of the EuroMed agreements. There are six challenges to capitalism today:

1. **Crisis in Globalization.** Globalization went from being a stage of capitalist development that many thought would benefit the advanced capitalist economies (or what some call the North or West) to a threat to these coun-

tries. The Trump program of making America Great Again is essentially anti-Globalist and has thrown Globalization itself into crisis through the threat of trade wars and protectionism. The fundamental reason for such anti-globalization backlash has been two pronged: one, the share of developing economies in the world output has risen in the past thirty years from 40 to 60 percent at the expense of the advanced economies. Second, the middle and working classes in the advanced economies saw their economic fortunes and incomes stagnate while the middle classes in developing countries like China have gained. The latter dynamic is clear in the now famous ‘Elephant’ graph popularized by Branko Milanovic.

2. **The 2008 crisis and its aftermath.** A decade ago, the global financial crisis pushed Capitalism into a deep existential crisis, exposing its challenges and questioning its fundamentals. This came almost two decades after what was called the Great Moderation and the longest economic growth period in the US in the 1990s. This all came crashing down in the largest crisis since the Great Depression. I will not go into the details, but the crisis was not a classical business cycle



but a general crisis that led to what many call the current state of secular stagnation in the US. The crisis also had repercussions that Europe, for example, is still reeling from: 1. Austerity and 2. The Debt Crisis like The Greek Crisis and its aftermath. At a larger scale, this has created political and economic uncertainties and instabilities in the EU and the EZ.

### **Very quickly the other aspects of the crisis**

3. **Technological change.** *The rise of the digital age and Artificial intelligence is threatening the advanced economies with technological unemployment.* It can have also tremendous effects on inequality between labor and labor, labor and capital, and the rise of winner-take all markets which brings me to the fourth point,....
4. **Rise of inequality.** Since T. Piketty in 2013 published “Capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” it has become widely accepted that the rise of income and wealth inequality has brought capitalism back to the Gilded Age. It is to be noted that in the advanced capitalist economies, it is technology and globalization that have contributed most to the rise of inequality.
5. **The breakdown of relations between democracy and capitalism** which is partially a derivative of the rise of inequality. Reagan and Thatcher believed that destroying the traditional liberal system, that took the form of Keynesianism and the welfare state in the 20th century, and replacing it with

neoliberalism would destroy socialism, but the result ended up pushing capitalism to contradict democracy itself. Paul Volcker, governor of the US Federal Reserve between 1979 and 1987, arguably the architect of the neoliberal era, says now that American capitalism is turning into a plutocracy.

6. Finally, of course, the ecological crisis and climate change where the contradictions between capitalist growth, distribution and the environment threatens the world with an unprecedented ecological crisis.

### **The Partnership Agreements**

The EuroMed agreements that started with the Barcelona Process in 1995 passed through several stages notably in the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks where security concerns took over and the project faltered, and subsequently in the aftermath of the Arab Spring which originally may have brought renewed optimism, but again the project slowed down afterwards. Irrespective of the wider political and cultural aspects of the original project, the EUROMED partnership agreements are essentially economic ones which have two aspects:

1. Elimination of tariffs and non-tariff trade barriers
2. Bilateral negotiations towards deep and comprehensive free trade areas that include further liberalization of trade in agriculture, liberalization of trade in services and investment, accreditation and acceptance of industrial products and regulatory convergence.

The question hence becomes: How do trade agreements between countries or group of countries differ from free trade? First, in free trade there are always winners and losers and these winners and losers are usually different groups within different countries. As we have seen above, globalization led to certain groups winning and others losing. However, free trade and globalization are inescapable: this is the logic of capitalist expansion on a world scale so vividly described by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*.

In the context of the EuroMed agreements, empirical evidence is not very large but it seems there is a consensus emerging that the agreements had limited positive effects on the SMCs in terms of increase in exports to the EU or through EU investments in the SMCs. However, the agreements in the trade area will gradually become an inevitable part of the Euro-Mediterranean economic space and I believe that the SMCs will benefit from such free trade with Europe. Today, the way of development is integration in the world economy not delinking, as the now largely wrong and defunct dependency theory claimed for so long.

However, the other aspects of the Med project that may lead eventually (or currently) to “rather than reigning in protectionists, trade agreements empower another set of special interests groups and politically well-connected firms such as international banks, pharmaceutical companies and multinational corporations’ as the economist Dani Rodrik says in his discussion of free trade agreements in general. In this respect, and according to Rodrik also, four areas that can have grave redistribution ef-

fects, which are conducive to “rent transfer”, between countries in trade agreements (in this case from the SMCs to EU)

1. Trade-related Intellectual property rights (TRIPS) that can generate monopoly rents to advanced countries firms such as pharmaceuticals, software giants, etc....
2. Capital Account liberalization
3. ‘Investor-state dispute settlement’
4. Harmonization of regulatory frameworks

In addition, there is evidence also that the trade agreements are benefiting rent seeking firms in the SMCs. In this respect, I quote a Tunisian commentator:

*“European support in the economic field seems inappropriate. For example, when it comes to the credit lines that are provided to Tunisian financial institutions, only large companies and, in the words of the World Bank, Tunisian “crony capitalism” seem to be the main beneficiaries. As a matter of fact, access to the EU market and to its financial assistance is widely seen in Tunisia as an economic opportunity that is captured by well-connected people. It is as though European support were another form of rent in a country in which economic incentives are used as vehicles for rent creation. In the fall of 2015, small-scale farmers in Tunisia’s south protested during the harvesting season against big distribution chains and market monopolies and demanded fair access to export opportunities.”*

### **Imperialism?**

And here we can then see the relationship between the increased monopolization and the increase in wealth and income inequality in the advanced capitalist economies as the origin of such pressure to transform trade agreements from being agreements for mere access to markets (which would be beneficial in the aggregate to all) to agreements that transfer rents to monopolies and holders of excess capital and wealth.

In this respect, capitalism seems to be entering a new phase of monopolistic capitalism coupled with high income and wealth inequality. According to the *Economist*, since 1997, the concentration has increased in two-thirds of US industries and in ten percent of the economy, four companies control two-thirds of the market. Companies today, as a result of their high profits, boast more cash flows than on average in the past 50 years. The *Economist* calculates that the amount of abnormal profits in the world is around \$ 660 billion.

A point here, also on the gains and losses. The discussion on “fairness” of trade agreements does not absolve the SMCs from the need to transform their economies and align them with international free trade in a productive manner (as the Chinese did). The times and scales are different but there is no alternative unless the SMCs choose to remain in a dysfunctional state of underdevelopment. In this respect, I would like to quote Marx from the *Critique of the Gotha Program* “Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society”

Finally, we need to develop a unified theory of the type of imperialism we are facing in the Mediterranean. Is it the same imperialism of 100 years ago? There is lot of “simplicity” that govern our thinking regarding this matter. Is current imperialism a response to capitalist crisis or to the rise of a new form of organized capitalism? Is ultra-imperialism on the agenda? Is it, as I said earlier, the manifestation of monopolization and excess capital as it was on the eve of World War I? Or is it that it maybe not useful any more in the age of Globalization to talk about imperialism? Or finally, is it just the hegemonic tendencies of the US manifesting itself in increased militarism pushed by special interests (Neocons) all the way to the current Trump administration?

### **Towards a Progressive Alliance**

Notwithstanding our answers to these questions, today in light of the rise of the right-wing economic nationalism and its global expansion and the danger of an escalation towards imperialist militarism, the response must not be “nationalist projects” of any shape or form but an “internationalist” one. The last time capitalism was cornered, it produced fascism and World War II. Today, despite the differences in approaches to socialism, a global progressive front is needed to stop the world from sliding into internal and external wars. Only such a global front can move the world forward and away from global or local conflicts.

With regard to Europe and the South, The EuroMed partnerships provide potentially an alternative political and economic space for the Arab Med countries. Instead of looking always inwards, they can look outwards. However, this

will only be viable if we have a different EU (not this EU). This EU is the EU of the rise of populism, of the crisis of social democracy, of the lack of trust in politics and economic institutions, the EU of the Troika that strangled the Greek economy, and the EU that the majority of its constituent nations remain part of what should be by now a defunct NATO military alliance. Only a left alternative in Europe would form such a space. In the meantime, the left parties should form a *Progressive Alliance of the Mediterranean* to signal to its peoples that an alternative exists and that a common destiny of peace, solidarity, sustainable development and democratic socialism is the way forward.

Inger V. Johansen • Jassim Halfi  
Michael Shabaan

# **ENERGY AND RESOURCES AS ENVIRONMENTAL BATTLEFIELDS IN THE REGION**

The environmental policies of the region

Fossil-free future and green energy

Control of resources as weapon of capitalism  
and root cause of conflict and wars

Natural resources within the Republic of Cyprus



# Inger V. Johansen

Red-Green Alliance – Denmark

## Climate change and the left

I wish to start by underlining a few points:

- The special role and responsibility of the Left in fighting climate change, as we are the ones acknowledging the fundamental link between the Capitalist mode of production and climate warming.
- Climate warming will especially hit the poor, vulnerable and the working classes – climate struggle is part of the class struggle.
- In order to fight climate change we need system change. Climate change can't be fought with the present free market-orientated policies; we need state/public subvention to help green and just transition.

The present serious climate crisis may very well develop into a climate disaster within a couple of decades, if the current greenhouse gas/CO2 emissions continue to grow. According to the report from last autumn of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (UN Climate Panel) we are at 1 to 1.5 degrees Celsius climate warming (compared to before 1990). We see the consequences of just this modest

rising in temperatures in the extreme flooding in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe, caused especially by massive rainfalls after the cyclone, in the heat and the drought around the Mediterranean in the summer, in the climate warming at the Poles and fast melting of ice.

The Paris Agreement in 2015 adopted the first legally binding global climate agreement with a goal of "limiting global warming to two degrees Celsius and as close to 1.5 degrees as possible" before the end of this century. But whereas the agreement is legally binding, CO2 emission reductions are voluntary.

CO2 emissions are low in the Middle East and Northern Africa region, as industrialization is modest. But the effects of climate warming are considerable and extremely serious to the peoples of the region. Additionally, there are huge geostrategic imperialist interests due to the presence of much sought-after natural resources like water, minerals, and fossil fuels such as oil and gas. This creates a continuing danger of destabilization, conflict and war.

Whereas during the years of financial crises, global CO2 emissions were stable, over the past years we have seen a new rise in emissions. We

are already close to 1.5 degrees climate warming. If CO2 emissions do not stay as they are now, and this will be difficult given the present rise, we will have reached two degrees climate warming before the end of the next 18 years, according to the CO2 budget of the IPCC, which is the goal set in the Paris Agreement before the end of in this century. We can only imagine the kind of weather conditions that might become the norm in case of two degrees climate warming within the next two decades. Additionally, air pollution and noise will further add to health problems caused by extreme temperatures, especially in urban areas and hit those who are socially vulnerable.

I wish to underline that climate warming was created by the so-called Western countries over the past couple of centuries. It is an effect of capitalist growth, ruthless industrialization, extractivism and consumerism, accompanied by global expansion and colonization of the peoples of the South. But climate warming is affecting us all. It will especially affect the poor and the working classes of this world. It will create more inequality. This makes the climate struggle part of the class struggle. It should be of deep concern to all those present at this conference.

We have seen over the past years a rising protest movement especially among students and children against the negligence of the politicians regarding their responsibilities to address in an ambitious way increasing climate warming. On Friday 15 March, a day of climate strike and action by a global youth movement took place directed at the politicians: 1769 actions in 112 countries in all continents.

The left – socialists and communists – have unfortunately been lagging behind on this issue. Among the left in Europe we are now calling for rapid cuts in CO2 emissions and fast green and just energy transition of our societies. These two go hand in hand. A just transition is important in order to make the transition both green and socially just. Social considerations should be built into the green transition. There should be community energy and public ownership of e.g. energy and water.

Our societies should be built as non-emission societies on green energy. There is no doubt that this entails a confrontation with the forced growth model of Capitalism. According to the Paris Agreement CO2 neutrality should be accomplished by 2050. In the climate and energy plans of many left parties and movements we put 2040 as the deadline for the complete transition.

Europe and the EU are often presented as pioneers in the struggle against climate change. Although it would be climate justice that the Western countries were paying the bills and did reduce by far the most substantial part of CO2 emissions and did pursue ambitious policies of green and just transition and support developing countries to do this, the efforts of the EU are far from this. Not only the USA, but other so-called rich countries are not paying the countries of the South what they promised in the Paris Agreement to help build sustainable development.

Many ordinary people try to make an individual effort, the main hindrance are the politicians, as is pointed out by the global climate movement.



In the EU they are lagging behind as the EU is based on neo-liberal policies and free market concerns and are under heavy pressure by lobbyists to keep doing this. The EU still finances fossil fuels- based projects, coal and gas especially. It supports nuclear power. EU promotes free trade and trade agreements, which are detrimental to green and just transition of energy. Privatizations are prioritized, with the same effects. There are no state aid rules supporting renewable energy. The EU emissions trading system helps neither the countries of the South nor the need to cut emissions in the North. The EU plans a 40% reduction of CO2 emissions by 2030, which is quite insufficient if the goal for CO2 neutrality is 2050 (Paris Agreement). The left parties advise an EU 65% reduction of CO2 emissions in 2030. This may very well be insufficient.

The following sectors are among the most CO2 emission heavy:

- Fossil fuels-based sector – oil, coal and gas
- Transport sector – including aviation

You will ask when green and just transition will become relevant in the countries to the east and south of the Mediterranean. It is already urgent if you wish to secure just transition for the peoples of the region, which will be among the hardest hit by climate warming in the future.

- In Europe left parties are advising to phase out fossil fuels by 2030; it is necessary as fast as possible to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

- Reduction in energy consumption: Main areas, transport, industry, heating, electricity.
- Cars and lorries run on petrol and diesel should be phased out and converted into electricity run vehicles or e-cars. Left parties advise to phase out the selling of petrol and diesel run cars in 2025.
- Public transport should be expanded and made more efficient and cheap in order to substitute cars and short flight routes. Aviation should have a climate tax and be geared towards being run by electricity.
- Building sector – needs to be energy-efficient; we should fight for the creation of local jobs
- 100% organic farming – change agriculture and forestry so that emissions are extracted from the atmosphere and bound to the soil.

Technological transition:

- Renewable energy: windmills, solar cells, geothermal heating. Storing of renewable energy. Biomass is still used but should be phased out.

We believe that in order to de-escalate climate change, we need system change. We need to build a combined economic, ecological and political alternative, a red and green alternative, which does not require blind growth like Capitalism. This may be eco-socialism or eco-feminism, systems that are compatible with CO2 neutrality.

# Jassim Halfi

ICP – Iraq

## **The oil policy crisis in Iraq – the oil licensing round, a model**

Iraq's economic policy has led to the deepening of the single product character of the economy and its revenue-generating nature. This is due to the increased reliance on oil revenue which represents on average more than 90 percent of the general budget revenue. As well as the distortion in the structure of the Iraqi economy and its fragile single product revenue-generating base, poor management and lack of vision on the part of economic policy planners and advisers have led to corruption within state bodies and, in the sphere of investment projects in particular, to the squandering of enormous economic and financial resources and the loss of many opportunities. After the change which occurred in 2003 and the accompanying collapse of the central structure of the state and its institutions, the occupation authorities launched an operation to convert the structure of the Iraqi economy, in which the state sector and its government and mixed companies played a hegemonic role, to a "market economy" starting with removing all the restrictions on foreign trade and opening Iraqi markets to the unhindered influx of foreign goods. At the

same time, the occupation authority after the change, and the governments that followed it, started to pass legislation which facilitated the financing of trade and the free movement of capital, which is generally heading abroad both legally and illegally.

This trend was accompanied by a move towards doing away with the public industrial companies by not re-equipping them and keeping their production capabilities out of order in preparation for their privatisation. This led to a continuous deterioration in industrial production. The same trend took in the agricultural sector which had protection measures on its produce lifted, allowing imported produce, especially from neighbouring countries, to flood the local market at the expense of Iraqi produce.

The move to a market economy was coupled with an economic policy that mainly revolved around expanding the production of crude oil and its earnings. Its expression was also found in the first and second oil licensing rounds, which very much looked like corruption and drained major resources from Iraq.

We opposed these oil licensing rounds and the great number of contracts which were signed with companies in haste, as agreements and contracts were concluded with them behind closed doors without transparency and without clear disclosure of them. Experience has shown that a lack of transparency in concluding agreements indicates that there is a desire to conceal an important matter from the people, as there is a strong link between the lack of transparency and corruption.

In this respect Iraqi decision-makers did not take into consideration the actual needs of the national economy, as these investments were no longer a factor helping to develop the economy but a specific element of the trends in its development. The oil sector has been developed according to an exclusive vision of it as a sector for increasing wealth, without paying any attention to constructing links with other economic sectors. The operations to manufacture oil and gas have not been paid the necessary attention, which has reduced its positive effects on the national economy and on its various sectors.

That our opposition to this trend was correct was confirmed after the sharp drop in oil prices revealed significant loopholes in these contracts, resulting in Iraq being charged a lot of money by the companies, in addition to what seems to be poor management and corruption. This is because the contracts from the licensing rounds granted the foreign oil companies the right to recoup the money they spend on developing wells or drilling new wells from export revenues within three months of the expenditure. Therefore, these

companies do not in reality bring in foreign investment, but rather they are advancing a kind of short-term loan within the context of the contracts for the job.

The current fragile economic structure of the Iraqi economy, completely dependent on oil, and the aspects of weakness and failure therein to which we have already referred, provides evidence of the failure of the economic policies followed since 2003 to achieve development and allocate human and financial resources and the raised growth rates in oil income over the course of the years in the interest of achieving sustainable and balanced growth.

The outcome of this trend is reflected in the reality of the Iraqi economy today, which has failed to develop any resource other than oil and has unleashed a growth in private and public consumption, the nature of which is mostly of luxury goods and is satisfied by importing from world markets. This combination of the revenue-producing state and the unrestrained market has led to increased integration with the global consumer market. According to this trend the action of the state is restricted to using the tools which influence demand in the markets. This policy has proved its lack of effectiveness in instigating the building of new capacities in the production sphere and in the labour-intensive sectors of building and construction.

In the course of adopting the policy of moving to the neo-liberal market and pathway, the trend toward privatisation has increased and the state has gradually moved away from

its social and economic functions. This is not only at the production level but also even at the level of public services. It is particularly noticeable in the spheres of education, health, electricity, housing and transport which will leave major negative effects on the living conditions of those with limited income and even the middle classes. It is being accompanied by an increase in the phenomenon of the super-rich, which is deepening social alienation and marginalisation and increasing the tension of class division. It is giving rise to increasing anxiety amongst wide groups and circles of the people and they are expressing their rejection in multiple forms and methods of strikes, demonstrations and protest movements.

The present social and economic circumstances of the country and clear aspects of weakness and failure to meet the needs of the citizens and find pillars for sustainable development are indications of the failure of the economic policy pursued since 2003 and hence the economic role of the state and its relationship with the market, as a view prevails amongst those who take economic decisions arising from predominantly liberal thinking that calls for a free market, and in our circumstances it could be said that it is unrestrained whilst the role of the state is restricted to that of a mere guard and its role and organisational influence is dwindling.

In what follows I want to quickly refer to what our party has adopted in this regard:

1. It has adopted a sustainable development strategy and approval of short- and me-

dium-term development plans, aiming at expanding, diversifying and modernising the economic base, and developing human capabilities, and the rational and competent use of the country's resources to achieve a better level and quality of life for all citizens.

2. To allocate the oil revenues for investment and development purposes in principle and to ensure monitoring and inspection of these by the institutions representing the people.
3. To consider the oil and gas extraction sector as a strategic sector, which must remain public property, especially the gas and oil reserve.
4. To approve a rational oil policy that gradually limits the Iraqi economy's reliance on revenue from exporting crude oil and preserves the national wealth from being wasted, guaranteeing the rights of future generations to it.
5. The state is to establish strategic mining policies for the country and monitor that they are executed well by the state sector and the private sector.
6. Building the necessary capabilities to adopt a direct national investment policy for the oil and gas wealth.
7. To modernise the oil installations, and expand the internal oil and gas pipeline networks.

8. Taking care of the petrochemical and refining industries and endeavouring to modernise the refineries and oil and gas product distribution installations and construct new refineries meeting the local need and exporting these products.
9. Re-negotiating the licensing rounds and their contracts and dealing with their loopholes so as to guarantee the highest revenues for Iraq and the optimum exploitation of the gas- and oilfields.

# Michael Shabaan

AKEL – Cyprus

We aim at exposing, inter alia, the significance of natural resources and how they should be used to the benefit of our peoples. At the same time, we cannot ignore the extent to which access to our region's natural resources has become another source of frictions and conflicts. It is therefore not surprising that tensions - to say the least - on energy are dangerously escalating not only in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East but also in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and the South China Sea. To be more precise, foreign interventionism, conflicts and wars, are the main weapons of powerful capitalist states seeking to attain access and direct benefits from the control of natural resources, not only here but throughout the world; and of course to enhance their overall geopolitical control. It is to this same end that internal conflict issues, religious fundamentalism or the alleged democratization of governments are being exploited by powerful states in order to pursue their own, their national geostrategic agendas.

A daily reminder of this, is their long-standing role in past and open wounds in the area, such as the Palestinian and Cyprus problem, the imperialist intervention in Syria, the dismantling of Libya, the activities of the "Islamic State"

organization, the results of the so-called "revolutions" of the Arab Spring, and the earlier illegal intervention in Iraq which yielded devastating results for the Iraqi people. A more recent expression of imperialist interventionism is in itself the last week's statement of the US President, regarding sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Reminding us of the US role in re-arranging the Middle East so as to serve self-interests and long-standing alliances, the US President seeks to re-write history, in flagrant violation of international law and in breach of numerous relevant UN Security Council Resolutions. At a time when Syria has essentially defeated the 'Islamic State', instead of assisting the stabilisation of the region, the United States are declaring that the recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the Occupied Golan Syrian Heights is vitally important from a strategic and security point of view for the State of Israel and the stability of the region. This unfortunate position follows the illegal recognition of Jerusalem as the indivisible capital of Israel and the transfer of their Embassy there a year ago, which provoked the outrage of the Palestinian people and international condemnation.

It is inevitable that beyond denouncing all such unacceptable and illegal policies adopted

by powerful states, through which they treat our states and our local populations as if we are their colonial extensions, a key challenge is what we actually do to use our natural resources to our own benefit. Notwithstanding the highly complex technical characteristics of extraction and transportation of hydrocarbons, which cannot take place of course without all the necessary environmental caveats, our main priority should be to utilize natural resources as an additional reason for peaceful cooperation and towards our mutual benefit.

As we all know, 30% of global maritime trade and 25% of marine oil transport are conducted in Eastern Mediterranean, while In 2010, the United States Geological Survey in a report, estimated that in the eastern Mediterranean basin there may be up to 340 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, while the value of the Eastern Mediterranean energy reserves are estimated to be around 1.5 trillion US dollars. In Cyprus, the existence of natural gas reserves in the southern part of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Republic of Cyprus has attracted the interest of big energy giants, but also of neighboring states. The Republic of Cyprus has proceeded in recent years to take steps to safeguard its sovereign rights, the delimitation of the EEZ and other related agreements with neighboring states, as well as to licensing of maritime blocks for respective explorations.

AKEL's position is that the exploitation of natural resources can and should proceed according to specific parameters: that is, it should be exploited for the benefit of the peoples in line with a plan that views energy as a public social good; that it should be turned into a factor of

peace and regional cooperation, and not a factor of tension and militarization; that it should be based on the respect of International Law, the UN Law of the Sea and the inalienable sovereign rights of each state.

Unfortunately, our approach remains inevitably hindered by the intransigence of Turkey. Ankara occupies illegally the 37% of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus, refrains from recognising Cyprus and thus from entering into a dialogue to solve our maritime disputes; additionally, it acts as a pirate within our EEZ, both threatening the Republic and obstructing the implementation of our energy programme. We recall that Turkey must comply with the international law of the Sea and respect the sovereign right of the RoC to explore and use/exploit natural resources within its exclusive economic zone. In fact, a prerequisite for the peaceful functioning of international relations is that the implementation of the rights of all sovereign states must be fully and indiscriminately respected by the entirety of the international community. Of which, Turkey is also a member. The Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982, signed and ratified by 168 states until today, constitutes the primary legal framework for the consolidation of these rights. And on several occasions, Ankara has been called upon to respect the relevant rules and proceed with the adoption of the Convention of the Law of the Sea.

The main pretexts for Turkey's unacceptable stance- and the constant hindering of the Republic's energy programme which is in conformity with international law- is the dispute over certain maritime areas which it claims for itself and the so-called "protection" of the interests



of the Turkish Cypriot community. Notwithstanding the extreme and legally unwarranted position of Ankara, we believe that the solution of the Cyprus problem is the most promising context for resolving the issues of natural resources comprehensively. Which means (1) to allow both communities on the island to benefit from the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons and (2) to create a new political environment for the resolution of the maritime disputes between Cyprus and Turkey, or even for their future cooperation in the field of energy.

Having predicted the significance of the issue of natural resources at an early stage, the then two leaders Christofias and Talat agreed since 2010 on relevant convergences. They provide that all natural resources, which essentially include the hydrocarbons, constitute a common heritage of the two communities in Cyprus and how they shall be exploited to the benefit of both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. More precisely, the said convergences clarify that the issue of Cypriot hydrocarbons shall be conclusively and constructively resolved through the comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem. They include an agreement on the federal competence over the delimitation of maritime zones and the settlement of disputes, all according to UNCLOS; as well as on the federal competence on natural resources including hydrocarbons. Another convergence under the negotiating chapter of Economy concerned the distribution of revenues at the federal level, including those generated through the exploitation of natural gas.

We believe that the existing convergences that will be implemented after the solution provide

a positive arrangement for both communities. On the other hand we need to clarify that the common management of the hydrocarbons by the two communities, as Turkey and Turkish Cypriot leadership require, before the solution of the problem, is not an acceptable claim. To require a sovereign state to give up its rights is unsound and in practice this could transform the hydrocarbons' exploitation, from a motive for the solution into a severe obstacle.

In concluding, what we would like to repeat is that to be constructive and peace oriented we always have to work around these difficult issues in trying to transform them into motives and leverages for resolving problems. This is our approach with regards to the settlement of the Cyprus problem. AKEL insists that we should work for policies guaranteeing the benefits of the future generations on our island, of both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. It is within this context that a new legislation has been put forth for the creation of a National Sovereign Fund for the revenues of hydrocarbons, to the benefit of future generations. At the same time, we believe that the viability of our energy policies depends on whether it can prove mutually beneficial for the entire region, if the energy planning proceeds in a context of friendly relations following the solution of the Cyprus problem. The tripartite meetings on energy planning which have been taking place in the last few years, among governments in the region including Cyprus, should be driven solely by that motive. Upon the solution of the Cyprus problem, Turkey's objective to ensure that the natural gas in Cyprus and the whole region will be supplied to Europe via a pipeline that will pass through its territories should also be taken into account.

Energy can prove to be a catalyst for friendly, neighborly relations and truthful cooperation in the region. We, as the Left can project on the importance of progressive and modern approaches on energy and natural resources, on defining them as a social good and not as commodities in the hands of monopolies. And we, together, could work, in order to render the natural wealth of the Eastern Mediterranean a leverage for peaceful cooperation and real stability, to warrant a more prosperous future of the region's peoples and countries.





