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Islamic future in Europe?

Let me first express my deep gratitude for the invitation by Nahnoo to take part in the Norwegian-Lebanese Cultural Week here in Beirut.

I have been asked to respond to the question: Islamic future in Europe? Hence, there are two underlying questions: What is "Europe"? What is "Islam"?

And as you know, "Europe" is not one. Geographically, different regions, North and South, East and West; historically, there are different developmental stages; socially, different classes and changing class structures; linguistically, different languages. In short, the term "Europe" has to be defined.

And "Islam", like any other religious or socio-politicial phenomena, is not one. In short, the term "Islam" has to be defined.

So, what do we mean with these terms? What do I mean, here?

I shall proceed by focusing on these three points:

(1) 'Europe'
(2) 'Islam'
(3) and, at the end: 'Islamic and Europe'

(1) 'Europe'

By 'Europe' I here mainly have the present European Union in mind, that is, countries in the European Union or closely connected to the European Union. Even so, there are certainly many ways of conceiving 'Europe'. Here I choose to focus on two main characteristics, without denying or disregarding other approaches:

(i) Enlightenment – institutional differentiations and new sciences

(ii) War experiences and related learning processes

Surely, these are broad and general characteristics. That being said, I do think that they express something that is characteristic of Europe, and more so than for instance of the United States.

(i) Enlightenment – institutional differentiations and new sciences

(A) Institutional differentiations

With the Renaissance and Reformation, with capitalist economy and new States, Europe was reshaped by institutional differentiations and related learning processes. Broadly speaking, there were institutional differentiations between State, market and civil society (cf Weber), and ideally there should be division of power between executive, legislative and judiciary institutions and professional roles (cf Montesquieu). The courts and judges should be independent of the political rulers. There should be rule of law, a constitutional State, and there should be a professional State bureaucracy that treated all citizens equally and according to the laws. Universities were to a large extent to be autonomous, independent of religion and politics, and gradually there were distinctions between the legal system and religion, between secular laws and religion as a private choice or a matter of cultural tradition.

(B) Differentiations of 'value spheres' (Max Weber)

Simultaneously there was a differentiation of different 'values spheres' – epistemic, moral, and aesthetic 'values' – that were related to institutional differentiations: questions of truth, of what is the case, are treated by the sciences (by scientists and scholars); questions of what is right are treated by the moral and legal system (by judges and moral advisors, again with an important differentiation: not everything that is conceived of as morally bad should be forbidden by law); and questions of beauty are treated in the arts. (Cf Kant's "Critique of pure reason", referring to the epistemic question 'what can I know'; "Critique of practical reason", referring to the moral question 'what should I do?'; and "Critique of judgment", referring to aesthetics in a broad sense.)

(C) Class struggle and other conflicts (Marx and others)

Those in power have often responded to class conflicts and other main tensions by the use of physical repression and by religious or ideological indoctrination. In modern European history, other ways of coping with such conflicts and tensions emerged: Independent trade unions were established, and also political parties, often based on class interests, or related to

social movements and organizations in civil society. On this background, a constitutional democracy – with universal suffrage and majority vote, under a common constitution in defense of minority rights – constituted a general framework for coping with social conflicts and tension. However, this is an ideal, the ideal of political and legal justice. To be real, more is required. Then there are preconditions on two levels: (i) Political and legal justice presupposes social and economic justice. This is the role of the welfare state, with a universal system for disability insurance and basic material support by unemployment and for the elderly, and with basic legal regulations of working conditions and family affairs. (ii) Political and legal justice, within the frames of a condititional democracy, presupposes educated citizens and enlightened public discussions. In other words, a good educational system common for all children, and a free public sphere that allows for criticism of authorities of various kinds.

(D) New sciences and renewed scholarly activities

The new natural sciences, experimental and mathematically formulated as in Newtonian mecanics, were gradually interrelated with technological development and thereby related to economy, and also to the State, for instance for the development of infrastructure and military technology. By the structure of their causally explaining methods, these sciences delivered explanations, predictions, and technical maximes. Hence, by these new sciences we could obtain better control of natural events.

However, in the same periode, with new states and a new religious pluralism by divisions between Catholics and Protestant denominations of various kinds, there was also a renewed concern for interpreting disciplines: the interpretation of legal texts in jurisprudence and the interpretation of religious texts in theology. For, a text does not interpret itself; it has to be interpreted by somebody. Moreover, there are often different interpretations of the same text. Hence, one is faced with the question: Why is my interpretation better than the other interpretations? For a serious answer to this question, one has to give reasons as to why one interpretation is more reliable than another. Moreover, different religious have different Holy Scriptures, and hence we are faced with the question: Why are my texts the right ones, and not those of the others? In short, there is an inherent urge, within the religions based on Holy Scriptures, to move from interpretation toward rational argumentation. This reminds us of Enlightenment, as in Kant's famous definition: *sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your own reason, in a self-critical discussion with other people! Moreover, in Kant the term 'critique' does not mean a negative denial (cf his 'critique' of pure and practical reason), but a

serious test (like 'advocatus diaboli' in the Catholic Church, who was conceived of as the 'defender of the faith'). Hence, modern societies are science-based, not only by the new natural sciences, but also by renewed interpretive disciplines and self-critical argumentation.

However, this has not been recognized by everybody. For instance, Sayyid Qutb (cf his book *Milestones*) was in favor of natural sciences, and certainly of his own religious convictions, but he disliked humanities and social sciences. The same is true of people like Ahmadinejad, engineer and religious fundamentalist, and also of influential groups in the United States who conceive of freedom of religion as a freedom from criticism, not as a freedom to criticize. These people embrace the modern sciences from Galileo and Newton, but not the Enlightment tradition from Volaire and Kant. At this point there is, broadly speaking, a major difference between the US and the EU – and not without political impact, for instance in foreign affairs concerning Israeli politics and its supposedly religious foundation.

(ii) War experiences and related learning processes

Every country, nation, and community has had war experiences and has tried to learn from these experiences. But for central European countries, there is more to be said concerning post-war learning processes and self-interpretations. I am thinking of the War of Religion between Catholics and Protestants in 1618-1648 (also called the "Thirty Years' War"), and the Second World War, 1939-1945.

(a) War of Religion
As a result of the devastating and exhausting War of Religion, there was a strong will to overcome religious conflicts of this kind. Steps were taken to establish laws and institutions that are common to everyone, across different religious denominations and convictions. Gradually there were institutional differentiations between the legal system and religion, between coercive laws common to all citizens, and various forms of faith as a matter of choice or tradition.

(b) Second World War
As a result of the atrocities and the tragic and painful experiences of WWII there was a search for universal human rights overriding national laws. There was the Nürnberg trial. In

Germany, there was an explicit and extensive self-criticism. And not to forget: at the ouset, a basic reason for the European Union was political, to establish a institutional frame for reconciliation and peace among central European countries, especial between the traditional ennemies, France and Germany. As a consequence, today central Europe is a peaceful and prosperous region. In the outskirts, from Northern Ireland to Balkan countries and toward northern Caucasus, there has been warfare, but not in central Euorpe. Surely, France and Britain has had their colonial wars after WWII. And today, through NATO, European states are involved in warfare outside Europe, but preferably in accordance with United Nation resolutions, and Germany most reluctently. Thus, in terms of war experiences among civilians and of post-war learning processes, there is a difference between central European nations and the US.

(2) 'Islam'

For Islam as for any religion, there is diversity in conceptions, traditions, and practices; and Islam as any other major religion can also be conceived of as a culture and civilization, or as a political ideology or programme.

But first, a general semantic remark:
In our times there is a pluralism of religions, of different and often opposite versions of each of the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, or of New Age, Satanism, and witchcraft, old and new, and also of other world religions, such as Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and of different forms of religious practices with or without a belief in God or theological theses. For instance, one God, or many, or none? Is God radically separated from the world and humankind, or are there transitions between God and human beings, and between God and the world? Is God benevolent, or evil, or both? Given this pluralism, who has then the right to decide, for others, what falls inside or outside when we talk about religion?

This is a semantic point with extensive practical implications, both legally and politically: This open-ended, indeterminate pluralism implies that a general appeal for general religious rights (of a legal or economic nature) has no longer a clear and definite meaning. This holds true also for what is said about 'religion' in legal texts, such as the UN declaration of human rights. Due to the indeterminate pluralism of 'religion', the term has to be defined. And to

deserve respect and rights, that has to be justified for the defined notion in each case, with convincing arguments. Hence, if there are special reasons why a certain 'religion' deserves special respect and support, this has to be shown in each case by arguments that are universally understandable and convincing, that is, by universally valid arguments.

In short, due to this semantic pluralism, the reference to something as 'religion' is in itself no reason for special respect or concern.

But is not religion (whatever it means) beyond the scope of rationality, either because it is deeply personal or because it can only be understood in an internal perspective, that is, by the believers themselves, or maybe by their spokepersons, such as rabbies, priests or imams?

There is something to be said in favor of such objections. On the other hand, when it comes to the three monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – they do raise universal validity claims, each one of them, about their Holy Scriptures and about the one and only God. Structurally, on these decisive points, the three monotheistic religions are faced with the same kind of challenges; and consequently, due to these universal validity claims, they are inherently open for enlightenment and rational criticism.

(i) Based on Holy Scriptures

In a modern pluralistic society, we are faced with the fact that there are other interpretations of 'my' Holy Scriptures. Hence the question: why are my interpretations the right ones? And we have to realize that there are other persons who have other Holy Scriptures. Hence the question: why are my texts the right ones? To answer these questions, reflexivity and reasoning are needed. Self-critical interpretations and reasonable argumentations are required.

(ii) Monotheism, belief in one God (Jahvé, Allah)

For all three monotheistic religions there is only one God (mono-theism), who is at the same time the creator (and supporter) of the world, the lawgiver, the judge, and the executor. Given that God is almighty, benevolent, and omniscient – he is all good, he knows everything, and he can do whatever it is – then, when faced with major tragedies and disasters (such as the earthquake in Lisabon in 1755) we do have a major problem, head on: How could God allow this to happen? In theological terms, how can we cope with "the problem of evil"? On this major problem in the three monotheistic religions, there are ongoing discussions, from the Book of Hiob in the Old Testament up to Leibnitz and his theodicé in the 18th century, and further on in our time. How should we theologically understand and explain major disasters –

earthquates, tsunamis, iceages or exploding calderas? Where was the voice of Jahvé in Auschwitz? Arguments from free will, or from unavoidable interdependence of good and evil, do not cope satisfactorily with such major disasters and tragedies, that do not appear as necessary (neither empirically nor logically), and that cannot be understood as divine punishment of sinnful acts committed by the victims.

Moreover, at this point there is even a paradoxical danger of "involuntary blasphemy", among uneducated and fundamentalist believers, who regard themselves as true defenders of the right faith: When God (Jahvé, Allah) by these people is conceived of as the souvereign creator who has given us strict laws and rules of behavior, and who at the same time operates as a severe judge and executor, sending condamned sinners to hell for eternity, then the 'problem of evil' reappears as a question as to whether God, conceived of as such a brutal master, in reality acts like a Satan. Thus, their conception of mono-theism looks like a mono-satanism – and that, for sure, must be seen as blasphemy, even if it is not recognized as such by those who think in these terms. In short, in these cases we have involuntary blasphemy, but blasphemy nevertheless. Moreover, the same holds true for uneducated believers who think that in our dangerous and precarious world, where a huge number of people are starving and are without shelter, the supposedly merciful God is seriously and predominantly interested in what we eat and how we dress – no milk and meat, no pork, and no silk shirt for men! – which in reality means that God has no sense for proportions and thus He appears as a ridiculous figure – a blasphemous view, and again a case of involuntary blasphemy.

In short, the three monotheistic religions are similar on these two essential levels:

(i) interpretations of sacred textes, and

(ii) the belief in one God/Jahvé/Allah as creator, legislator, and judge,

and hence, they are faced with similar challenges, such as the problem of evil.

Then there are differences between (and within) these religions. For instance, they are dissimilar due to different historical conditions, for instance as to whether they operated inside or outside the realm of political and military power, or as to how they were interrelated to the institutional and epistemic developments that were parts of early modernization processes.

But for all three, today they are faced with the same basic needs for epistemic and institutional adaptation to the positive and necessary demands for an enlightened modernity, in short, for a "modernization of consciousness" (Habermas):

- A recognition of various kinds of insight and knowledge that are established by sciences and scholarly disciplines, though critically conceived, but still as the best we have, we who are fallible human beings. Religious teaching and practices should be adapted accordingly.

- A self-critical reflection on, and recognition of, the plurality of religions and other "comprehensive doctrines" (Rawls). Religious teaching and practices should be adapted accordingly.

- An institutional differentiation between the legal system and religion. Reasons given for common coercive laws should be universally understandable and the procedures should be universally acceptable.

These are in principle demands for everybody, though in each case dependent on personal background and resources. They are, first and formost, general demands for political and religious leaders. However, when these demands for a "modernization of conscousness" are not coped with appropriately, then we do not live up to main preconditions for modern societies, with their variety of sciences and scholarly disciplines and their institutional differentiations, and with their variety of religions and other comprehensive doctrines.

Moreover, if in addition to these demands for a modernization of consciousness, we want to fight for democracy and political justice by the rule of law, it is worthwhile to recall that a constitutional democracy requires more than a model for elections. There is also a need for socio-economic justice, for instance in terms of basic welfare. In short, in fighting for political justice, we have to fight for socio-economic justice. And then there is also a need for apprioriate organizations, for a state bureaucracy that treats all citizens equally, for law-orientation and self-restraint, for education and enlightenment, and for a general trust, based on mutual experiences and learning processes, and finally, a concern for environmental sustainability, putting restrictions on our consumption and reproduction.

Then, finally, to the question:

(3) 'Islamic future in Europe?'

In this regard, much is to be said, and it is hard to predict. However, in general terms, there are different scenarios for the future:

(i) The world known to us may collaps,
for instance by an explosion of a major caldera, as the one under the Yellow Stone National Park in the US, causing an extinction of many species, possibly a new iceage that could cover most of Europe. If so, there will be no future for Islam, or anything else, in that part of the world – or maybe nowhere, worldwide.

(ii) There might be gradual deteriorations,
for instance due to climate change, with lack of water and food, and with less energy to meet vital needs, possibly combined with overpopulation, causing severe political tensions and war-like situations, and changing Europe, and the rest of the world, as known today, possibly with severe internal and external conflicts.

(iii) Then, and hopefully, our world will prevail, more or less in good shape,
for instance with Islam in Europe, represented by persons born there, and by newcomers, with different background and capabilities. Then again, there are two main scenarios:

(α) These persons may take actively and constructively part in the European communities where they live, acquiring sufficiently those attitudes and skills that are required for participating in those communities – that is, a basic "modernization of consciousness".

(β) Or, a large number of these persons do not adapt to the modern society where they live in Europe; instead, they form parallel societies and avoid any modernization of consciousness. Then, unfortunately, we can expect conflicts, all depending on the cirsumstances.

These are not empirical predictions as to what is going to happen in Europe for persons with various religious beliefs and convictions. However, I do make a claim as to some basic

preconditions that should be fulfilled, given the ambition that we want to live in a peaceful modern society with political and socio-economic justice. In this perspective, pre-modern and unenlightened versions of any religion – be it in the name of Islam or any other faith – is not desirable in the future, not in Europe, nor anywhere else. This does not means that "religion", when epistemically and institutionally modernized, will go extinct. In all likelihood, modern and reasonable versions of the main religions will prevail.

Moreover, such moderate versions of religions may even play an important role in modern societies, both as wonderment, existentially and cosmologically, and as a source of meaning for believers and a resource of cultural enrichment, as a reminder of some basic human values, in a world where we are faced with economic cynicism, greedy consumption, and cultural vulgarism.

Islamic future in Europe, or in any other modern society? Yes and no – it all depends on the universally needed "modernization of consciousness", as it does for all religions and other comprehensive doctrines.