

WHAT DOES THE EUROPEAN UNION TELL THE EAST?

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 Analysis

Why do people live together? This question has been pondered upon for a long time. It does crystallize to several answers, however it is possible to underline just two key words for an answer: security and the need for peace. While human's needs of materialistic things were not clearly proven, there is strong evidence of the society's need of security and peace even in prehistoric times. To establish a lasting security, it would only be natural for mankind to create a sense of "togetherness."

The international system, with the realism discourse, defines an alliance as the unification of homogeneous actors who come together with security concerns. The alliance is an agreement by states to support each other with layers

of dimensions in the event of an attack against any member state, or to advance their mutual economical, political, and military interests. An alliance may contribute to a sense of security and provide a deterrent to aggressions, and it may also consolidate possible collaborations among its members.

An alliance is a kind of power-balancing method in the political system, a way of facilitating economic flow and enabling its actors to consolidate their identities. An alliance is also a declaration of the league and the status of its members.

After the nationalism movement brought by the French Revolution, the world's empires plunged into disintegrations. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed bloody conflicts of nation states

with the desire for power and interest. This bloody period, which the Europe created and suffered from, was recorded as the “age of extremes”. Interestingly, the established alliances proved to be beneficial in aiding their members to win the wars.

After the destructions in the 19th century and the World Wars, the actors came together for new alliances in 1950’s. In the new order, the Atlantic wing formed alliances like NATO, the Council of Europe, NAFTA and so on. The Europe, which was stuck between the American domination in the West and the Warsaw Pact in the East, tried to form its own alliance with a combined economic and political model. This attempt was called the European Communities, which was later named as the European Union. The European Communities began to build an exclusive model based on economic cooperation, where sovereignty was handed over at a higher authority rather than as a strict reading of the nation-state paradigm. In the second half of the twentieth century, the Europe looked for opportunities to enable the movement of goods, capital, services, and labor – the “four freedoms” – within its borders. Today, it is evident that European integration has made a remarkable path compared to other alliance models.

The European Union is presenting a story of how multilateral cooperation brings positive results for actors as a model of political, economic and cultural integration. The idea of aunity of Europe shows that it is possible for actors with historical and geographical proximity to be able to meet on a common ground. Understandably, in the near future “regional integration” will prevail in the international system compared to globalization or localization.

The Handicap of the Muslims: Why Can’t We Integrate Yet?

In the age of the empires, it was Islamic civilization that dominated the vast geographies. But after the dissolution of the empires, a new world began to rise. But now we are talking about the new dynamics in the last three hundred years, where the empires were dissolved, the European colonialism spread and nation states were built. Today, the international flow is struggling to overcome the crisis of European modernism. Lately, the Western ideals such as democracy, rule of law, and human rights are on a stand off against populism and security doctrines. After the 1980s, the “global world” utopia failed to exist. The US being the center of “a global order” imagination is now aware of the fact that it has gradually lost its grip on power in the last decade and the balance of power in the international system has evolved into a multi-polar world. The balance of power is redistributed towards the Eastern actors, which had previously been viewed as mere passive elements of the international society.

In the new order where regional forces are expected to dominate, the Islamic geography is not yet able to build a regional integration. Initiatives such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League have not yet achieved an effective institutionalization due to the nationalistic interests of the member states. In the Arab-Israeli wars, the OAPEC-sanction of Arab countries on oil exports is still remembered as a unique example of a holistic attitude in history.

The Arab Spring, or the Arab revolts, triggered by a Tunisian street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi who set himself on fire in 2011, brought a concerning

“Is there a new era in the Islamic geography?” question. The domino effect in social upheavals has deeply shaken Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Kuwait. Since the first period of the uprisings, Turkey’s approach to the Arab peoples’ demands was noteworthy. Turkey’s foreign policy took the side of the people who demanded democracy. But at that point, these people have failed against authoritarian regimes; the outcome of their protests did not happen the way it was expected, and aside of Tunisia, the riots were intervened. In Yemen, Libya and Syria, civil wars emerged due to power struggles. In Egypt, the authoritarian regime of Mubarak was overthrown, but not long after, the democratically elected Morsi government could not be sustained because of the military coup. The United States and other major Western powers gradually backtracked from their support for democratization in Egypt and Syria, leaving Turkey alone with non-democratic regional powers.

The “first wave” of Arab revolts has left a major destruction in North Africa and the Middle East. The Arab geography has undergone disintegration after the riots. Kamran Bokhari saw the contrast and controversy between the fragmentation in the Middle East compared to the history of the EU; He stressed that while the EU is giving way to nation-states, why is the core of the Muslim world – the Middle East – devolving into sub-national fragments?

Could it be that the statement was made with a lack of patience? Because as a matter of fact, it is clear that the 21st century will give rise to new dynamics. We witness the pains of the reshaping of the African and Middle Eastern geography in the transformation from the “old”

global dynamics. It is also historically known that political transformations slowly take shape with long-term waves rather than an instant breakup. That is why we can optimistically identify the Arab revolts as the “first wave” of a transition period. There is also a vast literature stating that the Arab movements will take around 30 to 50 years. Authoritarian rules are not sustainable in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA), as Habermas states, “there are no laws of history in the strict sense, and human beings, even whole societies, are capable of learning.”

Who will raise the new order through the fire in the East, and how? What will be the leverage for movements in the region? It should be stated that the construction after the collapse would not be realized by “the cold-war generation”, who will face extreme difficulty in comprehending today’s world.

Today, Muslim countries have a significant share of the world’s natural resources, including oil, natural gas, mining and forest products. However, all these countries, with populations younger than the Europe, Japan and the United States, are extremely small in their contribution to the world’s GDP. Muslims make up 21% of the world’s population (1.5 billion) but account for only 5% of the global GDP. The average GDP per capita is around \$5,000, three times less than the global average of around \$13,000. Islamic thought has a “zakat” system for the establishment of social justice, but the gap of income between the richest Islamic countries and the poorest can be cascaded as the extreme dimension. With all the available potential for equal prosperity, the distribution of wealth among the Islamic countries is so disproportionate, that the presidential spokesperson of Turkish President Ibrahim Kalın stated “Only a few Muslim countries

have a sustainable model of development and show signs of success for alleviating poverty and for the equal distribution of wealth.”

What Does the EU Experience Offer for Islamic Countries?

The union model of Europe is politically and economically constructed from top to bottom for indispensable reasons, so the EU’s legitimacy on social context is still “under construction.” The European Union has major challenges such as migration, economic crises, Russia’s pressure, inefficiency and inability, non-integration etc. Still, we have to acknowledge that the EU has put forward a remarkable model as a regional integration model in the international system.

It is with no doubt that the international system is evolving into a gradually deepening regionalization rather than localization or globalization. The EU is also concerned about its disintegration scenarios, but it would be useful to think about the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker’s statement, “You only need to visit a war cemetery to see what the alternative to European integration is.”

In this respect, it is not possible to just copy and paste the EU model to the East. The main rationale for this argument lies in the historical and cultural differences in the imagination of the “state” in the East. While these differences narrow the possibilities of comparison, the EU’s regional policies and institutionalization process stand as a remarkable experience.

The Arab revolts show that political transformation will take place from the bottom up. The MENA region has to put forward a political will to build a kind of integration at least in the long run. Here, of course, we are not talking about the possibility

of integration like the EU. Ed Husain stressed, “for example, Egypt has low-cost labour but high youth unemployment. Neighbouring Libya has excess capital, huge infrastructure projects and an insatiable demand for workers. Turkey has the expertise to build airports, bridges and roads. These dots need connecting.”

It should be underlined that the regional integration opportunities for the East are open. As Oman Nizwa pointed out, there are many elements to put forward as visions:

- The establishment of a Commission for Energy Sharing,
- The establishment of a Commission for Water Sharing,
- The establishment of a Commission for Wealth Sharing
- The establishment of a Customs Union and a Common Market
- The establishment of Common Cultural, Educational and Linguistic Institutions.
- The establishment of Common Institutions for Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts.
- The establishment of Common Regional Political Institutions at a Later Stage,
- The establishment of governments that would respect the rule of law.

But first Muslims must be overcome what Sufyan bin Uzayr stated below:

- Conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, etc.
- Conflict of interests between Iran and Saudi Arabia
- Presence of foreign powers, especially NATO
- The issue between Israel and Palestine
- Societal problems (gender, illiteracy, you name it!)

The new century began with a transformation of the past century's ideologies. As is often expressed, the paradigm of the global system is reshaping again. In the transformation of the paradigm, similar actors have to get closer together. With all the

historical realities of "the alliance", it is as if The European Union is unwittingly saying to the East: "It is impossible to achieve prosperity without coming together."

Sonnotlar

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