**Palestine: Peace and Democracy at Risk,
and What Europe Can Do?**

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What the future of Palestinian democracy will be; whether Palestinians will follow the
route of Democratisation or Islamisation or both and what the impact of this process
on the peacemaking process will be, especially with Israel.

This short presentation will argue that:

1) A democratic route or process without the liberalisation of the economy and,
   specifically, without Liberalism (individual and collective rights) in the Middle East
   leads to only one path: the path of Islamisation.

2) Democratic processes without freedom (Democracy in a cage) lead inevitably to
   replacing the building of democracy with a fight for freedom.

3) Islam is not contrary to democracy; therefore it is possible to develop an Islamic
   organisation into a democratic organisation. The Justice and Welfare Party of
   Turkey is one example of such a possibility.

With regard to the first point, it is noticeable that a route to a state-building type of
democracy was opened in Palestine by the 1996 election. This route expressed the
move from the Palestinian 'civil society democracy' (as practiced in the Palestinian
Civil Society organisations from 1919-96, characterised by participation, pluralism
and periodic elections) to a democratic route aiming to build the structures of the
upcoming Palestinian state. However, this 'route', called by some the "*Transitional
democracy within an agreed upon Jurisdiction with Israel,*" was not developed to a
full process of democratisation. Elections were the only democratic aspect of this
'route', without being accompanied by liberalisation and liberalism.

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Arafat kept his hand on the economy through the companies that he and his economic team were running. He did not establish the democratic institutions that protect individual and collective rights; on the contrary, he promoted his authoritarianism by institution building. Moreover, he prevented the inauguration of the Basic Law until 2002, and the law of Independence of Judiciary until 2003. With the absence of democratic institutions and a respect for individual and collective rights, corruption grew; the rule of law deteriorated and the cohesion of citizenship was not promoted. Instead, processes for the promotion of individual direct narrow interests prevailed, PLO pluralism was weakened and Fatah was changed, from a political organisation into a fragmented collection of grasping individuals, each looking after his/her individual and cliental interests.

With the democratic elections aimed only at legitimising authoritarianism and with liberalism not being recognised, responsible citizenship was not promoted.

In this soil of corruption and fragmentation, Islam filled a vacuum and Hamas led the promotion of responsible citizenship (in its way), a clean economy and clean institutions working for the sake of the people. It is still debatable whether they will succeed in these goals, but the liberal democrats will have a problem with the content of Hamas' work, as Hamas will concentrate on the collective rights while imposing restrictions on the individual ones.

It could be assumed that the building of citizenship, civil society and the democratic institutions and laws that defend, express and act on behalf of citizen rights, would be done prior to the elections, or at least be accompanied by them. However, with an international community and Israel focused, in the period between 1996 and 2003 (till the Road Map was declared), on Arafat delivering peace and security, they forgot to apply pressure for the delivery of democracy and liberal rights. Therefore, while the years from 1996 to 2000 saw a period (relatively speaking) of increasing freedom to the Palestinians brought about by the gradual Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian area, accompanied by Arafat delivering (also relatively speaking) security to Israel, the absence of democracy to accompany this liberalisation led to a breakdown. The final outcome of that was the collapse of peace. The Road Map was then created in order to deal with the issue of democratic reform, this time without a parallel process to ensure freedom to the Palestinians, but rather by putting the Palestinians in cages

(prisons) that are surrounded by checkpoints and restrictions on their movements, which was also problematic.

As the second point above argues, these two processes of peace/freedom without democracy (1996-2000) and democracy without peace/freedom (2000 onwards), both helped Hamas. As a reaction to the slow pace of peace and the fact that dates for delivery were not met, Hamas responded with terror attacks against Israeli citizens, in addition to resistance in West Bank and Gaza. The high levels of corruption caused Hamas to adopt calls for 'change in Reform'. In response to the strategy of the Road Map, Hamas raised the same demands for reform as the Road Map, without adopting the Road Map, while acting strongly to attain freedom for the Palestinians, and responding to Israeli attacks on Palestinian civilians by killing Israeli civilians.

When Hamas interpreted Israel's unilateral plan of 2004-5 to disengage with Gaza as a victory and an outcome of its resistance strategy, Hamas responded by accepting the *Hudna* with Israel in order to allow the process of disengagement to pass successfully, giving more ground to Hamas.

With these tactics Hamas was perceived in 2005-2006 by those Palestinians who voted for it, as:

1) The Palestinian power that can provide a Palestinian unilateral plan parallel to the Israeli one.

2) The Palestinian power that can defend the Palestinian civilians against Israeli attacks on them.

3) The Palestinian power that can promote reform and change and can promote the best delivery of services to the citizens.

Had the gradual process of peace/freedom from 1996-2000 been accompanied by a respect of the dates leading to the end of negotiations on the final status in 1999, as was promised in the Oslo agreement, and if that period had witnessed the promotion of liberalisation, liberalism and the building of democratic institutions, the results would be different. Hamas would not have grown had a democratic Palestinian state been established. On the other hand, if a process of freedom and political solution

accompanied the Road Map reforms, the results would also be against the growth of Hamas and for both peace and democracy.

However, with Hamas becoming the winner of the PA elections in January 2006, would it be possible to move Hamas towards democracy and peace? As noted by our third point above, Islam and democracy are not mutually exclusive. Will Hamas work for freedom in a peaceful way (through negotiations or a long term *Hudna*), or by resistance and armed struggle? What would the impact of either way be on building democracy inside the Palestinian society? On the other hand what will the impact of democracy building inside the Palestinian society be on the peace/ freedom process? These questions express the challenges for both peace and democratisation. In order to deal with this set of questions, Hamas will need to merge Islam, democracy and engage with liberal nations. If this can be achieved, and the Turkish experience has shown that it can, Hamas could become more tolerant towards disagreement, both inside and outside (in this case towards Israel).

The Hamas experience so far after two years of ruling did not go in the direction described above, but the success of this process would bring the Israelis to two decisions: first, on promoting this process of change among Hamas, and second, on a response to it: Do they ignore the process, or use the opportunity to get together as partners, or do they look for coordinated, reciprocal, unilateral tracks. Different strategies will lead to different results, and the lessons learned from the previous experiences of disconnecting between peace/freedom and liberal democracy should lead to a new strategy of connecting them, by bringing Hamas to the field of liberal democracy and, at the same time, bringing peace and freedom to the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. The mistaken idea that the Palestinians, as the occupied, should be the first to deliver has often led to catastrophe and has also led to the success of Hamas. It is time for this idea to be put aside in favour of one calling for the two sides to deliver together, at the same time and in one reciprocal process.

Now with the resumption of the talks, between Israel and the Palestinian President Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas], the process to freedom, peace and democracy might be accelerated if this process will be a successful one, but what the Euro Liberal democrats can do?

The following might be recommended:

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- Help build citizenship in the Palestinian society beyond the patrimonial (familial, clannish, and geographical contradictory affinities), and the neopatrimonial (sectarian and clientele), cleavages, which create "subjects" and "compatriots" more than citizens, and therefore create "atoms" more than free responsible individuals.
- Assist the build up of Liberal-Democratic parties in Palestine, by helping brining together the different scattered liberal democratic groups, that already exist in the country. This will help developing diversity in the Palestinian life beyond the pre-democratic fragmentations that are still there.
- Assist build the participatory democracy process beyond the representative democracy model that was abbreviated to elections that were used to give more legitimacy previously to the authoritarian Yasser Arafat. The build up of participatory democracy include helping in the building of the capacities of the local governments, the judiciary, the Palestinian Legislative Council, the Palestinian Civil Society organizations, and citizens movements, and the Palestinian media, in order to promote decentralization and both horizontal and vertical separation of authorities.
- Assist the Middle Ground interpretations and practices of Islam which call for peace, acceptance of the other, tolerance, and nonviolence, and help them to transform their ideas and practices on the path of liberal democracy.

In addition to the constant interactions, and sustainable relations as tools to implement the recommendations, maybe it will be help to involve Palestine in a new Mediterranean Union that might be established, and will be one additional crucial tool in this direction.

Finally in order to help promoting these developments, the Palestinians will need freedom not only from the internal restrictions, but also from the external one (the Israeli occupation), and in this direction Europe has a lot to do and also the ELDR Parties to make the process towards Palestinian statehood the shortest one possible.

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