

PRESENTATION MADE BY AMBASSADOR (R) MURAT BILHAN, VICE CHAIRMAN OF TASAM in MARRAKECH, MOROCCO DURING THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE ARAB SPRING AND NORTH AFRICA

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INTERNATIONAL ISSUES AND REGIONAL IMPACT OF TRANSITIONS IN NORTH AFRICA

Honorable Chairman Prof. Mohammed Benhammou and Staff of the Center for the Moroccan Strategic Studies

Distinguished Representatives of the African Federation of Strategic Studies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express my sincere thanks for the well-known Moroccan hospitality. I would extend my appreciation and congratulations to the organizers and sponsors, who jointly organized this successful and timely meeting. I must underline that I have learned a lot from this meeting.

I want to begin with my humble observations and description of the transition of the world, from a bipolar order of the Cold War years to a uni-polar world, led by the major winner of the Cold War, namely the United States of America, the leading power of the Western World, which dominated the international scene between late 1980's until now. This ongoing process though is now turning our scene into a multi-polar world, the other poles being China, India, classical Europe, used here symbolically in the sense of European Union (though having made itself controversial recently by the economic crisis and other internal problems as one of the major global powers), Russia (which is trying to rise again as a global power), Brazil (which has the liberty and luxury of playing on its own ground, while enjoying partly being far and safe from other rival powers). There are lesser poles like Iran, Japan, probably also Turkey, some of the EU members in their own individual merits, *sui generis* power houses like Israel, maybe also Egypt, etc. This second group consists of mainly regional powers, some of them having global implications and influences. The New World Order is taking its future shape gradually during forthcoming years, while the axis being shifted to Eastern Asia.

On the other hand, we observe a very interesting contradictory development: This might be explained by a simultaneous, but diametrically opposite two phenomena. Let me open this up a little. On the one hand, some kind of an interdependence and lack of self-sufficiency urges nations big or small to come together for cooperative schemes, mostly in the form of regional integration processes. Most of these integration initiatives are directed at meeting either economic, or security requirements. The most prominent, experienced and sophisticated among them, being the EU on the welfare side and NATO on the security side, all other regional integration schemes are mushrooming in all continents. Some of them seem to be quite successful; ASEAN, MERCOSUR, COMESA, OSCE, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, CICA, ECOWAS, etc. are only a few to be mentioned.

Diametrically opposite ongoing process to this integration scheme, is simultaneous disintegration. I mean micro-nationalism trying to split up nations. The most forthcoming

example of this development was the disintegration and in a way dismantling of Yugoslavia during the last decade. I think no country and no continent is immune from such developments. In Europe itself, there are many examples, some of them still ongoing. In Africa, the most recent example has been Sudan. In Asia, there are many other examples for disengaging groups from their main states. I don't want to go into details, because we don't have time. But I would like to mention simply that this tendency for separatism might lead our world to tolerate as many as 500 new states based on ethnicity, religion, ideology, language or purely on selfish interests, etc. It has been speculated in one of the recent publications that we might observe as many as 500 new members of the UN organization in 2050.

Under these circumstances, Arab Spring came into being or fruition just a year ago. As a milestone, the date of this new development has been remarkable and unforgettable. It all started in the first month of the first year of the first decade of the first century of the 21st Millennium. So even the most negligent or forgetful person cannot forget this date.

Anyway, my expectation went very high in the beginning of the Arab Spring, maybe during the first three months of last year, i.e until March 2011. But I came back to the reality on the ground soon – not necessarily to the point of disappointment- but the facts on the ground have led me not to take my expectations too high. Between undesirable, but heroic self-immolation of the Tunisian young man, and the waves of unrest triggered by that incident, I was led to think optimistically that revolutionary changes in the Arab World finally had started for the sake of democracy, although already belated for centuries.

Why my hopes and optimism have been blunted gradually was the bloodshed in many of these countries, almost and maybe deliberately left beyond control. And also my concern that the ballot boxes to be put in front of the Arab constituencies might turn into Pandora's boxes. I want to underline here that the ballot box is a *sine qua non* for democracy. But it is not enough to become a real democracy, because it is not democracy by itself, even if the election results are honest and untainted. Democracy is comprising of transparency, accountability, rule of law, gender equality, respect to human rights, protection of minorities, tolerance to differences, freedom of press and expression, legality and legitimacy (I mean here that these two concepts are not necessarily convergent. Some lawful deed may not be legitimate always, because the law itself may not be legitimate and vice versa and even in some cases both a legitimate and legal thing may not be ethical, but democracy obliges us to be in conformity with all these concepts). Last but not least, the determining factors of a democratic state are separation and independence of three major basic powers, none of which should be contravened by the others: namely the legislative, executive and judiciary. Finally a lively civil society and a free media should not be prevented to function.

I have also a few words for the International Community, focusing rather on the West. Definitely western democracies are also not perfect. Despite legally forbidden in most cases, racism, xenophobia, islamophobia, hate language, disguising of differences, mobbing, religious discrimination, fundamentalism, prejudices and many other social ills are prevailing and double standards are being played. Jewish fundamentalism is another aspect worth to mention. I don't want to go into details and to give examples singling out certain nations and groups, not to hurt the feelings of some people, though they might represent fanaticism.

My last point would be references made to Turkey. In many parts of the world, not necessarily only in the Arab World, Turkey has been suggested as a model to specific regions, or countries. I would beg to disagree with these assessments. First, Turkey is a

multidimensional, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, like many other groups of countries. Turkey is a European country, as well as an Asian country, a Balkan and a Caucasus country, a Middle East as well as a Near East country, with strong affiliations to Central Asia. It enjoys being a neighbor of giant Russia; ally of the superpower America, both a Mediterranean and a Black Sea Country. We should not omit also its advanced negotiation process to become an EU member. Many of these dimensions do not fit the standards of the Middle East, which we are tried to be made model to. There might be some resemblances between some groups of nations, but we do not belong to and identify with any one of these groups. So Turkey should not be considered in any one of these categories, especially to make a model. Legacy of the Ottomans should be well-worth to mention. It was not only a Turkish Empire. It was a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multilingual and multicultural empire, spread out to 3 continents for 600 years. But withdrawing from all these territories, or rather by being driven out of these countries, we have tried to establish our own modest nation-state in the early 1920's. Whether we have succeeded after all these efforts and time (9 decades) is a question to be asked. Islam is one of the various identities of Turks. Turks have always freely observed their religious rights, and practiced them. They are one of the most pious and dedicated Islamic societies, but not an Islamic state. This is our understanding of secularism or laicism, whichever you may call it. Laicism in most Islamic countries is wrongly identified with atheism. Laicism is equidistance to all religions and sects and also to atheism and in that sense it is religious freedom. Freedom of conscience and religion is a basic and fundamental human right and no divisive understanding of any religion or sect should be allowed to destroy this important right which is protected by democratically qualified and unifying power of laicism.

Thank You,