

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



May 28, 2017

“Corruption is Supporting Insecurity”

It is no more a secret that underdevelopment, instability and insecurity in Afghanistan can be easily linked to the prevailing corruption in the country. In fact, it has been one of the most dominant hindrances to the efforts for betterment after the downfall of Taliban. However, throughout these years there have not been concrete efforts against it and, therefore, it has thrived and keep on influencing Afghan society for the worst.

Pointing to one of the influences of corruption, NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, in an interview said on Saturday that in return to NATO's assistance and support to Afghanistan, the organization asks the Afghan government to fight corruption, bring reforms and build reliable security institutions. He said in his statement, “The fight against corruption is extremely important because it weakens the armed forces of Afghanistan but it also undermines political support in NATO allied countries and partner countries to provide support with training and also financial support to Afghanistan”. There is no doubt in the fact that corruption has further promoted insecurity and, at the same time, it has nullified the efforts to bring improvement in the security sector. However, it must not be forgotten that it has devoured much of the development and humanitarian aid as well.

A study report by Transparency International, last month, revealed that corruption risks in Afghanistan hamper humanitarian aid from getting where it needs to go. The study revealed that corruption risks exist in a number of stages within the program cycle of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. Most notable included; negotiation of conditions for access and area selection for programming; inappropriate interference in the selection of beneficiaries; risks of nepotism and ethnic bias in staff hiring; a lack of means to reliably hold corrupt staff and organizations accountable; and a lack of transparent and effective communication and feedback mechanisms with aid recipients.

As a matter of fact, Afghanistan has failed to deliver maximum even through humanitarian crisis and in pursuit of development, though the country had the support and assistance of donor agencies and international community. Corruption has been lethal enough to annihilate the efforts or the plans to reconstruct the country and the different systems that may set it on the way to development. It should be noted that billions of dollars poured in the country for military support, humanitarian assistance and development projects, but if we analyze the socio-political and socio-economic scenario in the country the changes and development do not seem as great as they should have been. Most of these aids were devoured by corruption instead of being spent for the intended purposes. Either the money that was to be spent through government or the NGO sector, both the ways corruption had the largest share.

One of the major reasons that there has not been any considerable achievement regarding fight against corruption is the fact that the authoritative institutions and individuals have lacked true commitment; which ultimately provided them the room and the opportunity to benefit from the situation and make their own bank balance. So much has been said and so many instances, examples and data have proved that corruption has devoured much of the assistance funds that were for the purpose of improving the life standards of the poor and deserving people, yet there has not been any tangible measure taken to stop the situation.

No strategy for fighting corruption in Afghanistan can be successful unless it starts making the strong individuals and institutions accountable for any sort of corruption that they commit. The norm has been that the rich, powerful and influential people easily dodge the justice system, while the poor have to receive the negative consequences. In fact, the poor are influenced in two different ways by corruption. First, if they are alleged in any case of corruption they have to go through inefficient and most unjust process of the justice system. Second, they are the ones who have to pay bribes and search for recommendations in order to get their works done in the departments and organizations that are corrupt in their dealings. While the rich through their influence, get away with their corrupt activities and at the same time get their works done from different organizations without any difficulty. Therefore, it stands paramount that the rich and influential people, both in public and private sectors, who are involved in practicing corruption and promulgating it through their actions should be brought to justice. It is important in so many ways; first it will support in identifying the huge cases of corruption that involve large sums of money; second, it will set example for others - finding the influential people brought to justice and held accountable for their corrupt deeds would send a message to the people and to other officials that they cannot run away from justice if they practice corruption. Such initiative definitely requires support and determination to fight against the whole system; particularly, fighting influential and powerful individuals; nevertheless, there is no other option available. Therefore, it is important that the government and the international community must address this particular issue if something worthwhile is required to be achieved.



The Coexistence of Art with Religious Tenets

By Dr. Aman Fasihi

Religion and art share long-term bond with each other. Research about religion and art shows a dialectic bond, which has resulted in their blossom, between them. However, discussing the relation between art and religion does not necessarily mean overlooking the conflicts. Although religions have paved the ground for art's blossom, artists have been restricted in some cases. However, the entire art has never been opposed. If religion closes a door to art, it will open many other doors to it. For instance, picturing the living including God has been forbidden and sculpture is not allowed in Islam. On the other hand, we witness progress in art of writing. Koran, the Holy Book of Muslims, is the king in art of writing and, as it claims, no one has the heart to compete with it - such examples will be found in other religions as well. The fact is that art is men's crying need and will manifest itself in various manner in human life.

Despite the historical and tortuous relation between art and religion, the question is that will art and religion co-exist? The answer to this question will not be based on theology or philosophy of science but on sociology of art. The role of religion in producing art or art on the basis of religious criteria is not my dilemma in this commentary but the main objective is whether or not possible to deliver the message of religion in the frame of modern art.

I believe that using the modern art in this regard will be possible if religion is secularized or introducing art from religion's perspective. The current situation in the society and inserting the logic of modern art in the realm of religion will be detrimental to religion and lead to its secularization. In this respect, secularization is not tantamount to religion's marginalization from social life, but how to practice the religion.

It is believed that the autonomy of art has led to conflict. In the process of modernity, many facts, including art, claimed independence and the legitimacy of art is determined by itself rather than by an external factor like religion. If religion was the measure of all things in traditional societies, it is no more a criteria in modern life and changed into a simple institution. According to Weber, common criteria has disappeared in modern society for various conflicting values. Therefore, beauty, the fundamental character of art in modern life and sanctity, the ba-

sic character of religion are not concomitant. For example, something will not be beautiful but will be sacred and perhaps the lack of its beauty will be the reason behind its sanctity.

The fact is not always supported by beauty or sanctity. It should be noted that the inner logic of art means its subjection to modern logic - which has marginalized religion. Weber says that the progress in modern logic and reasoning prompt men to judge not on final values but on personal tastes.

Bourdieu believes that the realm of art, as the product of historical experience and ground for power, will impose its obligation on those who step in. It means that the nature of being artistic or not will be determined by the logic of art rather than a spiritual issue.

The mysterious hand active in the realm of art is demand and supply. This issue is not in coordination with religious criteria since the religious legitimacy is not subject to the logic of market. Hence, when art is involved in the realm of religion, it will produce religious elements in secular frame and tone.

The spiritual opinion of religion will not be expressed in the secular frame of art since there is exact similarity between form and spirit. Spiritual opinion has its certain language.

The next aspect which will be to the detriment of religion, if it is put in the realm of art, belongs to its essence. The essence of religion is virtue, whereas the nature of art is picture and image. Art reduces everything into image so as to conquer men's senses and imagination. In this process, the spirit of religion also will be reduced to image. However, the main objective of religion is salvation through purity and it is void of any images. So, since art, unlike religion, is manifested in image, it will be in conflict with religion. Illustrating religion in image will empty it from many of its characteristics. Hence, the relation of art with religion is possible when the content of art is considered not the form and image - which will be against religion. Art is a world with its certain values.

It is also a salvation defined by its own. But the fact is that expressing the message of religion will not be possible in the frame of art.

Dr. Aman Fasihi is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Confronting Europe's Illiberals

By Guy Verhofstadt

European politicians have mastered the art of wagging their finger, most recently at Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and US President Donald Trump. Sadly, the same cannot be said for our ability to formulate political solutions and implement common policies.

The refugee crisis has shaken Europe to its core, because, rather than taking collective responsibility for managing the flood of migrants and refugees into Europe, we have mostly shifted the burden to frontline countries. This has eroded European solidarity. Likewise, our inability to come together to stop Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's war crimes against his own people has left a void that Putin and Iran have filled. European leaders too often shout from the sidelines when they should be on the field, acting to defend common European interests. And as if our failure to ensure stability in our own neighborhood was not enough, we have also allowed right-wing populist and nationalist movements to take off within the European Union itself. These movements, actively fomented by Russia, have produced homegrown political leaders who frighteningly - but not surprisingly - resemble Putin and Erdoğan.

Poland's de facto leader, Jaroslaw Kaczyński, and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in particular, have been busily constructing illiberal states within the EU. Since coming to power in 2010, Orbán has been using his large parliamentary majority to rewrite Hungary's constitution for his own ends. Apparently, winning elections is not enough. He now wants to shred the liberal values that he once championed as a young centrist politician, and cement his control over Hungary's political process.

In recent years, he has pursued this project through varied and ruthless means. The government regularly harasses or raids civil-society and nongovernmental organizations. Media outlets that disseminate Orbán's propaganda receive tax breaks, while those that criticize him are taxed so heavily that they eventually have to give up. This means that EU money is effectively being used to stoke Euroskepticism.

In what is only the latest outrage, Orbán's government is attempting to shut down Central European University in Budapest. Although CEU, founded by the Hungarian-American investor and philanthropist George Soros and led by the human-rights scholar and former Canadian opposition leader Michael Ignatieff, is just 26 years old, many of its departments already rank among the top 50 in the world. Nonetheless, Orbán has refused to talk with Ignatieff; consequently, the university could be forced to close by the end of the year. In fine autocratic fashion, Orbán has tried to smear CEU with hysterical reporting about the university's foreign financing. And, because he wants to portray CEU as “un-Hungarian,” he usually neglects to mention that he himself received a Soros-funded scholarship to study at Oxford soon after the collapse of Hungary's communist regime. Orbán's attack on CEU amounts to more than a violation of academic freedom.

Now that he has weakened Hungary's constitutional court and free press, he wants to undermine critical thinking itself. If he succeeds, he will have removed yet another check on his power. And, by shutting down such a prominent US-supported institution, he can send a message that no one who has stood up to him has won.

Despots throughout history have used the same tactics. But Orbán is doing so in the EU of 2017. It is worth remembering that, in order to join the EU, Hungary had to meet stringent accession criteria, including credible democratic institutions and adherence to the rule of law. The fact that those high standards are now being systematically eroded has introduced a paradox for the EU. Once a country has gained entry into the bloc, there is little that can be done to ensure that it maintains democratic standards and upholds European values.

The European Commission can launch as many “infringement procedures” against Hungary as it wishes; Orbán will simply ignore them with smirking pleasure. After months of discourse with Hungarian government officials, the EU's only option now is to invoke Article 7 of the Treaty of Lisbon, which could ultimately remove Hungary's voting rights within the EU.

Invoking Article 7 is not a “nuclear option,” as some have claimed. Rather, it is the logical response to a member-state government that has routinely violated citizens' fundamental rights and EU values. Earlier this month, deeply concerned members of the European Parliament, after two previous attempts, finally approved a resolution that will pave the way for EU sanctions against Hungary.

From the standpoint of European parliamentarians, there is no reason why sanctions cannot be quickly implemented. The European Commission has already documented the facts of the case against Hungary, complete with arguments and counter-arguments. If two-thirds of MEPs now approve sanctions, the file will be forwarded to the European Council - at which point European heads of state will have no choice but to address the matter.

Europe's credibility already suffers because some of its leaders hold ambiguous attitudes toward Erdoğan, Trump, and Putin. But continuing to waver over Orbán's transgressions will have even more serious long-term costs. We Europeans must aspire to be more than just participants in an internal market. We need to restore the values-based community that once helped us face down dictators like Francisco Franco, António de Oliveira Salazar, and the Greek colonels, and that united Europe after the collapse of communism. A values-based community has no place for governments such as those that now rule Hungary and Poland.

The EU should invoke Article 7 as soon as possible, and with the broadest possible majority among member states. And, after Orbán, we must turn our attention to Kaczyński. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Guy Verhofstadt, a former Belgian prime minister, is President of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group (ALDE) in the European Parliament

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.