



Interview of October - Ziad Majed



Ziad Majed is a Lebanese political researcher and a university professor. He teaches Middle East studies at the American University of Paris and writes on reforms, democratic transitions, elections, civil society and citizenship in Lebanon, Syria and the Arab region.

He contributed in 2004 to the foundation of the Democratic Left Movement and participated in the "Independence peaceful uprising" in Beirut in March 2005. In 2007, he co-founded the Arab Network for the Study of Democracy gathering researchers and activists from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt,

Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen and Bahrain.

He currently lives in Paris, and visits Lebanon regularly to organize or attend political and cultural events.

The Lebanese Government affirms that Syrian refugees are more than 1.300.000. If we consider that Lebanese population consists of 4.500.000 people, which kind of consequences do you think it will have on your Country?

There are many consequences. First for the refugees themselves, as most of them live in very difficult conditions, and were subject before their arrival to Lebanon to atrocities and/or witnesses of violent acts. They lack institutional support in Lebanon and have problems finding shelter and health/education services. They are also victims in many places and on different levels of racist behaviors and discourses. Second for the Lebanese, there are economic burdens and huge pressure on the infrastructure (electricity, water supplies, roads, apartments, telephone networks, etc...). There are also political tensions due to the fact that the Lebanese themselves are divided towards the events in Syria, they are mainly divided among confessional/sectarian lines, and the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Syrian refugees are Muslim Sunnis, there are fears among some Lebanese communities (especially the Christians and the Muslim Shias) that the long presence of these refugees might jeopardize the existing demographic/confessional balances in the country. It is important to stress however, that there are Syrian and Lebanese civil society initiatives trying to deal with some of the refugees' problems. There are also international assistance through NGOs and UN agencies, but all this remains insufficient to confront the humanitarian needs and the scale of the humanitarian disaster. And it is urgent to find ways for aids and services to reach the refugees, especially the children who are the most vulnerable among them.

The " Revolution of Cedars" saw the Syrian army going out from Lebanon. What would helping Syrian people mean for Lebanese from an emotional point of view?

The Lebanese don't share the same political views on Syria. Some support the regime, others support the



revolution, and the Lebanese Shia party Hezbollah has sent thousands of fighters to fight along with the Assad army against the opposition. In addition, regional allies of major Lebanese parties (Iran for Hezbollah and Saudi Arabia for the Sunni Future movement – of the former Prime Minister Hariri) are struggling for power in Syria. This leads to dividing Lebanese even more.



Nevertheless, for those Lebanese supporting the revolution, they consider that helping Syrian people is an engagement and they hope to see the Syrian regime overthrown.

The destruction of the Syrian chemical arsenal after the accord between Russia and USA is an operation never seen before. But voices from the German intelligence say that Damascus régime would have sent to Iran most of their fighters aircraft and Teheran would have sent to Syrian new elite's corps divisions of Pasdaran. What do you think about it?

The destruction of the Syrian chemical arsenal is yet to start. What appears to be problematic ethically about it is that it was a deal according to which the Assad regime managed with the Russian support to avoid a western military operation sanctioning his chemical attack on the civilians in the Ghouta of Damascus, by offering to deliver the chemical arsenal for destruction. This means that giving up the “weapon of the crime” can save the “criminal” from any form of punishment. And I believe this is what is frustrating the Syrian opposition (and the majority of the Syrian people) and pushing it not to trust the international community anymore.

As for the military cooperation of Assad regime with Iran, it is an official one, and Teheran has been supporting the Assad troops against the opposition since March 2011. I have no information however concerning the details of the German reports.

During the latest hours the sea of Lampedusa is giving back dead bodies of migrants, victims of the shipwreck of some days ago. For a lot of time Europe has left Italy alone to face the continuous arrivals of migrant. Also President Shultz urges Germany to welcome more refugees. In 10 years only in the Sicilian Canal 6.200 people died. In your opinion whose the responsibility is?

This is a human tragedy. I think the United Nations and the European Union should take measures, pass laws and find ways to support the protection of immigrants, and support social infrastructures in Italy and other Mediterranean countries where the immigrants arrive. There should be as well international



programs and investments in countries exporting illegal immigrants and in countries where they transit before taking the sea, to assist local economies, create jobs and reduce the immigrants’ inflow. Finally, legal severe sanctions should be taken against criminal networks that put the immigrants in miserable insecure boats and gangs that attack them and seize their goods. This could be discussed in international and regional frameworks,

and it is urgent to put pressure on decision makers to act in order to help containing this tragedy.

I would like to add finally one comment on the new phenomenon of the immigration of Syrians and of Palestinians from Syria... I think we are going to witness more and more dramatic incidents in the sea as well as on the eastern borders of Europe since there are 2 millions of Syrian refugees who left Syria already, and hundreds of thousands who might follow them in coming months. This by itself should be one more reason for European capitals to consider the Syrian situation an alarming priority and to act with international and regional partners to find a solution to the Syrian conflict (that will probably never end as long as Assad is in power)...



We live in the social networks era. Are dictators afraid about digital democracy? Are social networks the only ones which contributed to the changes of our century or are there any other reasons? In the end which political scenery do you prospect for the future?

Yes I think dictators were/are afraid of digital democracy for different reasons: the end of their control over



information, the capacity of political discourses to flourish in the virtual spaces and challenge them, the end of solitude that they imposed in their societies to fragment them and to forbid communication and solidarity among their members. In addition to that, virtual networks can protect the individuals and the groups from direct confrontation with oppressive authorities and

allow them to start symbolically and with fewer risks the destruction of the walls of fear built by dictators. Social networks are in that sense very important tools that could help and contribute to changes. Elements of demography, factors of economy, political wills and Organization remain however the major instigators for these changes.

For your question on the future, I prefer not to make any projection. I just think that we will continue in the Arab world to live for the few coming years through a phase of instability that was to be “expected” after decades of despotism and of absence of politics.

Edmondo Papanice

Interview Ziad Majed online: www.halp.eu ; thanks for translation Dr. **Luana Convertino**