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### **Are Political Islam and Security in the Euro-Asian Space Compatible?**

Catastrophes can also have a positive effect: The destruction they leave behind points to what one should avoid in the future – namely the next catastrophe. September 11<sup>th</sup> was such a catastrophe - and that must be prevented from happening again.

From the productive peculiarity of having been through the catastrophe of two world wars, Europe has mastered the art of settling conflicts peacefully. It has been successful at it since 1945, and even at overcoming the antagonism about having two entirely different socio-political systems and its military pacts with NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

As a child of war, who lived through the second world war, it is very important to me that we, especially now after the tragic event of September 11<sup>th</sup>, apply this mastery of solving conflicts peacefully and that we turn our attention to Europe's relationship to political Islam.

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, a conflict that successfully evaded the opponents in the East-West Conflict erupted.

The following question arises: Are we going against a new antagonism? And this time - one between two civilizations?

Even among the Christian-conservatives in Germany, according to the CDU's Commission on Values, in September of this year, it was assessed that "the causes for the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> were culturally based conflicts".<sup>1</sup>

The question also arises as to whether Europe and Central Asia's security policy-makers will be able to come up with the vision, far-sightedness and energy needed to evade another antagonistic situation again - or to resolve it - or is Huntington in the right?

Therefore, conclusions drawn on the priorities of a security policy for the Euro-Asiatic sphere and Central Asia - after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> - should be thought over again and new questions should be asked.

Most importantly, the question needs to be asked whether the prevailing one-sided restriction of policies to military and security measures, in dealing with religious extremism and terrorism, is or can be the only solution.

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<sup>1</sup> Papier der Wertekommission der CDU, nach: Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, 8.Sept. 2002, Nr. 36, S.2

In the past ten years, Europe and the Central Asian States have for the first time been confronted with military variants of political Islam in its own political sphere, that is, in conflicts and civil war, but also in arbitration processes (the latter emphasized). Remember the still burning conflict in Chechnya, the civil war in Tajikistan of 1992-97 with over fifty-thousand casualties, the armed conflict with the Uzbek Islamic Movement of 1999 and 2000, and the populations effective agitation of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in the triangularly situated states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kirgystan.

I would like to emphasize once again that this agitation is not without repercussions in the population. As a high ranking Central Asian politician recently put it, "the danger of Hizb-ut-Tahrir consists in the questions it addresses: poverty, unemployment, the obscurity of a social perspective and corruption. All of this is, in fact, present."

Thus, if the "adversaries" of the fight against terrorism are found among extreme Islamic groups, the strategy of such a fight must be to look after the hinterland of the group in question. In Central Asia, there are more than 50 million people, 60 to 97 per cent of which profess allegiance to the Muslim faith.

Political Islam and Islamic opposition are, so to speak, "catching up" with the OSCE through its Asiatic back door. Therefore, dealing with this phenomenon of Islam is also a question of European security..

In this context, we must bear in mind that the regulation of conflicts in Afghanistan will have long-term effects: With this conflict, the last iron curtain of the Soviet period, which, up until 1921, had isolated the "Islamic people" of the Russian Tzar's empire from the Islamic world, will fall.

Now more than ever, this isolation will start to disappear and Central Asia, as it is Eurasian, will gain importance through its bridges which are accessible from both sides. No one is able to say what consequences this will have today on the Islamic image of Central Asia and how this will effect Europe and the post-Soviet sphere.

The so to speak "organized" relations of Europe and the OSCE with political Islam have, up until now, taken place mainly within the context of the terrorist problem; Military and security-policy measures dominate here. The problem thus so far is that we have been dealing with "oppressive" approaches. However, practice shows that, on the surface, this military and security policy- oriented context falls short in terms of a social-policy.

The question is why does such an approach fall short?

**First**, this context reduces relations between Europe and Central Asia to political Islam - to a fight against socially fringed groups (the extremists). However, for the majority of Muslims and those politicians who are Islam-orientated, this fringe group is only partly representative. And that which is actually politically feasible, suffers: Namely, to achieve constructive relations with political Islam and its supporters as a result of social-policy making.

In the long run, we need, " a decompression" with regard to political Islam in the common political sphere.

Since the Islamic factor in Central Asia is and remains of permanent strategic importance, rephrasing initial questions will be required in order to achieve constructive relations.

Namely:

- Can the Islamic factor be transformed into an element of co-operative security and stabilization strategies?
- Can it be integrated into a constructive role internally and externally?
- Can the Muslim population, Islamist activists and secular politicians develop a common political consensus that is based on the idea of co-existence and co-operation, smart adaptation to modern principles as well as the norms and values of the OSCE?  
If so, according to what viewpoints could such a consensus be reached?

**Secondly**, in this context even the approach towards fighting those "extremist edges of society" falls too short. Regulating violent conflicts without the involvement and satisfaction of extremist powers is absolutely not possible, because they are usually the ones who reach for the gun. Without their involvement in the regulation process, pacifying radical powers will not be possible. This is what the peace process in Tadjikistan shows. Also in Kosovo, the West kept this in mind with the Kosovo Liberation Army, the UCK. So, why not use it to confront political Islamists?

**Thirdly**, in the end, the question of the present-day anti-terrorist strategy in Central Asia remains unanswered, to which Hodscha Akhbar Turadschonsoda the former radical Islamist and today the first deputy prime minister of Tajikistan stated: that, namely, the debates should not be centered around the question of how to destroy extremism, but rather how the emergence of it radical thoughts can be prevented. What is needed is a far-sighted way of dealing with Islam and Islamic politicians. This is what numerous socio-political aspects urge us to do.

## **Which factors need to be considered?**

Above all, - and this is my basic thesis - the politicization of the Islamist factor in Central Asia is to be expected.

### **This is unavoidable!**

**In the first place**, this is related to the fact that both the incompleteness of the national state in Central Asia and the indelicateness of their social and political orientation are connected.

So long as relations between national identity, the state constitution and Islam, and the Elites, politicians and the strata of the population related to Islam remain unclear, we will have to deal with complex social and political constellations. They can lead to the escalation of confrontational conflicts.

## **Why?**

**First** of all, in the still incomplete states of Central Asia, the search for identity and Islam can not be separated from each other. This may be the case in Kasakstan to less of a degree than in Uzbekistan Tajikistan or Kirgystan.

However: "Stumbling blocks" in the terms of destroying basic values of civilisation, one of the reasons for the phenomena of Islamic fundamentalism, is not only found in the Near East but also in Central Asia: The religious foundations of Islam and the Muslim movement, in the course of the past three-quarters of a century, have been drastically remodelled by the Soviet cultural revolution.

All the Islamic peoples of the Soviet Union, without being asked, were forced into a secular state system, a system with which the present governments continue to rule. With a certain exception of Tajikistan, Islamic activists are being hunted down everywhere. Together with poverty, an educational crisis and a re-traditionalization of society, the ground is being prepared, above all, for the formation of radical Islamist groups, some of them originating in Arabic regions, such as the Hizb u-Tahrir.

**Secondly**, transformation and state formation processes remain complicated. This makes socio-political tension unavoidable. It is to be feared that there will be more repression, on the one hand, and that the opposition, which will articulate itself as Islamist, will grow stronger.

The latter implies:

**Thirdly**, that the conflict between politics and religion in Central Asia will chiefly take place between the governing secular bodies and supporters of political Islam.

Since, however, as already mentioned, the final decisions on the social orientation of the states have not yet been made, both powers will compete against each other for the chance to influence the direction of socio-political developments.

This competition makes the relationship between secularism and Islam a part of the transformation- and state formation -process and thus shapes the political system.

The problem with this is not the competition, but rather the way in which it is played out:

This competition can be the starting point for both democratization and conflicts.

**Fourthly**, state formation, after all, has to consider the religious and value-bound features of a population with a Muslim majority. Should those values be considered, the influence of Islam will increase and, with that, of its elites.

However, If this is not the case or just not enough, an Islamic opposition will be provoked.

So, You can turn the situation around as you like: This way or that way – a politicization of Islam is unavoidable.

Actually, the problem not only consists in the politicalization of Islam, but also in how and by whom this politicisation is instrumentalized:

- Constructive or destructive?
- By radicals or co-operative and co-existent Islamic powers?
- And: whether help is given to the latter from Europe or from anywhere else

It would be much more far-sighted, if Europe lent a hand to its Islamists.

**In other words:** If the Islamic factor is and remains of permanent civil and political strategic importance in the Euro-Asiatic sphere, the normalization of relations to it belongs on the political agenda. For European politics, this means that relations to political Islam and its sup-

porters need to be stabilized, and the pressure has to be taken off in order to not increase tensions.

Politics has to find a balance between “secularists” and “Islamists”, it should not come to a head.

And in fact in two dimensions:

- A: In the domestic political dimension, in the Central Asian states, in particular in the critical triangular corner in the Fergana Valley.
- B: In the triangular corner that is situated between secular Europe and the secular governments of Central Asia and respectively the representatives of political Islam and conversely.

Should European politics have a stabilizing effect, the compatibility of political Islam and security in both dimensions needs to be questioned:

- Are they compatible with one another?
- If so, what obstacles and contradictions need to be cleared up?
- Which civil and institutional consequences can be drawn therefrom?

Let me take this opportunity to inform you about a few research findings that CORE made on the secular-Islamic compromise process in Tadjikistan.

We, of course, know that Tajik experiences cannot be copied in other Central Asian states. Nevertheless, they are of great value. **Firstly**, they show that compromises can be reached and, **secondly**, that co-operative and co-existent relations between secular governments and an Islamic opposition can be developed in practice.

The Tajik compromise process allows us to gain insight into the specifics of regulating conflicts between secularists and the former radical Islamists.

These insights provide us with access to the following questions:

- How can conflicts between a secular government and Islamists be prevented from coming to a head?
- What conflicts between them are natural and thus to be expected?
- According to which principles can a self sufficient compromise process be shaped?

And finally:

Which questions require European answers? The latter is of special relevance in view of an election victory of an Islamic party in Turkey.

Allow me to discuss some of our perceptions and reflections:

**First:** Our research in Tajikistan shows that “Political Islam” is not in itself the cause of conflict. We feel that it is important to demystify the term “Political Islam”. We must take it for what it is: *one* form of expression of a religious-social consciousness.

The logic is as follows:

If we are able to assume that, because of the enormously complicated transformation and state-forming processes, politicisation is **as such** unavoidable and thus “normal” for people whose everyday way of life has turned upside down, then the politicisation of religion and, accordingly, politicised Islam is, then, also “normal”.

For politics, this means that such political parties, **even** that call themselves “Islamic”, must be treated as a ‘normal’ part of society. In Germany, no one has a problem with a party that labels themselves Christian.

The problem, however, begins first when such a party is denied its normalcy **because then those, on whom the ban is put, radicalise.**

**Our conclusion** is as follows: The radicalisation of Islamic political parties begins with the refusal to treat them as a “normal” part of the democratic spectrum. This is difficult to do even in enlightened Europe.

**Secondly,** relevant is our finding that the radicalisation of political Islam is not an abstract process. It begins with concrete actors who are excluded, for example, from political, administrative and economic power. This exclusion causes them to search for an alternative political system that allows them to realize their interests. Such a situation might push them to put the ideological decision “Secular or Islamic State?” on the agenda.

The reverse of this shows what must be refrained from in order to avoid a radicalisation of Islamic factors. There must be no political or ideological provocation of the Islamically bound members of the elite. Neither should there be a provoking of religious sentiments of the Islamic population. Also, there must be no simultaneous affront to secular and Islamic elites caused by the “exporting” of external value systems that are either an “alien” form of Islam or an unspecific imposition of Western norms and values.

**Third** is the question of where the religious, cultural and political home of Islam and Islamic politicians is located within its own national house.

**This question is of central importance for the decision of “secular or Islamic state?”.**

As long as “Islamists” maintain a *national* stance, they do not slide to a *pan-Islamist* one. This latter position is truly dangerous because it opens the door for radical interpretations of Islam that are foreign to the region, for example Hizb-ub-Tahrir.

This means that politics should strive to keep Islamic parties and activists by a national position. But to do that, they must grant them and their political, cultural and other systems an **equal place in their own** national house.

This requires **consensual and co-existent political approaches**, which must be, in fact, the **basic principle of state policy**.

**Fourth**, which **obstacles and obstructions** have to be cleared out of the way?

From our studies, two complexities for the relationship between the secular and Islamic sides crystallise as being especially straining. They are:

**First**, the relationship of the secular state elite to religion, that is, Islam.

The crucial issue here is the relation of religion, state and nation. From our point of view, the European secular principle of separation of church and state is falsely interpreted as the separation of state and religion.

The dilemma of a discussion conceptually attached to this approach to the relationship between secular state and Islam is that it starts with the assumption that religion and state would be separable from one another, that it can be said, “that state is here and over there is Islam.”

Such a conceptual approach leads to a dead end which is caused by a too strict control of religion from above, and the ban of parties and movements of Islam. Both of these constantly lead to new controversial issues in the relationship between the secular state elite, as well as the Islamic dignitaries, and politicians. This dispute comes to a head in the question of the place and role of Islam in the process of state formation.

## **Two approaches on how to deal with this dilemma emerge:**

**First**, what needs to be discussed is that the issue at hand here does **not deal with the normalization of relations between state and religion**, but rather with the normalization of relations between the **state** (or more precisely, its executive organs) and **religious institutions**.

This then would correspond to the secular principle of the separation of church and state and reciprocal non-intervention (on an organizational and administrative level).

**Secondly**, there is the need to clarify under which specific social, religious and socio-cultural conditions in Central Asia, a modern, national, secular Central Asian state would be able to grant Islam and its political articulators equal terms.

**Thirdly**, in this context, Europe also has to do its homework: The basic question that deals with democratization and stabilization in Central Asia needs to be asked – the question on whether Europe and the OSCE can envision young states there wherein Islamic values and identity flow into their structure.

**A second round of obstacles and contradictions** between both sides consists in a certain latent distrust. This distrust feeds on two sources:

**First**, it feeds on the question of “power“ and second on the problematic situation of the orientation of the state’s social policy.

### **Wherein does the problem consist?**

On the one hand, the secular power fears that the Islamic party could, in the end, be striving for a theocratic state. This is why the secular elite aims at guarantees that prevent a religious party from coming into power or any attempts at making any changes to the secular state.

On the other hand, even moderate Islamists who are open to co-existence reproach the secular power with not having clearly defined the concept of “secularism” and “secular state power” in a co- existential sense. Here we are dealing with giving the representatives of Islam their place in state formation processes on an equal footing

At the same time, it should not be overlooked that even moderate Islamists are not in the position to make any verbal guarantees or promise that the constitutional *status quo* will not back out - for example, the Islamic powers of which they are not in control.

According to our assessments, this state of affairs applies to the entire Euro-Asiatic sphere wherein the central meaning of trust or distrust between secularists and the Islamic sides is visible.

This dead end will continue to exist, **so long as** the formula of co-operation and co-existence of civilizations and cultures in **both the national and inter-national** Euro-Asiatic sphere is not understood in a political or legal manner wherein both sides find understanding with regard to the guarantees demanded and, **furthermore, so long as** neither side agrees to be put to the test.

**Is there a way out of this dead end?** “Final guarantees”, so to speak, will emerge only after a **long** political process of trust-building through the **mutual** and **peaceful** formation of national statehood has taken place.

**However:** If normalizing relations to political Islam and its supporters in the Euro Asiatic sphere is being recognized as a political **must**, then trust-building has to be started **now!**

**For:** only if we start trust-building now, we can open the road for avoiding religious radicalisation and **peaceful** formation of national statehood in Central Asia being blocked .

The well-deserved example of Tajikistan shows that secular-Islamic compromises have stabilized the situation there altogether.

In my opinion, for Central Asia the question arises: How can both sides, the secular and the Islamic, come to a *modus vivendi* without first having to go through the blood-shed of a civil war.

**This brings me back to my initial question** of compatibility between political Islam and security in the Asiatic sphere of the OSCE.

Answers to these questions have to be mutual. Only then will they yield any results.

This is why, we, here in Europe, need to realize that the Islamic factor in the Euro-Asiatic sphere is of permanent strategic importance and will continue to be so. Europe thus will not be spared from Islamic social opposition.

This is why a change in the traditional pattern of perceiving political Islam and the Islamic opposition is in demand.

This means that, with regard to “policy-making”, Europe should not behave towards the Asiatic, Muslim regions of the common political OSCE sphere, its culture and political movements as if it were something foreign and strange, but rather as a natural part of the social organisms that make up this common sphere.

Instead, we should transfer ourselves to this mental and political state, which enables us to comprehend and accept, for example, the Islamic social opposition as part of the spectrum of a democratic, civil-oriented opposition.

In fact: for the “Christian community of values” this would be an very odd thought.

However we, Germans, Europeans and Central Asians – have many good reasons to want to break through the traditional negative fixation of secularism versus Islam, Islam versus the West and conversely.

For this, we all need to display circumspection, courage and optimism.