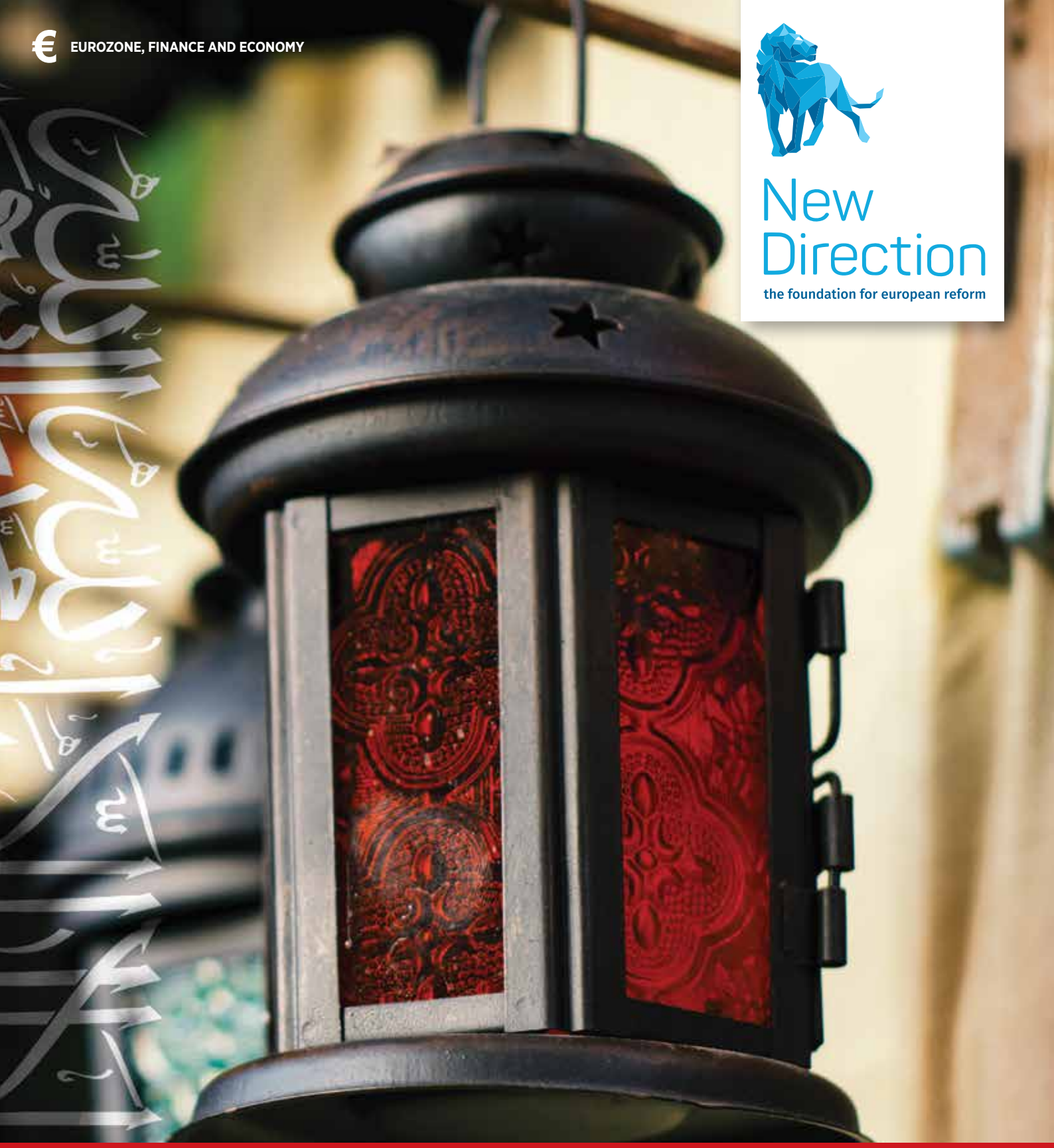

New Direction
the foundation for european reform

# THE ARAB SPRING AND THE ECONOMIC FUTURE OF THE MUSLIM WORLD

# New Direction

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New Direction is particularly grateful for the great work and contribution of these scholars in the field of Islamic studies.

# THE TRUE LESSON OF THE ARAB SPRING

*by Daniel Hannan MEP*

Tunisia is a success story in a region that currently needs success stories. Here, at least, few people regret the Arab Spring. Some neighbouring countries have replaced one autocratic regime with another while others have collapsed into lawlessness. But Tunisia is arguably happier, wealthier and freer than at any other time in its history.

To explain Tunisia's relative success, it is worth recalling what sparked the revolution in 2010 – which spread from Tunisia across North Africa and the Middle East. The risings began when Mohamed Bouazizi, a market trader, was driven to the horrific extreme of self-immolation because he had been denied ownership of his own goods and the right to engage in commerce. His was a protest against the violation of property rights, and he was not alone. In an authoritative study of the Arab Spring, the Peruvian economist, Hernando de Soto, chronicled many other cases of entrepreneurs in Arab countries being driven to suicide by police corruption and harassment.

The Arab Spring, in other words, began as a movement against arbitrary government. Citizens were fed up with living under regimes that could make up the rules as they went along, seizing property without due process, rigging the law in favour of their clients.

Gathering in Tunis as conservatives, we should recognise Mohamed Bouazizi and those who followed as heroes of our cause. Theirs was a battle for freedom: freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of worship, freedom of association and, not least, freedom to enjoy your own property.

Sadly, not every country has followed Tunisia's trajectory. Authoritarian regimes have a way of calling into existence authoritarian opponents. Many strongmen in North Africa and the Middle East justified their despotism by presenting themselves as the only alternative to Islamic fundamentalism. Such arguments have a way of becoming self-fulfilling. If people are told often enough that the only alternative to brutal, self-serving, oligarchic regimes is religious extremism, some of them will come to believe it.

As Rached Ghannouchi put,

> Throughout the Middle East, for decades, dictators suppressed Islam. In Tunisia, any kind of Islamic education was forbidden. It was forbidden for women to wear the veil. People were persecuted if they demonstrated any interest in Islam. It is these policies that produced a reaction, the generation of Islamic terrorists that we are living with now.

Across the region, people faced an unappealing choice between two sets of autocrats: secular Leftists, and religious fundamentalists. Moderate and democratic parties were squeezed out, forced to pick the side they regarded as less threatening.

There is a challenge here for the left. Liberals in many Arab states have been shockingly quick to cheer on military putsches, even the abuse of civil freedoms, when they happen not to like the people being abused.

We on the centre-right face a different challenge. We need to address the tendency of some of those who suffered repression under the dictators to overcompensate, to retreat into an authoritarianism of their own. We need to build a space where devout voters can comfortably support parties that don't question the pluralist nature of the state.

Virtue cannot be compelled, nor piety coerced. The authority of God over man can never be a justification for the authority of man over man – or over woman. Conservatives understand that we must work with the grain of people's values and instincts. We have a natural reverence for tradition. We recognise that faith cannot be eliminated from the public space. But we understand too that the task of politics is to allow citizens the freedom to live by their beliefs, not to turn those beliefs into public legislation.

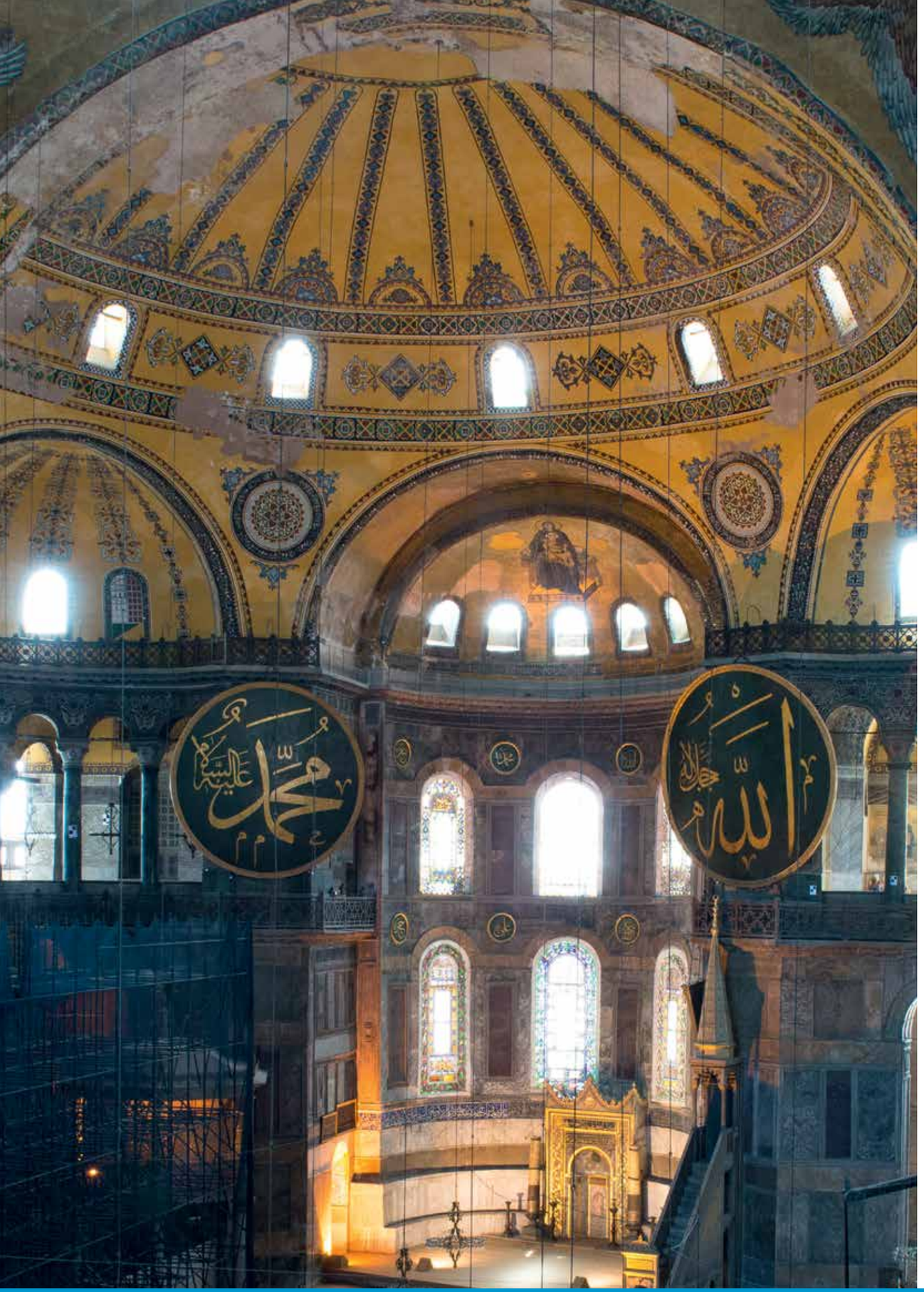
We know in our bones that liberty is a universal aspiration. Nothing could be more false than the idea that free markets are somehow a Western imposition on Muslim countries.

As Guy Sorman argues later in this brochure, Islam was the only major religion founded by a businessman – a businessman who refused to regulate prices when asked to and who used his last sermon to declare that property was inviolate.

The early Islamic world was the centre of global commerce. As one of our conference speakers Benedikt Koehler has argued, the earliest origins of capitalism can be traced, not to the first commercial firms in Holland and England nor to the trading ventures of the northern Italian city-states, but to two Islamic institutions: the joint-stock venture that invested in caravans and the waqf, a form of charitable trust which created a civil space between the government and citizens.

If anything is a Western imposition in this region, it's not the ideology of free markets. Rather it is the debased creed which led to Nasserism, Ba'athism and Arab Socialism.

North Africa, like the EU, needs a dose of moderate free-market conservatism. The parties who gathered for the Conservatives and Reformists Summit in Tunisia share a belief in personal autonomy, national sovereignty, open markets, free competition, inherited tradition, free competition, sound money, low taxes and parliamentary supremacy. Those principles work wherever they are applied. God knows we need them on both sides of the Mediterranean. •



1

# THE MESSAGE OF CONSERVATISM FOR THE MUSLIM WORLD

*by Roger Scruton*

Conservatism is not the same thing in every place where it is practised, and it has evolved in Britain and America in a manner that has no real parallel on the continent of Europe. However, there are certain underlying ideas and policies that unite conservatives in the West and the Muslim world.

Perhaps the most important idea is that of the nation-state. The regrettable attempt by Western powers to impose national boundaries on the former Ottoman Empire, without a full understanding of the delicate relations between the communities that had struggled for centuries to live peacefully side by side there, has created a long-lasting instability in the region, the tragic and threatening consequences of which we are now seeing. But there is no reason to retreat from the nation-state idea, which has many precedents in Islamic thought, and which has been embraced with success in Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Indonesia and Egypt. The nation-state lies at the heart of modern politics and opens the door to the kind of legal order for which all Muslims are craving.

The essence of the nation state is that it defines legal order over a bounded territory and cultivates loyalty to the customs and institutions that grow within that territory. It is, in theory, impartial towards the various religious or ethnic minorities within their shared territory and can create networks of power and influence that bring ethnic and religious tensions to an end. Moreover it creates the kind of background loyalty that enables people to define themselves as citizens and not just as Sunni or Shi'a, Orthodox or Catholic. A state that can depend on national loyalty has the support of all its citizens, regardless of faith, and can engage in clear dealings with neighbours and with the world without activating the exclusive networks of tribe, family and religion.

Of course, not all Muslims accept this idea. The Muslim Brotherhood grew in Egypt as a rejection of the very idea of secular government. Thus it was that Sayyid Qutb was able to, in *Milestones* and *In the Shade of the Quran*, to dismiss the whole idea of the nation and its laws as a kind of blasphemy, a way of rejecting the law given to us by God and setting ourselves above Him as the final legislators. But it has been shown time and time again that the principles announced by the Muslim Brotherhood do not lead to coherent government, that the attempt to govern a modern state to Quranic jurisdiction alone will lead either to family-based corruption of the kind that prevails in

Saudi Arabia or criminal oppression of the kind we see in ISIS. I believe that once Muslims see that their faith gains much and loses nothing from the security and peace provided by national borders, there can be Muslim states that embody all that we conservatives most value in the Western democracies, and whose laws are entirely compatible with the basic precepts of the shari'ah.

The idea of the nation-state came about after painful conflicts between rival religious creeds and sects in Europe, when it was recognized that another kind of jurisdiction was needed, which could be accepted by everyone regardless of faith. The purpose was not to marginalise or overthrow the law of God, but to provide another system of law that would prevail in the public sphere which would permit people to resolve their disputes regardless of their faith, and which would generate answers to the political problems that concerned the populace as a whole. When Atatürk carved out from the residue of the Ottoman Empire a state capable of surviving and prospering in the modern world, it was by adopting the nation as the focus of loyalty – which meant the language, customs and territory of the people – and by creating a new system of law that would make no reference to religion, even though it acknowledged the rights of religion over the soul of the believer. Of course it was hard to do this, and not everything Atatürk did was successful. But he provided one of the few models we have got, and we need to learn from it. Moreover, wherever there have been comparative periods of stability in the Middle East, it is where some version of the nation-state idea has begun to emerge – notably in the French-speaking parts of North Africa and in Lebanon.

Another fundamental idea for conservatives is that of the rule of law, in which all that pertains to public life is subject to jurisdiction by independent courts. There have been many attempts to establish such a rule of law in Muslim countries, but often private influence and corruption undermine public trust in the courts, and deals have to be conducted and enforced by private means. A rule of law is not possible without an independent judiciary, and if judges are to be independent they must be properly honoured, respected and rewarded according to their status and given the motive to stand outside the networks of corruption over which they must stand in judgement. Creating that kind of judiciary, and the institutions of education needed to perpetuate it, is one of the most

important tasks facing all governments in the Middle East, and there is much to be learned here from the conservative experience in Europe.

An idea that is not always put at the top of the agenda by conservatives, but which seems to me to be vital for the health of the Muslim world, is that of town planning. All over the region the disastrous ideas of Le Corbusier (who advocated tearing down the old cities and rebuilding them out of concrete and steel, without streets or alleys or secret corners, and who almost succeeded in doing this to Algiers) have been implemented by ruling elites determined to be ultra-modern and wishing to turn their backs on the past. To turn your back on the past is to turn your back on the people, to produce the kind of monstrous pleasure park that we see in Dubai, designed by those poor in imagination for the use of those rich in petro-dollars. The destruction of Mecca by the Saudi royal family and of the beautiful towns of the Levant by the modernist planners is surely as regrettable as the deliberate vandalism perpetrated in Syria against Aleppo, Palmyra and Homs. Fundamental to creating and recovering the love of place, which is essential to the rebuilding of the Middle East as a viable home, is the adoption of sensible planning laws in order to create a human habitat compatible with the old ways and aspirations of the people. And it would be a great boost to Muslim self-confidence to stop emulating the worst kind of modernist arrogance and to revive the traditions of Islamic architecture, which did so much to attach the Muslim way of life to the land and the landscape of the region. Conservatives in the English tradition have always been sensitive to this issue, believing the pursuit of beauty to be a part of the contract between 'the living, the unborn and the dead', which is the true foundation of social order.

About economics there is no viable position in the conditions of Mediterranean life other than the conservative one – an economics based on private property, free trade and fair taxation. What is not always recognized, however, is that for conservatives those things only make sense when taken in conjunction with a rule of law that upholds free agreements, punishes cheats and frauds, and ensures that people enter the market in a spirit of trust. This, perhaps, is the most important point of all when it comes to dealing with the Muslim world, where demands of family, tribe and faith often prevail over the objective force of law, so that deals are the less honoured the further away they are from the family circle. A system of public education in 'fair dealings' is necessary if Muslim states are to replicate the conservative experience. But schools should teach that private property is both a right and a duty: without the habit of charitable giving and the establishment of public goods, such as schools and hospitals, private property will always arouse resentment in those who are relatively deprived of it. This idea of charitable giving (zakat) is already deeply embedded in the Muslim way of life and surely opens the way to the development of a functioning modern system of education.

For education is the sine qua non, without which the necessary transformations cannot be achieved. It is a distinctive mark of conservatism to believe that education is not necessarily best delivered by the state, which has too great an interest in conformity and an insufficient commitment to talent and enterprise. The establishment of properly funded schools, capable of providing the kind of secular education that the French have delivered across the region through the lycées, should be a priority for all Muslim communities. School should be devoted to providing the kind of knowledge and skills that are not to be found in the Quran. The existing madrasât rarely venture outside the rote learning of the sacred text and the study of its application; what they teach is valuable to the Muslim, but not enough to lift Muslim communities into the competitive arena of modern life and trade. Schools should aim to create the elite who will govern the country and lead its enterprises, who will be secure enough in their position to feel responsible for the rest of society and who will be able to represent their country in the global forum with pride and good-will.

Lastly, we British conservatives look with envy on those many Muslim communities which have preserved what we are in danger of losing the attachment to the family and to the home as a refuge and a source of love. Necessarily, in the turmoil of modern wars and conflicts, the family has often been, for Muslims in the Middle East, the only place of safety. But it is more than that. It is the moral heart of the community. Respect for family and the religious values that sustain it gives Muslims a real moral and political advantage in the uncertain world that we are entering now. Integrating this love of family into their own form of political conservatism, the political leaders of the Muslim world could set an example for modern politics as a whole.

I have sketched a few of the most important conservative ideas and policies that might benefit the Muslim world. I don't underestimate the difficulties or the challenge that some of these present to the Muslim way of life. But God willing, and with a renewal of the spirit of Ijtihad, there is no reason why things should not change in the direction I advocate. •

2

# POPULAR CAPITALISM CAN SAVE THE ARAB WORLD

*by Dr Guy Sorman*

Among all major religions, Islam is the only one founded by a trader. According to the holy Quran (dictated by Allah himself to His prophet), profit is good as long the wealthy merchant redistributes a modest part of his acquired wealth to the poor.

No idealization of poverty can be found in Islam, which makes it a much more pro-business faith than Christianity. When at the peak of their political and cultural influence around the Mediterranean sea, Arabs dominated global commerce, benefiting from the intersection of the Silk Road and the Fertile Crescent. The reason they were supplanted by Italian merchants around the 13th century had nothing to do with their respective creed. Traders in Genoa had invented better accounting techniques and initiated business contracts through civil covenants, while economic relations in the Arab world remained confined within the family.

From the Middle Ages until the 20th century, however, trade and popular capitalism never vanished from the Arab world. Since the 1950s, independence leaders have imported anti-capitalist concepts, such as central planning and state ownership, into the Arab Muslim world. In Egypt, all remnants of popular capitalism were destroyed by Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was president from 1956 to 1970. The Ba'ath Party in Syria and Iraq – Saddam Hussein among its leaders – acted much the same when it seized power in the region. The same happened in Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s after Mustapha Kemal, praised as the founder of modern Turkey, proved much inspired by fascist and Soviet economic models from Europe. The Turkish economic renaissance started only recently when the Justice Party rejected Kemalism and rehabilitated popular capitalism along with a religious renaissance. Anti-capitalist dictators happen to be anti-Muslim, pushing Islamic organizations into clandestine and later violent resistance.

So far, the Arabs have not been as lucky as the Turks, except for the tiny sliver of the population who happens to be sitting on huge gas and oil reserves.

Then the Arab Spring took place, in 2011, whose true origins should never be forgotten: the economic frustration of the people. The hero of the uprising was a young Tunisian student by the name of Mohamed Bouazizi, who tried to start a modest business by selling fruits and vegetables on a street cart. After he was arrested by police for not showing the right bureaucratic authorisation, Bouazizi committed suicide by setting himself on fire.

Spontaneously identifying themselves with Bouazizi, young Arabs by the millions took to the streets all over the Arab world. The revolt was most acute in Egypt where, not by coincidence, popular capitalism happened to be the most severely repressed under Hosni Mubarak. A survey by the noted Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto before the Arab Spring revealed how opening a modest bakery in Cairo required two and a half years in order to obtain all the necessary legal documents, most of them delivered by petty and corrupt state bureaucrats. The creation of a larger business which might have a chance of competing with a state monopoly proved to be forbidden in Egypt. With varying degrees, this remains the prevalent situation in all Arab countries.

The civil wars between sects and tribes in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon – or ready to explode in Algeria or Morocco – would certainly not have erupted in an environment of economic prosperity. The Islamist parties which seized power in Egypt and Tunisia, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, proved no better than the dictators they had replaced, as they did not understand that economics was the people's priority. Facilitating popular capitalism would have been the way to go. Mohammad Morsi, for example, was dismissed by his own supporters after demonstrating his administration's incapacity to tame food inflation and spur inclusive and balanced growth.

Peace will never return to the Middle East as long the economic ambitions of the would-be entrepreneurs remain repressed. So far Turkey is the only positive, if imperfect, demonstration of what the combination of Muslim faith with local entrepreneurial spirits can achieve. Will this so called Turkish model ever emerge in the Arab world? The Arab people are torn apart between statist autocrats and radical Muslims. Moderate pro-market Muslims remain silent or crushed.

Popular capitalism is the only way out of misery and chaos. Enlightened Arabs should proclaim it, not by imitating the West or importing Western values, but by rediscovering their own faith and history. Adam Smith is not needed in the Arab world. Muhammad's life is enough of a reliable model to rekindle economic growth and opportunities for the people. •

3

# ARAB SPRING, MARK I

*by Dr Benedikt Koehler*

The Arab Spring of recent years dismantled power structures that blocked social advance and replaced them with durable institutions promoting social progress. However, constructing these institutions have proven much harder than anticipated. In search of a blueprint for marrying Islam with social and economic progress, there is a template in easy reach, namely the circumstances and progress of an Arab Spring that occurred in the 7th century.

In a small town in Arabia, Mecca, a group dissatisfied with the way the city was run voted with their feet and took themselves to another city, Medina, where they created a new model society. Muhammad, their leader, came to this start-up equipped with considerable management experience. He was 52 years old and his working life had been in business as had been that of his wife, Khadija, a venture capital investor by profession. Appointment of women to management roles was one of the many business practices from his former life that Muhammad carried over into this new community; when Muhammad remarried, one of his later wives, Hafsa, managed the first trust fund set up to distribute welfare. But, to be clear, Muhammad's ambitions went beyond creating a better way of life based on a better way of doing business. What mattered to him more than anything else was his spiritual calling as a messenger of Allah. As such, he propagated a framework for putting that will into practice and the name for this new creed was Islam.

Islam innovated every sphere of Arabic society. One of Muhammad's first measures in Medina was to create a mosque, a place for prayer but and a forum for settling disputes. Soon thereafter he moved to establish a new market, which he inaugurated with the words, 'Let this be your market and there will be no taxes levied on it'. Muslims did not forget his pro-business approach. After Muhammad died, authorities tried to impose taxes on transactions in the Medina market, but they were met with opposition from merchants who objected to measures that contravened Islamic precedents. Authorities first ignored them, but the merchants refused to back off and finally tore the building down. Islam was a shield against government caprice.

Muhammad proved himself a seminal economic reformer on more than one occasion. When during a famine in Medina food prices shot up, his adherents prevailed on him to impose a price cap, a policy measure that complied with standard practice at the time in Arabia and throughout the Middle East. Even today many would consider this impulse the

appropriate response: in a famine, stopping traders from raising prices intuitively seems fair. Muhammad, however, rejected the request by pronouncing in words that could not have been more stark, 'prices are in the hand of God'. Muhammad faced incomprehension and disappointment, however, he was not for turning. Muhammad's free-market price policy became a cornerstone for Islamic economists from Abu Yusuf to Ibn Khaldun, and indeed, even to Abu Wahhab.

Muhammad invigorated civil society in other respects too. Guidelines on what it meant to be a Muslim, he said, ought to be few and clear. There was no need, therefore, for a class of rabbis or priests. What he cared about more was that Muslims ought to take personal responsibility for acting in accordance with the precepts of Islam. To this end, he issued recommendations on how this would in practiced. One such was providing relief for the poor, called zakat.

Muhammad was a multi-talented leader, no doubt. Anyone who went into exile without a penny to his name and within ten years created a realm bigger than any that existed in Arabia before must have had leadership skills nothing short of exceptional. One aspect of his leadership were his uncommon skills in man-management.  Muhammad's first five successors, who ruled from his death in 632 until 680, each had been groomed by him: the first four having being close to him from the very start of Islam and an fifth having served as a private secretary in Medina. This management cadre was instrumental in ensuring the innovative, pragmatic approach of Muhammad would be adapted as the realm of Islam grew bigger and bigger.

Of this group of five successors, the one who stands out for his executive qualities was the second caliph, Umar ibn Chattab (who ruled from 634 until 644). Umar was a visionary economic reformer who opened a gateway for Arab seaborne trade to Asia by establishing a port facing the Indian Ocean and Basra, a city that for several centuries was second in size in the Middle East after Baghdad (which, in the 10th century, was the largest city in the world).

Umar was as pro-business as had been Muhammad, and he resembled Muhammad also in his support of welfare policies. Umar was conscious that once Islam had come to rule over a vastly expanded realm, changes needed to be made. The difference in scale between the realms ruled by Muhammad and by Umar-most of the Middle East plus Egypt came under Islamic rule in a short space of time-was like that between a family business and a multinational corporation. But Umar proved equal to his challenge. He tasked officials with carrying out a census of the Medina population, and armed with this information, he awarded income support to every man, woman and child. This social policy was ground-breaking: Umar introduced the world's first government social security plan.

Back to Muhammad. It has already been stated that Muhammad frowned on creating a class of ecclesiastic officials. Perhaps it was an unintended consequence, if so, in any event a highly productive one, that after Muhammad had died there was no single authority that could claim exclusive jurisdiction over interpretation of the Quran. Since Muhammad in person whilst officiating in the mosque had settled legal disputes, unsurprisingly, after he died Muslims would expect to find someone at the mosque to adjudicate matters in contention. With no single authority having a final say over interpreting the Quran, inevitably, disputants looked for expert advice, and soon, a new class of professionals emerged - jurists proficient in expounding the implications of the Quran. Umar, whose duties as caliph left him less and less time to officiate in court cases, appointed judges and called kadi, who needed to demonstrate competence and integrity in equal measure. Islamic law evolved competing schools of jurisprudence (to bring home the significance of this development, plural jurisprudence was something beyond the ken of Roman law). Judges who excelled in their profession became public figures, who then populated the pages of Arab lore. A particular advance of Islamic law, to mention but one, was to frame legal entities, called waqf, which managed endowments dedicated to providing welfare. For all intents and purposes, a waqf was a forerunner of what in common law emerged as a trust.

Islamic innovation had a ripple effect across the Mediterranean. Entrepreneurial drive, after all, was not an Arab monopoly. From Italy, Islam's closest neighbours, merchants came to visit, to trade and to find out what lessons they could take back home. Cities such as Venice and Genoa throve on doing business with the Middle East. But others too wanted to find out what they could take away from Islamic societies. Pope Sylvester II, who studied mathematics in Muslim Spain, re-introduced to Europeans the abacus (who had forgotten its use after the Roman Empire collapsed). Another student of Arab mathematicians, Leonardo Fibonacci, wrote a popular business manual explaining how to set up companies. But there was also brisk traffic in ideas. Theologians once again were able to study the works of Aristotle after they returned to Europe via Arab libraries; the pointed arches that grace Gothic cathedrals have Islamic precursors; and in Venice, the façade of the church of San Marco more resembles a mosque than a church. And there was a vigorous culture of debate. St Francis of Assisi. For example, crossed enemy lines to see the sultan of Egypt and request a panel discussion on the respective merits of Islam and Christianity; interdenominational debates were also held in Baghdad. The apex of East/West cooperation was reached when Saladin, like Muhammad a formidable warlord, but also like Muhammad an economic reformer of consequence, created trade centres for Europeans in Alexandria and Cairo which were catalysts for something that had disappeared with the Roman Empire and that has eluded later generations ever since: a common market in the Mediterranean.  If the Arab Spring of our time may seem in danger of foundering, Muslims may draw inspiration from the pragmatic, can-do spirit of the Arab Spring of yore. •

4

# BUILDING A CENTRE-RIGHT MUSLIM DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

*by Dr Syed Kamall MEP*

As we continue to absorb the tragedy that unfolded in Paris 2015 and seek answers to how young men of North African origin raised in France and Belgium could equate their faith with such violent acts, there have been the inevitable statements about the incompatibility between Islam and Western values of liberal democracy.

In November 2015, politicians representing centre-right parties from the UK, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa gathered at the Conservatives and Reformists International Summit in Tunisia to reflect on the challenges faced in today's world.

We wanted to show how the centre-right movement can provide a balanced response that respects the practices that are important to Muslim communities with a pluralist, secular state.

We gathered in the country where the tremors of revolution gripping the region were first felt some five years ago. As the tremors have echoed across the region, the tensions and stresses that still beset other countries have calmed in Tunisia. The revolution has given way to reform, and reform has led to a transition to stable democracy.

In a region that needs success stories, Tunisia stands as a model which many of her neighbours may aspire to. Part of the reason for her success has been the recognition by the people of Tunisia that the absolutism of secularism or religious fundamentalism is not the only path. As revolution takes hold, an exchange of one form of coercion for another is not the answer to a false dichotomy between volatility and autocracy.

The answer to a secular dictatorship is not a religious dictatorship. It is an open society, in which freedom of worship is accepted along with freedom of speech, assembly and contract.

Tunisia only has to look at Europe to see the parallels in their own political reform and Europe's shift in the relationship between church and state. Towards the end of the 19th century, newly unified polities in Italy and Germany wrestled with the impact of secularisation, most notably in Germany with the Kulturkampf. 19th and 20th century Britain similarly grappled with the role of Christianity in a period of modernisation punctuated by two World Wars. Our laws no longer restrict marriage, abortion or blasphemy as in the past, and regulation of Lord's Day has been unwound as time has gone by.

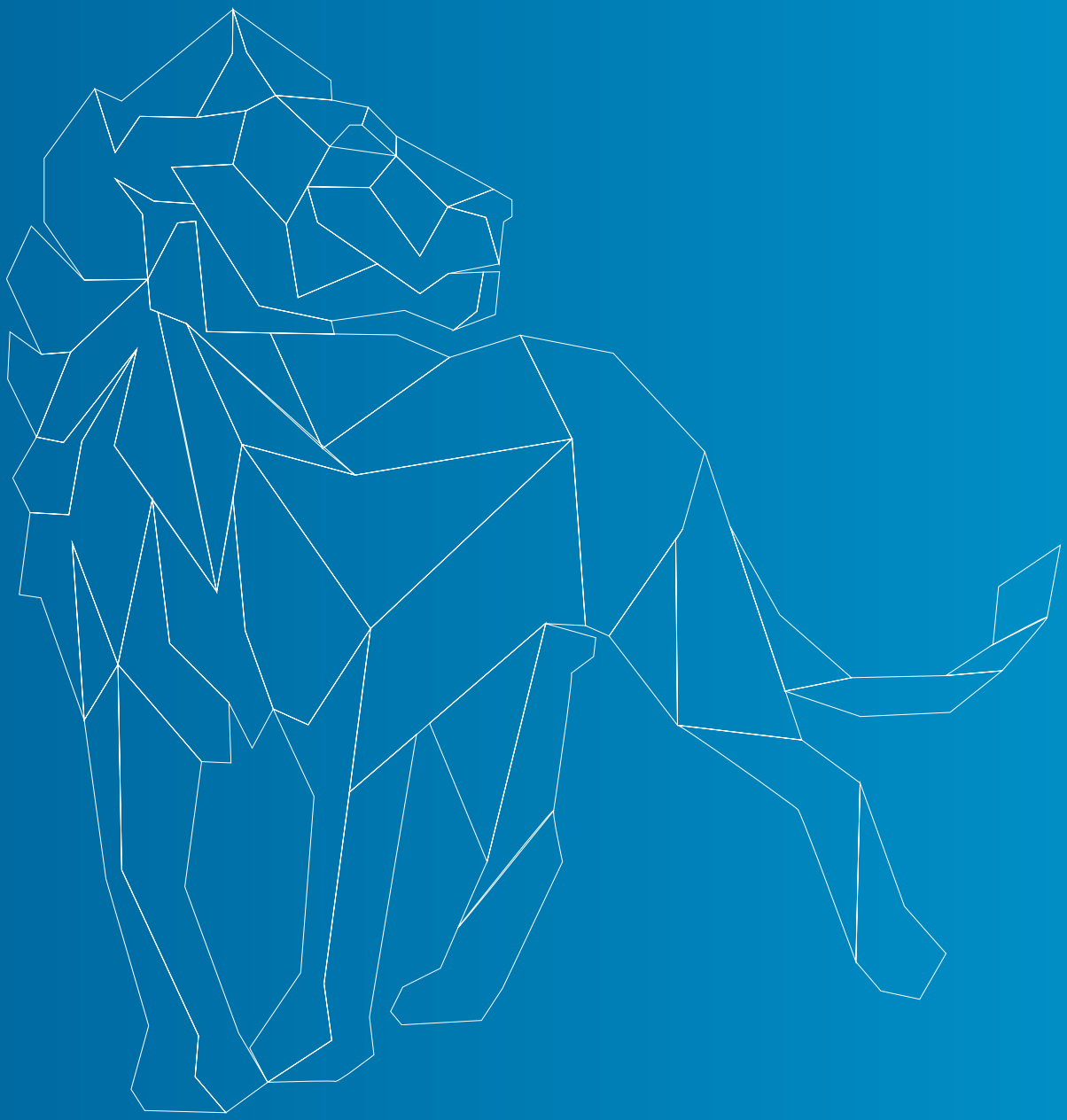
Today church attendance has fallen dramatically, but self-affiliation with Christianity has not diminished. Personal identification with Christianity and other religions remains an important part of modern British life. Institutionally, however, religious convictions are increasingly expressions of personal and societal values rather than state-mandated orthodoxy. Whilst the state provides the conditions for religious practice, it is the person who puts their religion into practice. It is man who has a relationship with God, not the State.

This sometimes uneasy consensus recognises that the authority of God over man does not justify the authority of man over man. Virtue cannot be coerced. We must all make our own choices and take responsibility for those choices. This is the corner-stone of centre-right politics.

Islam places great emphasis on personal responsibility. Perhaps that's why, in its golden years, the Islamic world was also the centre of global commerce. Long before modern capitalism emerged in the northern Italian city states, and then in Holland and in England, secure property rights contributed towards Muslims creating prosperous societies.

From this central notion builds a wider truth: the state does not have a collective identity. It can't be devout or charitable or honest. It can only provide a context in which individual citizens can pursue those virtues.

The transition to democracy in the region must be grounded in those terms. Openness and pluralism ensure that there is a space for personal freedoms to take hold and society to flourish to ensure that the state enables enterprise without crowding it out. It must secure property rights without encroaching on the private sector. The law must remain a mechanism for individuals seeking justice, not an instrument of state control religious Laws or privileges are not required to recognise faith. Our job is to roll the rocks away so that the grass can grow. •



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