

Executive Summary

The Conference was **held on the 5th and 6th of April 2004** in Doha. It was **inaugurated by His Royal Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar** in the presence of about **(500) participants** representing several official academic, research, information and cultural circles in different parts of the world in addition to the representatives of some international and regional organizations and bodies.

The work of the Conference was completed in the course of **(10) sessions**. The responsibility of organizing and moderating each of these sessions was given fully to a specific institution in a manner that will be explained later. In the course of the meetings several working papers were presented by the panelists to the tune of **(52) papers**. The discussions amongst the participants concentrated on the papers. There were **(71) observations** and the panelists also contributed approximately **(36) comments**.

The first topic dealt with the issue of: **“Education and its role in promoting the march of democracy”**. The session was organized and chaired by: **“The University of Qatar and the Gulf Institute for Studies”**; the discussion dealt with the responsibility of education in the Arab Region for the state of democracy therein. Two main orientations emerged from the different opinions expressed, one of which was to consider education in our region fully responsible, since it does not contain nor adopt a culture of democracy in the required manner, but rather basic elements obstructing democracy.

The other main orientation considered Arab education innocent of such a charge and rather a victim of the official Arab political and social order. The session witnessed the expression of several views by the panelists, as well as by the participants concerning the basis for the reform of education and the external role to be played to achieve that, as well as the impact of religious thought in this particular area. They also discussed the Qatari experience in the field of the development of education.

Another topic discussed is: **“The importance of culture in economic development and democratic awareness”**. This discussion was organized and chaired by: **“The Arab Press Club in France”** and it stressed the fact that the cultural element has become the main promoter of political dynamics in the world. The discussion concluded that democratic salvation cannot be achieved without full freedom of cultural and epistemological choice. The discussions also expressed concern over the situation of Arab reality and the deterioration there of, all of which require immediate reform. They also discussed the fact that Arab political culture is relatively receding at all levels and is facing many challenges (the culture of simplified dualities- the culture of all or nothing - the culture of the fear of the other- and the culture of plots). Also, the possibility of seeing the West attempt to impose a ready-made culture and global criteria ready for implementation or application.

That is why some of the participants warned against the disregard for the increasing separation between the Arabs and the Islamic world because of cultural misunderstanding. Others called upon culture to wage the battle of development and democracy provided it would not give priority to

material wealth at the expense of the higher values of humanity; they also called upon culture not to disregard or forget the political and cultural sovereignty of the peoples. Moreover, the issue of secularization also elicited a very lively discussion between the panelists and the participants.

The third topic of discussion was devoted to **“The role of economic development in enhancing and promoting democracy”**. It was organized and chaired by **“The Council for Foreign Relations in the U.S”**. One intervention dealt with the main pillars of economic development (education- political and economic empowerment of women in society- transparency- respect for personal rights and the sovereignty of law- the role of the international community- and active civil society). Another presentation dealt with the issue of state security and democracy, while a third concentrated on the importance of the role of women in achieving economic development, stating three basic elements, the education of girls -controlled of women over economic resources and the participation of the feminine labour force. Yet, another working paper dealt with the issue of generating concentrated wealth and the importance of "risk capital".

These presentations elicited very extensive dialogue and discussions between the participants and the panelists, particularly underlining the objection of some to what had been said about "risk capital" and the role of banks concerning the working capital. The question of alternative sources of energy was also fully discussed, as well as the establishment of a development bank for the Middle East were of particular interest to all the participants.

“The Arab Organization for Human Rights” organized and moderated the session devoted to discussing the issue of: **“Transition in the Arab World, issues and problematics”**. The main speakers, i.e. the panelists dealt with the state of democracy in the Arab Region, the projects and initiatives for reform from within and from outside the region at the present moment, all of which creates a very difficult situation for Arab governments.

Others discussed those external projects particularly, the American project and the fact that it is surrounded with an aura of suspicion because of its several inherent errors, in addition to the several existing confrontations in the region particularly in view of the ongoing Israeli- Palestinian conflict and the fact that they represent obstacles hampering the establishment of the bases of democracy.

Some other participants dealt particularly with the steps adopted by the state of Qatar on the path of democracy in the course of the past years. The presentations elicited very lively discussions in the hall between two main lines of thought, one objecting to the import or the imposition of democracy from outside, and rejecting the idea of those who come to the region in order to teach us democracy.

The other line of thought considered that the world has become practically a cosmic "flat" and not a cosmic village, which makes it necessary for the inhabitants of that "flat" to stand up, by force if necessary, to any attempts to destroy the facilities of the "flat" by other inhabitants.

The fifth topic dealt with: **“The impact of crises and instability on the development of democracy in the Middle East”**. The session dealing with this topic was organized and moderated by: **“The Westminster Institution for Democracy in the U.K”**. One of panelists spoke of the role of that institution in helping enhance democracy and its experience in this respect.

Another speaker dealt with the impact of external crises on the state, with regard to the economic losses it causes or with regard to the fact that such crises may lead to reducing the scope of democracy within the country on the pretext of the need to deal with external threat.

A third presentation dealt with the possibility that crises and instability are not alone in hampering or are not the main obstacles to democracy, whereas another presentation expressed an opposite opinion and considered that internal crises do not put an end to democracy, but rather that such crises and instability may be the strongest factors in leading to a mature democracy.

This opinion was supported by another point of view affirming that the crisis is not an obstacle, but is essential for the achievement of democracy.

These opinions were reflected on the discussions with the participants, some of whom called for the necessity for the Middle East to obtain the democracy that it deserved, provided it stems from within the region, stating that external obstacles faced by the region, foremost of which is the stand of the super powers with regard to the Palestinian and Iraqi questions. Some other participants expressed their concern over what had been said about the absence of reason, which would prevent the forces of political Islam from coming to power.

Another session dealt with: **“The European role in promoting democracy in the Arab World”**. It was organized and moderated by: **“The Institute of International Strategic Relations in France”**. Some of the presentations dealt with the different methodological approaches of Europe on the one hand and the U.S. on the other concerning the way of establishing democracy.

Another panelist dealt with the extent of the possibility for European and Western values to become an example for others, not, however, by exporting such values or having them copied.

A third panelist compared Europe to the Arab region with regard to the issue of democracy, affirming that no single state can claim to give lessons to others with regard to reforms.

A fourth panelist referred to the inevitability of having Europe deal with the question of democracy in the Middle East and of the need to devote serious thought to the matter on the basis of its security and urgent interests, provided that the key to any move should be towards enhancing democracy in the Arab World and to develop a partnership with the middle class, and civil society, both being a source of development in the region.

Yet, another presentation stated that Europe would seem to be closer to the region, not only geographically and culturally, but also because Europe is more understanding and objective with regard to the main issues within the region foremost among which the Palestinian question as opposed to the obvious American bias for Israel.

The participants had many comments with regard to the presentations. Some considered the presentations to be merely a number of statements in defense of Europe or the Western World, while others linked Europe's success to the extent of its capacity to offer assistance in finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. A third participant called upon Europe to bring pressure to bear upon America and to convince the latter of the need for both of them together to assume responsibility in this respect. Others spoke of the weak credibility as regards the role of Europe in the region as a result of the lack of political efficiency of the European Union, in addition to the complex bureaucracy that Europe is facing.

“The Royal Institute for International Affairs in the UK” assumed the responsibility of organizing and moderating yet another topic entitled **“Iraq: Is Foreign Intervention a Generator or an Obstacle to Democracy in the Middle East”**. The discussion started with the assumption that Arab regimes wish for the failure of American intervention in Iraq. Some supported the idea, while others objected to such a statement.

The discussion then dealt with the gravity of the Iraqi war at both the Iraqi and regional level, and some panelists criticized the incomplete democracy in Europe and the United States of America.

Some presentations spoke of the justifications for foreign intervention from an economic point of view, stating that such an intervention is necessary with regard to the Palestinian issue, and criticized Israeli politics and practice against the Palestinians, all of which reveal Israel as being a non liberal state, as well as being unworthy of a state which declares itself to be a democratic state.

The discussion between the panelists and the participants revealed the predominance of a current refusing the principle of imposing democracy from the outside, particularly by force, as is the case in Iraq at present, they expressed suspicion regarding the credibility of the stand of the United States of America bearing in mind their position regarding the Palestinian question. On the other hand, some speakers expressed interest in Turkish-American-Israeli relations, and raised questions as to the nature of such relations.

“The Council for Foreign Relations of the United States” was given the responsibility of preparing and moderating a session entitled: **“The Formulation of Public Opinion, Democratic Application and the Role of Arab Information”**. One of the presentations dealt with the role of the information office in the White House and its methods of work, in the light of what was revealed by the events of the 11th of September as to America's need to change its manner of connecting with the rest of the world. Another presentation gave actual examples concerning the attempt to discover the facts connected with the investigations' reports in order to put a stop to the rumours aiming at destabilizing public opinion, or rumours aimed at reaching wrong conclusions and adopting the wrong stands.

Another working paper dealt with the role and responsibility of foreign information (French) in Arabic for creating the climate conducive to assisting and encouraging the development of democracy in the region. Another speaker dealt with the role of journalists in shaping public opinion.

A fourth panelist reviewed the obstacles and problematics hampering the role of Arab information, particularly those caused by the State, and preventing the development of democratic mechanism. Another panelist dealing with the same topic spoke of the requirement for the future and called for the "institutionalization" and establishment of a charter of honour for Arab information.

The comment of the participants was in agreement with the presentations of the panelists, particularly regarding the role of the state in limiting Arab information. However, the question concerning the danger of assassination threatening some media men, and the accusation of the United States for being directly responsible thereof, loomed high in the discussions of this topic.

Another topic entitled: "**Free Trade and the Promotion of Democracy in the Arab World, Good Governance and Civil Society**" was the subject of another session. This session was organized and moderated by: "**The Centre of Studies and Research on the Arab Nations and the Middle East- in Geneva**".

One of the presentations discussed present day reality as regards democracy in the Arab World, concluding that what is taking place is not aimed at establishing democracy through democratic political regime, but is rather the result of the pressure brought to bear by the international community, because of the way they view the radical regimes as enemies of the international community.

A second panelist spoke of breaking up monopolies and dealt with what was referred to as "the magic formula". A third presentation dealt with the European view of cooperation and partnership in order to achieve reforms, mentioning the importance of Middle East partnership even though it has not been realized to date and has only achieved average results because of the fact that there was no success in achieving peace in the Arab Region. The same panelist referred to the new extended European policy of relations of good neighborhood which was launched in January of 2003 and which in fact, offers a new perspective of the future.

Another panelist spoke of the success of the process of the European integration as opposed to the failure of its Arab counterpart. Yet, a fifth presentation dealt with the role of civil society in developing democracy as a fourth estate.

The discussion between the participants and the panelists centered around the question of separating religion from the state, some explaining that it is not impossible to establish the concept of Islamic democracy, while others considered that the failure of all attempts at Arab integration as compared to European integration is due to the Arab's incapability of adopting a political decision, while another speaker considered the role of Israel to be responsible for such a failure.

"**The Islamic Centre in the United States**" assumed the responsibility of organizing and moderating the special session devoted to: "**The policies and economics of energy in the coming stage**". Some of the presentations dealt with the political dimension of availability of resources, warning states owning oil and oil-products not to consider this a pretext to evade reform policies. Another presentation dealt with world energy policies within the framework of the radical relationship linking sources of energy to economics, to the environment, to education and to equality of opportunities.

Another panelist mentioned the fact that the USA would be reducing their purchases in oil and natural gas from the Middle East and the Gulf in the long run, a fact that necessitates that such states should vary their economies, and declare the innocence of the OPEC organization of the charge of having an impact on the prices, laying the blame on the US system of dealing with gasoline after the adoption of the resolution for amending the law on pure air in 1990.

A fourth panelist affirmed that there is an agreement within the United States concerning the need to reduce the price of energy, while there is a disagreement concerning the way and means of so doing, stating that the availability of energy for all states may not be reflected in the form of economic development and welfare for the people, but rather it may divert attention away from the requirement of economic growth.

Some of the participants expressed their concern regarding the possibility of having false expectations, while others expressed their reservations concerning the possibility of seeing the

United States of America reduce their dependence on foreign oil, and regarding what had been said concerning the tendency of the United States to shift their dependence towards the global sources of energy.

* * *