

Open Discussion with Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban of the Presidency of the Syrian Arab Republic

After delivering her statement to the conference by video (see EIR, July 1, page 45), Dr. Shaaban was able to connect to the conference by Skype video and engage in some discussion with the audience.

Hussein Askary: Now Dr. Shaaban is available for answering questions for a brief while. If anybody has a question they can come forward.

Question: Hello, Dr. Bouthaina, my name is Salah, I'm from Libya; I'm a journalist. I would sincerely like to have this opportunity to talk to you. I'm not



going to ask a question, I'm just going to give you some notes and some information about what happened in Libya that you might know more about than me; and maybe you can say something about it.

When the West and the United Nations decided to remove the Qaddafi regime, they applied democracy to Libya. And we had two elections, and in the second election the Muslim parties lost the elections. They won only 20% of the Parliament seats. As a result, they refused to give power to the new elected Parliament and they occupied Tripoli and started a civil war in Libya.

Then the United Nations forced the elected parliament to sit with the Islamic militias at a table of dialogue to agree about giving them half of the government. So, is that the democracy that the West and the United Nations want us to have? Is that the type of democracy, where the loser is able to take power by force, and force the elected, legitimate authority to sit with him in negotiations?

Askary: I think your point is clear. But do you have a question?

Question: I'm just giving her these notes; maybe she can give us more notes about this issue. And does Syria want this democracy? Thank you.

Dialogue of Cultures

Dr. Shaaban: Thank you very much for inviting me to be with you at this very important panel. I think what I heard now was an intervention, rather than a question. And I think I said in my paper that what we have to do, is try a dialogue with each other about all the issues, and to acknowledge each other's differences and cultures. And that's why I'm so glad to be with you at this very important gathering, to speak about the future world, to speak about the common future of mankind, and a Renaissance of Classical culture.

Yes, Syria wants democracy. But it wants a *Syrian* democracy. I think every country in the world wants democracy, but they want a democracy that's based on our identity, on our culture, on our principles, on our history, on our civilization. And it is not acceptable to have one-size-fits-all, as the Americans say. That we have a kind of a formula that should apply to all people.

However, the result of this attitude is proving to be dangerous, not only for our country, but for Western countries. Because there are people in Western countries who are watching and understanding what is hap-

pening. And unfortunately this kind of attitude is feeding extremism and racism.

And so we are looking for a world with no exceptionalism, for a world where we enjoy the differences with each other; that we love being together, but on the basis of respect and parity. Thank you.

Helga Zepp-LaRouche: Yes, hello. I want to thank you so much for your wonderful presentation. And I was very moved, as were many millions of people around the world, by the beautiful concert in Palmyra, which I think was the beginning of this intellectual and cultural dialogue on the Silk Road.

Dr. Shaaban: True.

Zepp-LaRouche: Yesterday we had a very beautiful "dialogue of civilizations" Classical concert, where we had Mozart's *Coronation Mass*; we had Bach; we had Chinese folk-songs; a Russian children's chorus. And if you have some time in the future, I would like you to look at that, because I think we need to turn this whole control of the media around, because we have not only Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya [TV networks], but we have the mainstream media in Europe and in the United States, who are part of this unipolar control.

But I think we should organize, maybe in some other country, a real conference for an international dialogue of civilizations, where each culture and each nation brings forward the best expression of what they have produced. And you mentioned the great role of Syria in the ancient Silk Road, which is absolutely true and fantastic, and which has to be made known! Because people don't know history.

So what I'm actually saying is, maybe we should consider how to organize a real — in Germany you would say, *Paukenschlag* [thunderbolt] — an international *Paukenschlag*, where we just outdo the enemy, by beauty, by joy, by love in bringing together such cultures, and then broadcast it with all the channels and TV, satellites all over the world, and win this war! [applause]

Dr. Shaaban: Thank you very much. And thank you for reminding me of what happened in Palmyra, after it was liberated from ISIS and from all the terrorists. President Putin and President Assad suggested having a cultural evening in Palmyra, and it was really, really heartening, to see Russian musicians and Syrian musicians a few days after the liberation of Palmyra, playing together: It was beautiful music from both sides. They were all human beings looking beautiful.

They all acknowledged each other as partners in defeating terrorism, in trying to create a base for a better future, for all humanity.

I totally agree with you that we should think of probably arranging a gathering, an event — you would be most welcome to do it in Palmyra! But probably in the Autumn or in the Spring, because now it's a little bit hot there. We need to raise our voices [applause] to build the bridges. We owe it to our children and our grandchildren, to create more bridges. And I feel that both our worlds, the Eastern and the Western worlds need a different way of thinking, need the way of thinking that is the theme of this conference, that we should all look at each other as human, that we should all be brothers and sisters, in common humanity. Thank you. [applause]

Question: I'm from Denmark and we are working in the Danish Schiller organization in Denmark. Our problem in Denmark is that we are censored. Anybody who tries to tell the other side of the story is censored in Denmark, and also sanctioned. And now, there's a new law, if somebody in Denmark travels to Syria, you risk getting two years in prison. Not if you're going through Turkey and to the rebels, or ISIS, but if you just travel normally, just as a tourist to Syria, you risk ending up in prison in Denmark.

My question is what could we do in Denmark, and also in the rest of Europe, to help get the Syrian information out to the public? Because I think we have the same problem in all of Europe; we are not allowed, the politicians are blocking the people, and the newspapers also. So what could we do, or how could we help more?

Western Attitude Must Change

Dr. Shaaban: I'm sorry, the sound was a little bit shaky. If I understand what you were asking, about how to get Syrian real information to Denmark? Did I get you right? Because the sound was not good on the Internet.

Question: The question was that the media are very controlled, and how could we get the message from Syria out in the world, as to what's really going on, because it's very controlled all over Europe. And people who want to travel to Syria from Denmark, — they can even end up in prison for two years, under law.

Dr. Shaaban: Yes. The problem is that right from the beginning, [there has been a blackout] on Syria, — you know this is the first time I've appeared with an audience in Europe, and I'm very happy to be appearing

with you. I appeared two times on television, but even when people in 2012 or 2013—when media people came to Syria, which was very rare, they would start with accusatory questions. “How do you stay with this terrible government? Why are you supporting a man who is killing his people?” So they were not coming here to know what is going on, or to hear or to listen to us, unfortunately.

I think we need, all of us, to resist this corporate media, and to find other ways of communication between us. Because it is actually widening the gap between our societies and between our countries. And what we need is more bridges. I consider this panel or this conference a way of brainstorming together. I consider it a first step, in order to try to find ways of establishing better ways of communication. And you will find in us very active and eager partners to do that. [applause] Thank you.

Question: Hello, Dr. Shaaban, I'm Christine Bierre from the Schiller Institute in Paris, and we have been fighting this ugly man [former Foreign Minister Laurent] Fabius for years. Now he's gone, but the French policies remain.

My question is at this point, the Western media say that there are two offensives in Syria. One by the West to take over the Jarablus corridor going up to Turkey; and the other one by the Russians, the Syrians, and the Iranians, to recover Raqqa. Is there any connection, any coordination between these two offensives? And if not, what is the West doing there, and what can we do to stop them?

Dr. Shaaban: If you are talking about Western forces that are in Syria, I can tell you the Americans, the British, and the German forces came to Syria without any coordination with the Syrian government, which is a violation of international law and of sovereignty of a nation that was one of the founders of the UN, that is, Syria.

While, by contrast, if you see that the Russians not only coordinated, but *we* asked—the Syrian government asked the Russians to come and help us in fighting terrorism with their air force, because our air force is not enough to go all over the country.

So that behavior of Western countries in Syria and towards Syria is far from respectful, and far from respecting the sovereignty of a nation. And actually, this is part of the problem, because what they call “moderate” opposition, is not an opposition; it's armed groups

who are killing and butchering people! And for one year, now, the Russians have been trying to make the United States differentiate between Al-Nusra and ISIS on the one hand, and the so-called “moderate opposition” on the other; and until now, the Americans were not able to do that, because there’s no difference, really, on the ground. What does it matter whether I’m killed by someone from Al-Nusra or by anybody who’s carrying arms and belongs to Jaysh al-Islam or [other such groups]? They’re all terrorist groups who are butchering people and destroying our country.

So I think the whole Western attitude toward the war on Syria needs to be reviewed, at least, if we want to reach a peaceful solution and if we want — which is more important — a common stand and common understanding to fight terrorism everywhere in the world, because terrorism is a threat, to all of us, wherever we might be. And it’s feeding extremism, even in Western countries, and Western capitals. We are more than happy to share our experience and to dialogue with the world for the benefit of all humanity. And this is what Syria, the old civilization, ancient country, would love to do in the rest of the world, and *with* the rest of the world! Thank you. [applause]

The Bundestag Had No Clue

Question: [speaks in Arabic] I’m very sorry, I feel very, very sorry about the situation now in Syria, because me, I was 30 years ago a student in your beautiful country and I feel so sad about what’s happened, really.

Dr. Shaaban: Thank you.

Question: And I hate these people, this barbarism; they will destroy all the Middle East, I’m sure. That’s their planning. I don’t know why, but it’s what’s happened. And me, I want to fight so that this will not happen, so that we can help you and the Syrian people. Thank you very much.

My question is, what do you think about German policy against your country? This is what’s very interesting, because I work for German-Iraq relations.

Dr. Shaaban: Thank you very much for your passion towards my country. And I’m sure those who visited Syria before the war loved it, and I hope you will come, all of you, and visit Syria, after we put an end to this war together.

About German politics, the problem I think is German politics or Western politics, probably do not reflect the understanding of the people towards the con-

flict that is in our country. In fact, I was a little bit shocked to see that the German Parliament — I saw that on YouTube; I hope it is right — but I saw the interviews on YouTube, that the German Parliament voted to send military people to Syria, to send the army to Syria. And there was an interviewer who was interviewing members of Parliament after they had voted for sending soldiers to Syria. And he asked them, “Why are you sending the German army to Syria? Is it in support of President Assad? Or in support of Al-Nusra? Or Daesh, or in support of moderate opposition?”

And unfortunately, most of the MPs have *no clue* why they are sending this army to Syria! They have no clue who is who! And they were saying, “I’m sorry I have no idea, I can’t answer this question.”

And I mean, how — how do you vote to send your army to a foreign country, without knowing why are you sending it? Without knowing the reality on the ground, without knowing why you are costing your people, the taxpayer money in order to send your army to a foreign country? For us in Syria, we find this unbelievable, you know. Because we have such a big idea about Western governments and Western countries, and we think that they are all very well informed, they all do their job extremely well, and they don’t vote unless they are absolutely certain of what they are voting on.

And so, this YouTube really shocked us. Unfortunately, this applies to many countries, who have no inkling of what’s happening on the ground in Syria. All we are asking for, is to know what is *truly* happening, and to decide according to the facts, rather than according to all the propaganda circulated in the corporate media, which most of the time, is irrelevant to our reality, not only regarding this issue, but regarding many issues.

Imagine somebody like me, who has a PhD from England, who has had three books published in English, taught at American universities, and European universities, and I am accused of being a terrorist, not allowed to travel to Europe or the United States. [laughs] This tells you the judgment and the assessment of what’s going on in our country.

Allow me to thank you again. I’m *very* happy to be able to share this gathering with you, and I hope I’ll be able to host you in Syria for a bigger conference, and to continue our dialogue for a much better future for all humankind, that we all long for. Thank you very much. [sustained ovation]