

Dehli Europa, Central Asia and Islam - New Challenges for Stability Policies

Honoured ladies and gentlemen,
Esteemed colleagues,

This conference, as a forum for exchange between scientists and politicians from India and Germany, is of particular importance because it is taking place at a crucial point in international development where we all have to make up our minds on some, in my view, important questions:

Do we after the disappearance of the antagonism between the two different political and social systems, the Western and the communist camps, and the end of a global cold war, head towards new international political antagonisms?

If we look at the maps of theaters of war and Western troop deployment – its Asia and Africa. So, is the new *political* antagonism circling around South-North relationship, fueling the already existing economic antagonism?

Furthermore, a religious, Islamic-based political movement of considerable weight has come to the conclusion that a dialogue with the West and secularists over matters of concern would be futile. Moreover, as a consequence this movement does not see any alternative but the use of force. Is there a peaceful way out of this “dilemma of terrorism”?

For the time being, no end of this conflict seems to be envisaged. Neither by the extreme Islamists, nor in the West. Unfortunately, also not in Europe.

The German interior minister Schily describes terrorism “as the threat of our times”, which we will be “exposed to for a long time to come”¹. He places the threat on an equal footing with “National Socialism, Fascism, and Stalinism”²!

The opinion of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) that “the East-West Conflict has been replaced by the clash of the values of civilisations, on which global order must rest”³, implies that western values of civilisation are to be the foundation stones of global order, thereby more or less justifying the West in its global intervention for world order.

With this a strategic approach is created which proves highly provocative not only for the Islamic world. It strives to determine the struggle for a new international order unilaterally, in favour of the western part of the world community. This approach provokes fateful questions, while failing to answer them: do such assessments and orientations incite a new worldwide antagonism? This time between civilisations?

¹ Frankfurter allgemeine Zeitung 21.March 2004 Nr.12, p.7.

² Ibid.

³ On the anniversary of the 11th September, Resolution of the CDU, Germany, 9th September 2002, p.2

Western language used in describing this new kind of Islamic opponent and conflict around terrorism is accompanied by a great deal of arrogance with regard to questions of civilisation. Terrorism seems to offer the fabric into which a new “western value community” can be woven, now that the anti-communist fabric of the cold war has ceased to exist.

It almost has become difficult to imagine NATO and the WEU (Western European Union), new German defence policy guidelines, the federal armed forces, politicians and even the defence industry in the absence of terrorism.

Dear colleagues, I had to enshrine my views on the topic announced in the headline of my presentation into those broader issues since Europe and Asia have become direct neighbours: namely, by admitting in 1992 the five Central Asian states to the OSCE Europe, from a a geo-political perspective, has obtained a *Euro-Asian dimension*. It is bordering China and Afghanistan. Afghanistan itself has obtained the statut of an observer of the OSCE.

As a consequence, the general strategy of European powers, the EU and OSCE will determine also their policy with regard to Central Asia.

Therefrom derives your right to tell European powers: “Hey, wait a minute! What you are doing in Central Asia, whether you deploy there military baseses or manage or fail to prevent conflicts there peacefully is not your concern alone.”

The logic is such: Once a door has two handles, the tennants of both sides control it. If the German defence minister intents to defend Germany’s and Europe’s security at the Hindukush and the supply goes through Termez – then the Asian neighbours have the right to be concerned and, at least, to be consulted. Otherwise, it’s neo-imperialist policy.

Therefore, we should compare European intentions and those of its new Asian neighbours.

With this intention on my mind, dear colleagues, I would like to come to the topic of “Europa, Central Asia and Islam”. Central Asia and Islam – this are major political and civilisat-ionary hinges which link Asia and Europe.

What is new for Europe after it has admitted the five Central Asian states to the OSCE?

1.From a a geo-political perspective, it has obtained a *Euro-Asian dimension*.

What does that mean in religious and civilisatory terms?

In Central Asia, the Caspian Basin and in the Caucasus, Islam is the dominant religion. Sixty-three per cent of the population in Kazakhstan, 82 in Uzbekistan and more than 90 in Tajikistan profess, “there is no other God than God, Allah”.

Although there exists differentiation from country to country, in total we are talking about a *population potential* of 40 peoples with a total population of roughly 57 million people which is connected to Islam and its influence in culture, values, social norms and, partially, also to its political way of expression.

As far as Russia is concerned, estimates assume that in some thirty years 30 to 40 million Muslims will live there.

Henceforth, this gives Europe its own Euro-Asiatic Orient as well as its own Euro-Asiatic Islam.

2. The impact of current developments:

With the settlement of the conflict in neighbouring Afghanistan, the last Iron Curtain of the Soviet period has been taken down so that Central Asia is no longer separated from its Islamic neighbours.

Brigdes over the Pjanj border river are built, governments think about new roads to Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, mine fields are removed. In other words:

Central Asia has become the Eurasian bridge into the traditional Islamic world and is thus accessible by *both sides*.

No one can say today what the consequences of this will be for the *Islamic* face of central Asia or what retro-active effects it will have on Europe and the post-Soviet area.

The conclusion is: The population, the elites and the forces related to Islam, thus, continue to be of permanent strategic importance with respect to civilization and politics in the Euro-Asian area.

As a result, addressing the “phenomenon of Islam” will, from now on, become an issue directly related to European security also in its own political area.

Thinking about European security one has to pay attention to a very important new aspect:

Besides **external** security challenges, the **essential** questions of European stability are linked to the processes of transformation and state building in the vast post-socialist, respectively post-soviet regions which became part of the political space of the OSCE twelve years ago after the collapse of the USSR.

Here, the question of stability is related to the course, these processes are taking: whether they proceed successfully or fail, whether they continue peacefully and evolutionarily or disruptively and confrontational.

It is important to underline that these processes are of **internal** nature.

This specific nature of development processes in Central Asia lies in the fact that state- and nation-building is linked to economic and political transformation, resulting in the incapability of the politicization of the social sphere, including also religion and thereby the Islamic factor.⁴

Under such conditions, the way in which socio-political and civilizational contradictions are dealt with determines whether development occurs in a stable or confrontational manner. The secular-Islamic relationship is thereby, for the following reasons, of particular importance:

Firstly, national identity-building and Islam cannot be separated in the still unfinished states of Central Asia, due to the Muslim majority in the population. In the context of a re-traditionalization of society, re-Islamization would also begin to rise.

Secondly, if transformation and state-building processes remain complicated, it will inevitably lead to socio-political tension.

Thirdly, the conflict between politics and religion mainly takes place between secular rulers and political representatives of Islam.

Fourth, secular leaders are more or less bound to an authoritarian understanding of power. This makes it difficult for them to bring about the necessary amount of democratization and political flexibility to resolve internal tensions using methods which aim at social consensus.

Fifth, the dissatisfaction among the population which has arisen from the rapid deterioration of the social situation⁵ and political repression is already being taken advantage of

⁴ The term "Islamic factor" is used as a *terminus technicus* in this study. It denotes Islam, political Islam, the Muslim population, Islamic organizations, parties, movements etc.

⁵ An extreme example is Tajikistan, which today belongs to the poorest countries in the world after its rapid decline from an annual income per head of 1,050 USD (1990) to 150 USD (2001). Within only ten years, 80 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. Source: The World Bank Report No. 25329-TJ, <http://www.ds.Worldbank.org/Servlet/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/02>, p.5.

today by radical Islamic movements whose goal is to replace the secular regime with an Islamic state.

Sixth: National state building is accompanied also by retraditionalization of society which, as a result, raises the level of influence of religion and religious leaders. Particular in a traditional society.

This analyses leads me to my main thesis when thinking about Islam in Central Asia

The politicization of the “Islam factor”⁶ is inevitable.

The conclusion is: another new important element for the situation of Europe is that it cannot escape Islamic social opposition in its own political Euro-Asian space of the OSCE.

Under such circumstances, the politicization of Islam and an inappropriate handling of the situation can lead to a complex conflict between civilizations.

The main reason for this is that a conflict between the secular governing parties and political representatives of Islam not only involves issues of bad governance, democracy and human rights.

Rather, it divides the situation into a conflict of civilizations and world views on the character of the state and the interpretation of the content of a modern secular state.

If this conflict is not dealt with carefully, it could possibly become an antagonistic enmity between two world views.

Summarizing this situation, one must come to the following

conclusion: If strategic stability shall be maintained in Central Asia which is highly important in geopolitical, economic and energy terms, one must prevent that social and ideological conflicts turn into a political antagonism.

Therefore, Europe must make a new start in its relationship to Islam in its own political area.

This will only be possible if Europe perceives Islam and Islamic political movements in the Asian part of the OSCE area as an organic element of the societies there, not as an alien element, and not as a subject of political tactics.

It has to draw *strategic* conclusions.

⁶ “Islam factor” is used as a technical term here which combines the totality of the factors connected with and emerging from Islam.

Unfortunately, European security policy is lacking a strategic approach for dealing with Islam. The prevailing treatment of this issue occurs primarily in the context of providing freedom of religion as part of the Western human rights concept, and in the context of the fight against terrorism which is dominated by military and security policy, in short, repressive means.

In Europe, and also within the OSCE member states, there exists a conceptual vacuum with regard to dealing with the Asian “island of non-Christian culture” in its own political region.

Some voices argue that Islamic participation in state building in the OSCE region present a principle, a civilizational threat and is, therefore, not in the interest of Europe.

However, if these prejudices could be countered and overcome, a completely new perspective would open up for Europe toward its Muslim neighbouring regions.

At present, the driving force appears to lie in imposing the values of the OSCE and Western civilizational self-understanding to these Muslim societies through the OSCE acquis. The notion that this can be achieved is, however, an illusion.

Rather, Europe and the OSCE should reformulate their relation to political Islam. It is therefore advisable that the social potential behind Islam be acknowledged and also used as a strategic factor for the stability policies of the OSCE.

In a nutshell, the question that requires an answer is: How is a stability policy to be formulated in the OSCE region with regard to the “island of non-Christian culture” with a Muslim majority?

This question needs to be answered by European security policy with an integrative strategy of adapting the Islamic factor into the European stability area. September 11, at the latest, made it clear that this is indispensable.

The key is the view that stability in the Euro-Asian region can only be ensured through a common civilizational perspective of its peoples and nations. This does not mean giving up respective values, but rather developing a relationship of co-operation and co-existence.

Facing this challenge, the initial questions on the relationship to Islam in the Euro-Asian space must be asked in a different way:

- Must the Islamic factor be an element of the OSCE’s co-operative security and stabilization strategies for its Euro-Asian region?
- Can it be integrated to play a constructive role internally and externally?

- Can civilian Islamic opposition be a “normal opposition” in the democratic sense, and what would the requirements for this be?
- Can the Muslim population, Islamic activists, and Western politicians reach a common political basic consensus that is founded on the idea of coexistence, intelligent adaptation of modern principles, as well as the OSCE norms and values?
- If so, how would one structure such a consensus?

Dear colleagues,

looked at from such a standpoint, the prevailing strategy on terror turns out to be extremely unproductive. Taking into account that with its new extended geo-political space Europe has become neighbour of a whole chain of Asian Muslim states, both sides - Europe and these neighbours, should start drafting a common strategy for good neighbourly relations of cooperation and peaceful co-existence.

Europe should embark to such a relationship with the intention of guaranteeing a common perspective of the different civilisations inhabiting this huge area. This perspective relies on the recognition of common security, respect for the particular values of cultures and development as an integral whole. Prerequisite for such a perspective is the recognition that the stability in the relationship between the neighbouring Muslim regions and Europe will in future only become possible by respecting the integrity of the civilisation of others as well as the diversity of its societies and its political systems. It is true, that this entails the need to abstain from missionary zeal. However such an abstention does not mean giving up values and principles. It is about creating relations based on cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

In both these areas Europe has diverse historical experiences and traditions from the CSCE process and European integration process. The CSCE process was only successful as a warlike confrontation was avoided between the, at that time, antagonistic systems for *strategic* rather than tactical reasons.

It is in these experiences that Europe's real strength lies. This can still prove useful today when attempting to contain hostilities between civilisations. Contradictions and factual issues must be determined and reduced to their *actual factual core* in order to define the fields, on one hand, of common interests and agreement, and, on the other hand, of dissent. Based on that, ways of preventing potential conflict have to be found out: cooperation where similarities exist, non-violent coexistence where deeper contradictions prevail.

Dear colleagues, if we think about future relations between Europe and Asia (and not only Asia!), so I feel, one should be realistic about the following fundamental development: in

comparison to the historical periode between 1917, 1945 and the collapse of the Western colonial system and its end in 1990, the social and political driving forces of the period that started in 1990 have changed by character fundamentally. This calls for a sober evaluation of the type and character of international development the world is heading for.

One of my major conclusions is that a renaissance of the notion of peaceful coexistence with modernised principles and instruments might be badly needed.