

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



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Lessons for Afghanistan from China's Development

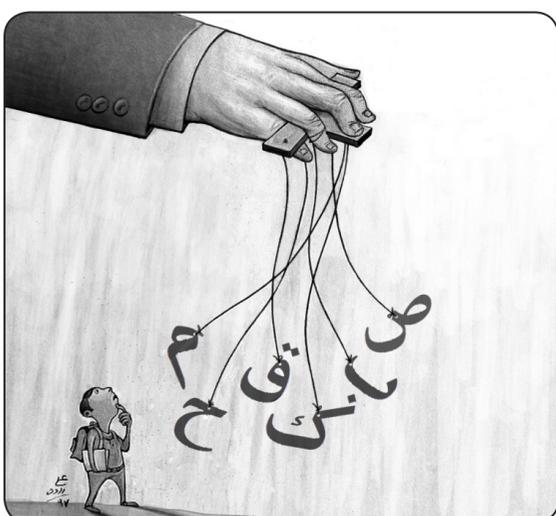
It has been 40 years since Deng Xiaoping kicked off China's reforms with his famous speech Emancipate the mind, seeking truth from fact, and unite as one to face the future, which concluded that year's Central Economic Work Conference and set the stage for the 3rd Plenum of the 11 Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

Profound changes have taken place over the last four decades and remarkable achievements have been made in China. From 1978 to 2017, China's GDP increased to 12 trillion U.S. dollars from 175 billion, with an average annual economic growth of 9.5 percent and the size of China's economy increased by 35 times. China's GDP per capita reached 8,640 U.S. dollars from 156 U.S. dollars. The percentage of the China's GDP in the world economy has risen from 1.8 percent to 15 percent. Both China's urban per capita disposable income and rural per capita net income increased by over 100 times. Primary medical insurance and old-age insurance have covered 1.35 billion and 900 million of population respectively in 2017. China's education has leaped from relative backwardness to the upper level of the world. Free compulsory education has been implemented in urban and rural areas. The gross enrollment ratio of secondary and higher education has reached 88.3 percent and 45.7 percent respectively. More than 700 million Chinese have been lifted out of poverty, accounting for over 70 percent of global poverty reduction during that period. As a result, the process of market liberalization has led to the establishment of China as a major global exporter. It eventually allowed for the re-opening of the Shanghai stock exchange in December 1990 for the first time in over 40 years and, ultimately, to China's accession to the World Trade Organization.

What is of specific importance for Afghanistan is the rapid growth of China and some other (emerging) economies in the East and the South that has created a new global economic outlook for developing countries. In the UNCTAD this is qualified as the "new geography of trade" shaped by three interlinked trends: the increasing share of developing countries in world trade; South-South trade (commodities and manufactures) and economic cooperation "reaching a critical mass"; and the changing context of North-South interdependence and terms of engagement. Within this new context, as a "new growth pole in the world economy" China has a major impact on developing regions.

Afghanistan by drawing on China's vast and successful experience can learn how to identify a development model suiting it without to mimic China's institutions. Rather, it must create the conditions to define its own development path, based on its history, culture and institutions. Thus, various models for structural transformation, as offered by different groups of academics, need to be adapted to our unique circumstances and the conditions in subsets of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan needs to incorporate principles behind China's impressive growth into its strategies as it seeks to build on its improved development of the last two decades. We hope that, going forward, Afghanistan can look to China not only as a trading partner, but as a development mentor.



Role of Media in Peace Building

By: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Media can play a vital role in Peace Building in Afghanistan. One of the key issues to be interrogated by media researchers in relation to conflicted societies is the extent to which the media serve to escalate or reduce the overall conflict situation. The argument goes that the media either escalate the conflict by accentuating disagreements, foregrounding confrontations, and lending air time to forceful voices, or, conversely, reduce the conflict by shunning extremism, giving room for alternative voices and visualizing peaceful solutions. For several reasons, the media situation in and around Afghanistan provides an interesting ground for discussing these issues. For one, the longlasting Afghan conflict has been a recurrent issue for both the local and the international media. In addition, the extraordinary situation of the growing Afghan diaspora has provoked a media engagement that in a special way treats issues of conflict through civic-driven, transnational media channels. Within this backdrop, it is the aim of the current article to discuss the role of the extended Afghan media in relation to the local conflict situation.

Within media and conflict research, a particular movement, namely "peace journalism," has received increased attention over the last few years. In short, peace journalism seeks to challenge conventional journalism by working actively for peace through the media. The movement has gained momentum as a result of criticism raised against conventional media operations in the coverage of the so-called global war on terror, a critique that echoes several decades of disappointment with the global media and their coverage of national and international conflicts. Against this backdrop, peace journalism claims to be an alternative to the traditionally conflict-oriented news paradigm.

Peace researchers generally see a great potential for improve-

ment in the area of mass media as an instrument for change and reconciliation. Media analysts are often more skeptical. It is difficult to decide what role the Afghan media actually play in the process of conflict resolution. In practice, when the peace journalism philosophy is transferred to actual media work, small media and active audience formats are deemed most useful. When traditional news media channels are requested to engage in peace journalism, the recommendations tend to reinforce traditional journalistic standards: independence, objectivity, fairness, and the importance of fact checking. These standards correspond entirely with the values called for by journalist organizations in Afghanistan. In this area, the contribution of peace journalism does not stand out as something new. When it comes to the need for explaining the complexity of the Afghan conflict and creating understanding between the various parties, there is undoubtedly room for improvement both in the Afghan and international media.

A bulletin style news language would not suffice. One needs wider program formats and participation from diverse interests, including average citizens. The language of the media must also be the subject of persistent critical analysis. Some of the important issues are how reporters frame a conflict and who they include and exclude in the presentation. To scrutinize the media processes, one could very well be inspired by Johan Galtung and other peace researchers who are critical of the logics of the mainstream media.

However, traditional journalism actually does not appear to be hostile to improvements in these areas. To the contrary, it is part and parcel of the journalistic craft to be cognizant of the effects of word choice and media framing. To journalists covering Afghan issues, however, the appropriate approach appears to be the exercise of professional journalism rather than entering a peace mediation role.

The Revolution Europe Needs

By: Guy Verhofstadt

The spontaneous street protests in Paris over the past month come almost exactly 50 years after the mass revolt of May 1968. But that is not to say the two events are comparable. Les événements de mai 1968 was an anarchist uprising by students and workers against the traditionalism and apparent authoritarianism of President Charles de Gaulle. Today's "Yellow Vests," by contrast, have eschewed intellectual and political debate, and quickly degenerated into a rioting mob.

What started as a decent, middle-class protest against a new tax on diesel fuel has been hijacked by professional thugs and extremists railing against migrants, the European Union, and French President Emmanuel Macron. "Paris is burning," gloated Steve Bannon, US President Donald Trump's populist former consigliere, at a recent appearance alongside Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Rally (formerly the National Front). According to Bannon, "The yellow vests ... are exactly the same type of people who elected Donald Trump ... and who voted for Brexit."

Worse still, the extremist activism has already spread to neighboring Belgium and the Netherlands, which now have Yellow Vest movements of their own. And in Italy, Matteo Salvini, the xenophobic interior minister, has capitalized on the riots to launch a broadside against Macron's policies. Never mind that Italy is in even more desperate need of a Macron-style reform agenda than France.

The fact that alt-right agitators are using the Yellow Vest movement as a platform to spew hate and lies should worry all Europeans. In one way or another, many of today's populist parties and movements draw financial support from the Kremlin. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that the United Kingdom's 2016 Brexit referendum was influenced by "dark money" from Russia. And Russian trolls have continued to foment Islamophobic hatred across Western Europe.

The alt-right has been highly successful at exploiting people's fears to undermine global solutions for global challenges such as migration and climate change. For those struggling to make ends meet, right-wing messaging about refugees and migrants taking jobs and destroying European culture can resonate powerfully. And for rural households facing slightly higher fuel taxes, it is convenient to believe that climate change is just a hoax propagated by political elites and "the media."

A countermovement against such disinformation is long past due. The first step in stemming the populist, Euroskeptical tide is to tell the truth and point out the lies. But let us not be naive. Countering the alt-right threat to our societies will also require deep reform.

A common populist criticism of the EU is that it functions opaquely and often incomprehensibly. Yet, if anything, the EU tends to be rather weak in the face of global challenges. Contrary to populists' claims of overreach, European institutions almost always do "too little, too late." That must change, and radically so. We need to make the EU far more democratic, transparent, and effective - which is to say, more sovereign - than it is today.

This does not require us to reinvent the wheel. We need only return to the ideas of Europe's founding fathers: Jean Monnet, Paul-Henri Spaak, Robert Schuman, Alcide de Gasperi, and others. These leaders had a clear vision of a simpler yet stronger Union, led not by a 28-member commission, but by a real

government with 12 ministers. They would have allowed Europeans to vote directly for a parliament with full competencies and legislative authority, and without the system of unanimity that has allowed rogue member states such as Hungary to tie the entire bloc's hands.

Above all, we must not equate liberal democracy with the status quo, which all but ensures slow, arduous decision-making. If the EU suddenly were to make collective decisions by simple majority, the problems confronting it would no longer seem intractable. Europe would finally be able to stand on its own and address its citizens' concerns.

For example, with a European army serving as an autonomous pillar within NATO, the EU would no longer have to defer to the US on security decisions. With a single European digital market, European alternatives to Google, Facebook, Amazon, Samsung, and Huawei could finally emerge. And with a European border patrol and coast guard, Europeans would be far less reliant on Turkey, Russia, and others when it comes to managing migration flows.

Of course, controlling our borders does not mean closing ourselves off from the outside world. Europe will always need to engage with other powers. But it must do so from a position of strength.

If the EU can rediscover its democratic potential, the alt-right will no longer have grounds on which to launch attacks against international cooperation and multilateralism. In a more democratic Europe, citizens who took to the streets would do so not to scapegoat migrants and journalists, but to demand solutions for the real challenges we face.

Before it was co-opted, the yellow vest movement was based on a genuine concern about economic security. The lesson for all EU member states is that we must shore up our national social security systems, while moving forward on EU-level reforms. With a full-fledged banking union, citizens' savings would be secured, and taxpayers would not end up on the hook for private-sector profligacy. And with a complete monetary union and an autonomous joint budget, the eurozone would be far more resilient in the event of another financial crisis.

Until Europe gets serious about economic reforms, our economy will continue to underperform structurally vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Since 2010, the average annual growth rate in the euro area has been 1.3%, compared to 2.3% in the United States. This gap represents €1.2 trillion (\$1.4 trillion) from 2010-2018, or approximately €500 billion lost in terms of tax revenue. For France alone, this amounts to €10 billion every year - the budgetary cost of what Macron recently proposed to meet the Yellow Vests' original demands.

The uprising that Europe needs will not happen in the streets of Paris or Brussels, but within the EU's paralyzed institutions. For more than five decades, power within Europe has been divided between conservatives and socialists who, collectively, have failed to address the challenges of the day.

It is time to leave the European talking shop behind us. The current era demands action. In the May 2019 European Parliament election, "Generation Europe" can break the old political order and take the revolution out of the streets and into the hallways of European democracy.

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