

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



October 17, 2016

## No End to Violence against Women

In the recent Brussels Summit it was reiterated by National Unity Government (NUG) that there would be serious efforts for the rights and protection of women in Afghanistan. However, there are many who fear that the situation regarding the rights, role and status of women in Afghanistan may further deteriorate.

It was not the first time that NUG made promises that it would consider the condition of women in Afghanistan seriously. On its beginning days, it had made many such ambitious promises but little could be seen from them practically. Human rights and, particularly, women rights organizations raised their voices during the Brussels Summit and demanded better efforts by Afghan government to change the scenario. International community also made it clear that the support and assistance to Afghanistan would largely depend on the endeavors that would be made by Afghan authorities regarding women rights. However, it has to be seen how Afghan authorities would make efforts in this regard.

Unfortunately, issues pertaining to women have been handled by the authorities in a hypocritical manner. They have been used to attract donor funding and treated on project-based manner. Some efforts are made only temporarily to show the donors that there are actions being taken but it is also ensured that the issues are not solved permanently; thus enabling the officials to keep on attracting donor funding.

As a matter of fact, the magnitude of work that has been done regarding the rights of women in Afghanistan is much less than the funds and resources that have been utilized. A cursory look at the condition of women in different parts of the country would reveal the whole story. Moreover, the incidents of violence and atrocities against women have kept on multiplying. Every now and then, there is an incident that shows the nature and frequency of violation of women rights and their subjugation by the male members of the society and the social norms and values.

In a recent incident on Saturday, October 15, a man doused his 23-year-old wife in petrol before setting her on fire in Anjel district of Herat province. According to officials the incident took place only because the wife had an argument with the husband. Though the wife survived the incident, she is said to be in hospital in a serious condition. Many such incidents take place in different parts of the country and many of them are never brought to the attention of media and the relevant authorities.

There is a clear rise in incidents of violence against women. This is directly linked to the overall security situation. As the security situation in the country has deteriorated the weaker strata seem to be in trouble the most. There were no serious attention to their woes and now with rising insecurity, the authorities have more excuses for less attention to the issues of women. Women and many intellectuals believe that even if the security situation improves there will be serious challenges for women to earn a reputable position within Afghan society. Even if there is a peace deal with Taliban, there are fears that Afghan government may sacrifice some of the achievements that are made regarding the heightened role and position of women. Taliban have never been in favor of active role of women in social and political lives and one of their conditions for peace talks would be limiting their role as much as possible. Keeping the Afghan society in mind, the authorities may accept such a condition.

Afghan social structure has been fervently dominated by religious extremism and tribal partiality. Most of the self-designed religious doctrines and tribal norms are against the women and discriminate their basic rights. Regrettably, these norms and principles have even gone to the extent of aggression and have tortured women physically – even in the public. They, in the name of dignity of women, have in reality dishonored them. Though they have been raising their voices every now and then but in the noise of male shrieks they seem to be negligible and get faded away. In fact, the male-chauvinistic ears are not ready to hear them though they feel their vibrations clearly. Nonetheless, the efforts in this regard must never be given up and they should continue in every possible way.

With such a situation existing around, it is really difficult to see development in condition of women who have been undergoing discriminations since ages. Afghan authorities and all the Afghan people, both women and men, must strive to change the scenario as it would help the society as a whole as women are an essential part of it.

We need to accept that women form an integral part of society and have an imperative role to play. Their representation and participation in different walks of life can help society develop suitably. They cannot be kept on being discriminated and violated without letting up, because it is not only non-religious but at the same time atrocious because above all women are human beings. Unfortunately, this evident fact has not been realized by many in Afghan society.



## Toxic Politics Versus Better Economics

By Mohamed A. El-Erian

The relationship between politics and economics is changing. Advanced-country politicians are locked in bizarre, often toxic, conflicts, instead of acting on a growing economic consensus about how to escape a protracted period of low and unequal growth. This trend must be reversed, before it structurally cripples the advanced world and sweeps up the emerging economies, too.

Obviously, political infighting is nothing new. But, until recently, the expectation was that if professional economists achieved a technocratic consensus on a given policy approach, political leaders would listen. Even when more radical political parties attempted to push a different agenda, powerful forces – whether moral suasion from G7 governments, private capital markets, or the conditionality attached to International Monetary Fund and World Bank lending – would almost always ensure that the consensus approach eventually won the day.

In the 1990s and 2000s, for example, the so-called Washington Consensus dominated policymaking in much of the world, with everyone from the United States to a multitude of emerging economies pursuing trade liberalization, privatization, greater use of price mechanisms, financial-sector deregulation, and fiscal and monetary reforms with a heavy supply-side emphasis. The embrace of the Washington Consensus by multilateral institutions amplified its transmission, helping to drive forward the broader process of economic and financial globalization.

Incoming governments – particularly those led by non-traditional movements, which had risen to power on the back of domestic unease and frustration with mainstream parties – sometimes disagreed with the appropriateness and relevance of the Washington Consensus. But, as Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva demonstrated with his famous policy pivot in 2002, that consensus tended largely to prevail. And it continued to hold sway as recently as almost two years ago, when Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras executed an equally notable U-turn.

But after years of unusually sluggish and strikingly non-inclusive growth, the consensus is breaking down. Advanced-country citizens are frustrated with an “establishment” – including economic “experts,” mainstream political leaders, and dominant multinational companies – which they increasingly blame for their economic travails. Anti-establishment movements and figures have been quick to seize on this frustration, using inflammatory and even combative rhetoric to win support. They do not even have to win elections to disrupt the transmission mechanism between economics and politics. The United Kingdom proved that in June, with its Brexit vote – a decision that directly defied the broad economic consensus that remained within the European Union was in Britain’s best interest.

The referendum happened for one reason: in 2013, then-Prime Minister David Cameron feared that he would be unable to secure sufficiently his Conservative Party base in the general election that year. So he pandered to Euroskeptical voters with the promise of a referendum. The source of Cameron’s fear? The political disruption caused by the

UK Independence Party – an anti-establishment party that ended up winning only one seat in Parliament and subsequently found itself leaderless and in turmoil.

Now, it seems, the floodgates have opened. At the recent Conservative Party annual conference, speeches by Prime Minister Theresa May and members of her cabinet revealed an intention to pursue a “hard Brexit,” thereby dismantling trading arrangements that have served the economy well. They also included attacks on “international elites” and criticism of Bank of England policies that were instrumental in stabilizing the British economy in the referendum’s immediate aftermath – thus giving May’s new government time to formulate a coherent Brexit strategy.

Several other advanced economies are experiencing analogous political developments. In Germany, a surprisingly strong showing by the far-right Alternative für Deutschland in recent state elections already appears to be affecting the government’s behavior.

In the US, even if Donald Trump’s presidential campaign fails to put a Republican back in the White House (as appears increasingly likely, given that, in the latest twist of this highly unusual campaign, many Republican leaders have now renounced their party’s nominee), his candidacy will likely leave a lasting impact on American politics. If not managed well, Italy’s constitutional referendum in December – a risky bid by Prime Minister Matteo Renzi to consolidate support – could backfire, just like Cameron’s referendum did, causing political disruption and undermining effective action to address the country’s economic challenges.

Make no mistake: solid and credible policy options are available. After years of mediocre economic performance, there is widespread agreement that a shift away from excessive dependence on unconventional monetary policy is needed. As IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde put it, “central banks cannot be the only game in town.” And yet they have been. As I argue in *The Only Game in Town*, published in January, countries need a more comprehensive policy approach, involving pro-growth structural reforms, more balanced demand management (including higher fiscal spending on infrastructure), and better cross-border policy coordination and architecture. There is also a need, highlighted by the protracted Greek crisis, to address pockets of severe over-indebtedness, which can have crushing impact extending well beyond the directly affected.

The emergence of a new consensus on these points is good news. But, in the current political environment, translating that consensus into action is likely to happen too slowly, at best. The risk is that, as bad politics crowds out good economics, popular anger and frustration will rise, making politics even more toxic. One hopes that enlightened political leadership takes the reins in time to make the needed mid-course corrections voluntarily, before unambiguous signs of economic and financial crisis force policymakers to scramble to minimize the damage. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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## Educational System in Germany

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Germany is one of the world pioneers in ranking best educational system. Studies show that Germany has a much higher percentage of high-quality performance than many advanced countries; Comparing to US, German 15-year-old students outperformed their U.S. peers by 32 points in math, 27 points in science, and 10 points in reading. Seventeen percent of German students perform at or above the advanced level, while only 8 percent of U.S. students achieve that level. Overall, the scores of students in Germany are higher than in the United States and many European and Asian countries.

The very first step for children to leave their home is to go to pre-school, which is called “Kindergarten”. Contrary to public opinion, Kindergarten in Germany is usually not a state supported school system and therefore not free and also not compulsory. Nonetheless, the majority of children between the ages of 3 to 6 go to voluntary communities or church-supported facilities where playing outside and socializing with other children are the main concepts. The next stage for a child is to attend “Grundschule” (primary school), which is compulsory from this stage on. A special event is in the first day of class, which is called “Einschulung.” Each child gets a “Schultüte” (a large cornet of cardboard filled with sweets and little presents), which have different designs and they proudly carry them around the whole day, until they are finally allowed to unpack their presents. They have now successfully been introduced to society as “school children” and passed their rite of passage. Here, the children are taught basic math, grammar and reading, sciences, art, music, PE, religion or ethics lessons, and English. There is also a big stress on social developments, as well, like self-reliance, problem solving skills, social interactions, etc.

After the Grundschule, the children get split up and transfer to one of the different types of secondary schools. For all schools, starting in primary school, parents and children can decide which school they’d like to go to; one of the options is “Hauptschule.” (Grades 5 - 10) The main objective here is to prepare the students to enter the world of work with focus on vocation-oriented courses and apprenticeships. It is generally considered the least demanding type of the secondary schools and has gotten less and less popular throughout the nation as an option. After the students earn their degree at Hauptschule, students often continue with a vocational training in different kinds of schools or businesses. The second option is “Realschule” (grades 5-10) designed for students who pursue mid-level and non-professional careers, while also allowing them with the possibility to access secondary level education (Abitur) and a university entrance. There is a wider range of subjects (in comparison to the “Hauptschule”) and more advanced courses. If the grades of a student are good enough, it is also possible to be transferred to a “Gymnasium,” which will be

elaborated on in the following. By the way, it is possible to transfer between the different types of schools, but the grades have to be good enough and the school has to accept the students. The third option is “Gymnasium,” (grades 5-12 or 5-13) prepares students more specifically for university education. The curriculum is more academic in comparison to the other schools and also has a long history in Germany, dating back to 1528. In these last years, students earn their “Abitur” (final examination and degree), where students are able to choose which higher classes they would like to focus on. They have more variety of classes to focus and specialize on, but also need to fulfill certain requirements. Depending on the states, it varies if the Abitur is from grade 11-12 or 11-13.

The “Gesamtschule” (grade 5-10 and 11-13) is another concept which has different goals. This school is meant for children with all sorts of different abilities and combines elements from the other school systems already described. It was introduced later than the other school types. Students can gain their certificates from all the different schools. And depending on their school level, they can also do their “Abitur” from grade 11-13. This model would come nearest to the U.S. high school system.

Sonderschule/Förderschule The last type is designed for children with special educational, mental and physical needs. Here, the teachers have to be trained specially and the classes are usually smaller than in regular schools. There is a current trend toward a more inclusive education model and children with disabilities in most states also have the choice to attend a regular school if they want to.

Legally, Germany has a compulsory education law that good to be recommended in Afghanistan.

The school day usually starts at 8:00 am and finished around 1:15 pm. But in some schools, there are full days of education, which is most common in the Gesamtschule with study hours for homework and extracurricular activities. Each day has different subjects; some subjects are taught two times a week and some 3 times. One class lasts for 45 minutes and sometimes they can be combined to 90 minute classes. The break periods are usually short (5 minutes), with two longer breaks (20 minutes and 15 minutes) per day. Most schools have no cafeteria and students only eat snacks there and their main meal at home. The school year is also different; It consists of two semesters and normally starts around August or September. The breaks are longer in fall, winter and spring where students get two full weeks off. In summer, on the other hand, they are shorter with only 6 weeks off. The dates for vacation are also different for each of the states, so usually the break times are on a different date which is good because otherwise everyone would be taking vacation at the same time.

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