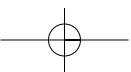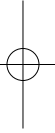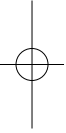# International Seminar

"Middle East, Fragmented Societies:

What Future?"

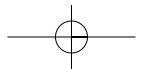Madrid, 9th - 10th June 2009

Work Document nº 4

Centre for Middle Eastern Studies

of the

Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture

Report prepared by Jumana Trad
with the collaboration of Félix Sánchez and Blanca de Mesa

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We also wish to thank all the attendees for their presence and participation. Their intellectual contributions made it possible to achieve the goal that the CEMOFPSC had proposed for this 4th Seminar.

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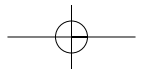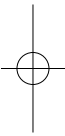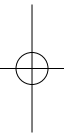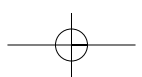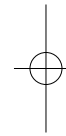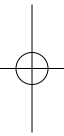
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I.   INTRODUCTION

For the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture (CEMOFPSC, Centro de Estudios de Oriente Medio de la Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura), studying the situation in the Middle East, arguably the most turbulent and unknown part of the world in spite of all the coverage it receives in the media, is an extremely important task. In 2006, taking advantage of its experience on the ground, the FPSC, with the support of the Regional Government of Madrid, decided to take another step forward on the path it has always taken by setting up a Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, its aim being to promote research into and analysis of issues related to the Middle East with the intention of contributing to a better understanding of its different cultures and peoples, as a specific means of helping to build peace in the region. Spain, Europe and the West in general lack in-depth knowledge of these issues, and such ignorance has serious consequences both at regional and international level.

When the Executive Committee of the CEMOFPSC met to determine the topic of this 4th seminar, its members agreed that fragmented societies constituted an issue of special importance in the Middle East, although they had no idea that it would coincide with:

1.   His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the Holy Land (May 8-15, 2009), which has encouraged the different communities to seek reconciliation with renewed vigour.

2.   President Obama's tour of the Middle East and Europe, and his historic speech in Cairo on June 4, 2009, which has raised so many hopes and expectations in terms of what it might lead to not only in the Middle East, but also throughout the Muslim world, in the United States, and even in the sphere of transatlantic relations.

3.   The European Parliament elections (June 4-7).

4.   Lebanon's parliamentary elections, whose definitive result was announced a few days after June 12, 2009.

5.   And finally, the elections in Iran (June 12).

These events did not alter the issue that brought us together, but everyone present agreed that they would have a significant impact.

Fragmentation in the Middle East is a much broader issue than the mere conflict par excellence in the region. It concerns matters relating to what has been called the succession of the Ottoman Empire. In more contemporary terms it directly concerns what are known as Failed States, although it cannot be said that any Middle Eastern State is failed, except for the non-nato Palestinian State, which could be said to be in this situation. Islam and the Arabic language and culture represent the common denominator of Arab societies in the Middle East, but bearing in mind religious and ethnic pluralism, the potential for fragmentation is very high.

This region has been home to all civilizations at one stage or another throughout history, and today it still has a key role to play in achieving peace and development, which are the necessary concomitants of justice.

It is also necessary to mention the problems posed by education, freedom and the situation of women, which the Human Development Report drew attention to a few years ago as obstacles to stability and the implementation of democracy in most parts of the Arab world.

The President of the FPSC and of the CEMOFPSC foresaw that "in order for this seminar to be successful, each and every one of the participants must make specific contributions based on their own professional experiences. Each one represents a piece of the puzzle of this compelling part of the world, and all the pieces are necessary to complete the puzzle".

This debate, which focused on the challenges and problems related to the chosen topic, as well as the possible solutions to these problems, took place behind closed doors and followed the Chatham House Rule: in order to encourage sincerity in these work sessions and to facilitate the dissemination of ideas, the CEMOFPSC maintains the anonymity of the contributions made during the seminar. Nevertheless, the speakers who take part in the sessions may authorize the publication of their speeches on the Web.

II.   4TH SEMINAR OF THE CEMOFPSC

The 4th seminar of the CEMOFPSC, entitled "Middle East, Fragmented Societies: What Future?", took place on June 9-10, 2009 in Madrid.

Participants: Ms. Pilar Lara, President of the FPSC; Mr. Javier Fernández-Lasquetty, Minister for Immigration and Cooperation of the Regional Government of Madrid; Mr. Andreu Claret, Director of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Association for Dialogue between Cultures.

From the religious sphere: Mons. Michel Sabbah, Patriarch Emeritus of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem; Mr. Samuel Hadas, Israeli Ambassador, Advisor for Intercultural Cooperation at the Simon Peres Centre for Peace and former Ambassador of Israel to Spain and the Vatican; Mr. Pedro López Aguirrebengoa, Spanish Ambassador and former Ambassador of Spain to Israel; Mr. José María Ferré de la Peña, Ambassador at Large for Relations with Overseas Muslim Communities and Organizations; Mr. Giuseppe Cassini, Ambassador of the Italian Republic and former Policy Adviser to the Italian Forces in UNIFIL; Ms. Silvia Escobar, Ambassador at Large for Human Rights.

From the political sphere: Ms. Nadia Hilou, former Israeli Arab Member of Parliament for the Labour Party; Ms. Paola Binetti, Member of the Congress of Deputies of the Italian Republic.

From the academic and business spheres: Mr. Diego del Alcázar, President of the Instituto de Empresa Business School and of the Vocento Group; Mr. Theodor Hanf, Professor at the American University of Beirut; Ms. Dina Awwad, Development and Public Relations Officer at Bethlehem University; Mr. Rafael Puyol, President of the IE Business School University.

From the think thank and research centre sphere: Prof. Fred Halliday, ICREA research professor at the IBEI (Institut Barcelona D'Etudis Internacionals); Mr. Diego de Ojeda, General Director of Casa Sefarad; Mr. Alberto Carnero, Diplomat and Director of the International Department of the FAES Foundation; Ms. Janice Smith, Special Assistant to the Vice President of The Heritage Foundation, Mr. Nadim Shehadi, Member of the Advisory Committee of the CEMOFPSC and Associate

Fellow in the Middle East Programme at Chatham House, United Kingdom; Ms. Jumana Trad, Member of the Executive Committee of the CEMOFPSC and Head of Tribunes and Seminars at Casa Árabe-IEAM.

III.   OPPORTUNENESS OF THE SEMINAR TOPIC

The fragmentation of societies is a practically universal phenomenon whose significance extends far beyond the Middle East.

The tendency towards fragmentation has acquired an almost worldwide dimension since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the bipolar world that emerged after the Second World War. Today it is a fact not only in Africa, where the borders inherited from the Berlin Conference have been very relative, but also in Europe, where the end of Soviet control over the countries of Eastern Europe provoked an explosion of national identities that redrew the map of Central, Balkan and Baltic Europe.

"Fragmentation" is the result of complex dynamics, which have deep historical roots and which must be examined in a specific manner in order to avoid ideological amalgams that could lead to a certain degree of nostalgia for the confined world that existed before the Wall came down. Redrawing the map of nations has undoubtedly caused wars and violence and led to the resurgence of exclusive nationalisms. Viewed from a global perspective, today's world is certainly more complex and perhaps more unstable, but also more free and more democratic.

The question is not, therefore, whether "fragmentation" in itself has positive or negative consequences, but rather to what extent this greater cultural and national complexity is compatible with freedom and social cohesion. In other words, to what extent does it allow its protagonists to live together?

Today's world cannot be explained without considering the cultural and civilizing dimension of the majority of processes and tensions, but neither can it be explained only through the paradigm of identities or religions. Some analysts who predicted the end of history spoke too soon. The world is still political. History has only just begun. The world financial and economic crisis has, if nothing else, reminded us of this.

There is one politically important question: does segmentation matter? Whether it matters or not depends on people's perception.

Anyhow, it is true that cultural, ethnic and religious identities have acquired a prominence that they lacked in the previous bipolar context.

And it is even truer that this emergence of identities as a driver of history (displacing conventional ideologies and more traditional social interests) is particularly significant in the Near East.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the consequent response that these attacks provoked, brought about a profound polarization of the world. The response of the Bush Administration was received as such by Arab society, i.e. as the expression of a dual vision in civilizing international relations with familiar historical resonances.

Out of every ten quotes thrown up by Samuel Huntington's famous book ("The Clash of Civilizations"), nine refer to the Near East. It is in this region, which has the Mediterranean as its axis, that we are witnessing the most far-reaching cultural divide in the world today, that which juxtaposes the West with Arab-Muslim societies. And yet even in the Mediterranean, the problems and conflicts of this region cannot be explained (let alone resolved) from a cultural perspective that sidesteps the other fractures that cross the Mare Nostrum (social, historical, economic and political).

In the Near East, this dualizing logic has found fertile terrain in a geopolitical context where the local and the regional are permanently interrelated, creating extremely complex situations due to the number of actors involved, all of them highly volatile and with an exceptional capacity to affect the international agenda. This is a region in which any analysis that does not take into account the relationship between the whole and the part and tries to explain everything through the cultural or religious identity of the actors involved is bound to be ineffective. Such has been the role of a large part of the international community in the region.

This interrelationship between the cultural and the political is particularly relevant in explaining anything that happens in the Arab world, where the Muslim status of the majority of its population has come into the foreground, with a growing manifestation of collective expressions of Islam in the public sphere, and with the spread of political Islamic fundamentalism (in a wide variety of forms) as the main source of criticism of the existing regimes and, sometimes, as the most articulate expression of a possible alternative to these regimes.

IV. FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE MIDDLE
     EAST

1.   HISTORICAL FACTORS

1.1. Birth of the Middle Eastern countries: a brief introduction

The fragmentation of the Middle East stems from the fragmentation of
the Ummah during the Ottoman Empire. We find this theory in David
Fromkin's work "A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman
Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East". This was the period
that saw the start of various forms of foreign intervention in the Middle
East, mandates, etc. Now we have two problems: the people of the
Middle East, especially the Arabs, are accused of having wasted every
opportunity by having been incapable of remaining united with a
common point of view. Meanwhile, foreign intervention continues in the
Middle East: oil, economic and political interests, religious interests,
which prevent the people of the Middle East from unifying their points
of view and developing their own alternatives.

Besides the potential for internal fragmentation, we must also mention
the external factors imposed on the Middle East since its birth, and
especially after First World War (1914-1918) and the fall of the Ottoman
Empire. Then, the Arab world was deliberately fragmented by the major
powers. Instead of creating a single political entity in the Arab Middle
East, they created and placed under British and French mandate various
nations with the intention of spreading the new fragmentation
throughout the region, and they included the Jewish national home, now
called the State of Israel. It could be said that the existence and survival
of the State of Israel seem to be imposing this situation of fragmentation
on its neighbours, treating strong Arab unity as an existential threat.
Thus, an already fragmented entity emerged at the outset. Modern Arab
history began under a certain pressure to maintain fragmentation.

Up until the beginning of the 20th century, Palestine, like many other
Arab communities, found itself under the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922).
During this period, Palestinians and Arabs formed a single State, one
nation, and they were concerned about Arab nationalism. All of them
were Arabs who wanted to be free from Ottoman control. However, the

First World War broke out and the Ottomans lost the war. The result of this conflict was the signing of various agreements among the victorious countries of Europe, such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 (whereby the entire Middle East region was to be divided between France and Great Britain, with an international sovereignty over the territory of Palestine, smaller than what would later become known by that name), the Balfour Declaration of 1917 (in which Great Britain declared itself in favour of creating a national Jewish homeland in the British Mandate for Palestine), the San Remo Conference of 1920 (which ratified and legalized the territorial allocations previously agreed between France and Great Britain in the Treaty of Versailles signed in 1919. Syria and Lebanon were put under French mandate and at the same time separated from each other. Iraq came under British control. Palestine, which was detached from Syria pursuant to the commitments agreed upon in the Balfour Declaration, came under British mandate. Transjordan, which was artificially separated from the rest of the territory a few years later, also came under British rule), thus resulting in the division of the Arab nations. Different States were then formed, different nations based on different colonial interests and, as a result, the Arabs began to put emphasis on their national identities as Syrians, Lebanese, etc. This was the first stage in which Palestinians were separated from the rest of their Arab brothers. Then they started to think about how to free themselves from the British mandate as Palestinians, and not as Arabs.

1.2. Present situation of the Middle Eastern countries

What is this region like? Today, we have to talk about a region of interrelated countries and cities, approximately 30 in total. There are 19 independent Arab countries, and a few non-Arab Middle Eastern countries (Israel, Turkey and Iran). If we are talking about exchange of conflicts, we have to include two more countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, which did not form part of the region 20 years ago, and the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia). These countries did not form part of the region 30 years ago, but the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as Ba'athism, had a considerable influence on the Eritrea regime, which is an illegitimate grandson of Ba'athism. Somalia and Ethiopia left the region, but have now returned, due to their strong influence as rivals in the Sudan conflicts.

Looking at this region of some 30 countries, only two of them could be said to have undergone "normal" peaceful political changes (through elections) in last two or three decades: Israel and Turkey. These two countries have their own problems because they are fragmented between the secular and the religious, between civilians and the army, and because they are constantly at war with their own populations and with their neighbours. Therefore, they live an abnormal normality.

There is also a group consisting of approximately 20 States where nothing has changed, with the same politicians for the last 10, 20, 30 years, the same families: Gaddafi, Mubarak, Assad, the Gulf sheikhs, the Saudis, the generals in Sudan, the Algerians, Ben Ali, the King of Morocco. We are talking about the Middle East, a region of great change, but in these 20 countries there are no changes, which is why frustrations arise.

There are 20 countries suffering from instability, eight of which are extremely unstable. Countries in which there is practically no State, and if there is a State, its future is fraught with complexity. Countries which are at war: Somalia, for example, where there has been no State since 1991, and which has become a black hole for terrorism, and Sudan, Africa's largest country, with a death toll of two million and four million refugees, where peace has only existed since 2005. But it is a fragile peace between North and South; one need only think of Darfur, where there is war and other complications. The natives of Yemen, cradle of the "first Arabs", are proud of their ancestral cultural tradition, unlike the Saudis, but the State is disappearing. There are weapons all over the country, a country that is out of control. Where are Iraqi guerrillas trained? Yemen is Iraq's backyard for training the guerrillas who fight against the Americans.

As regards Palestine, today there are two Palestinian States, and we are not talking about the two-State solution. Reconciliation between the two sides seems unlikely in the short term. The problem between Israel and Palestine is not difficult; a dividing line could be drawn, the settlements could be stopped, etc. We are familiar with the Clinton Parameters of the year 2000, but what is lacking is the political will, leadership and the support of the population on both sides to reach a genuine compromise. We are a long way from the situation that

prevailed in the 90s. It does not seem possible for either the United States or Europe to impose a solution.

Lebanon has its electoral process, but it is fragile. If a party has, as they say in Ireland, a tool in the shed, it is not a normal political process. A few weeks ago a Syrian diplomat said: "we haven't played all our cards yet in Lebanon", and this cannot be forgotten, it has to be taken into account. Lebanon is currently at peace, but it has been through a very difficult period, and it is astonishing that those who played a leading role in the Civil War are still in politics. We cannot forget what they did.

Iraq is suffering a profound crisis. The Al-Malaki Government has a 10 or 20% chance of consolidating itself and, with the support of neighbouring countries, of building a political base to resolve the problem between Sunnis and Shiites, between Arabs and Kurds, but it is unlikely. Once the Americans leave, it is more likely that all the parties involved, including the army, will start a genuine civil war, which we have yet to see, but which is being prepared. The worst part is that four or five years ago, the Iranians could control the Shiites, but now they can't because their influence has declined due to the fragmentation of Iraq.

We must also analyse the situation of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Given that there are eight countries in the region that are in crisis, or at war, without solid state structures, foreign countries have a very limited scope for action. Obama, for all his good intentions, cannot solve the problem of Palestine, or Iraq, or Afghanistan.

All the issues overlap; what happens in Somalia has repercussions in Iran, for example, even though the problems that both countries suffer rarely stem from the same reality. Years after the Cold War, perhaps starting with the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in the 1990s, there is more contact between the different societies. They are different societies, but what happens in Afghanistan has an influence on Palestine, Algeria, etc. Therefore, we can talk about a region with different elements, what in the Social Sciences we call a system, a group of very different elements with regular links, just like the human body. The parts of the body are different, but they are interconnected: if I have sciatica, it doesn't affect the whole body, but it has consequences. The Palestine problem is like sciatica; it affects everyone but it does explain the illness within.

Today there are many centres of conflict that are interlinked, and Afghanistan and Iraq are examples of this.

2.   SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS

2.1. Family, immigration and tribalism

What does fragmentation consist of? Middle Eastern societies are formed of families. This is very important. Of course, there are other societies in which the family is crucial. Even modern European nationalisms which are not centred on the family often use it for their purposes.

Marx made a very interesting distinction between what he called "class in itself" and "class for itself". A class in itself is that in which a distinction is made between upper class, middle class and lower class people. But only when the people who belong to one of these categories identify with the category in question do they become a *class for itself*.

The same thing happens with cultural communities. There are societies in which people are different because of their skin colour, language or religion, but these things do not matter to them. Skin colour, for example, was extremely important in South Africa, but not in Brazil. Denomination is a distinction between two different varieties of the same religion. It is crucial in Northern Ireland, but it no longer is in the Netherlands. What matters is whether or not a cultural group considers itself different from the rest. If it matters, then it is a group. What people believe is a political reality. Perceptions are the raw material of politics.

When does politicization of the cultural indicator take place? When the indicator is linked to privilege or to discrimination. If the fact of belonging to a group is useful to us or not, then this indicator becomes important. Therefore, any cultural indicator can be politicized: religion, skin colour, etc. The same indicator might not be politicized if it is not linked to advantages or disadvantages.

Fragmentation implies that something which once existed as a whole has now been broken into pieces. This is not the case. Middle East societies are made up of various segments that coexist, although they are

different. Sometimes the coexistence works well, sometimes less so, but for better or for worse, the segmentation will always be there.

Political mobilization is much easier if we can explain to someone that they are discriminated against for being Shiite rather than for being working class. It is much easier to discriminate against someone for being Catholic in Northern Ireland than to explain that the capitalists - Protestants or otherwise- are the ones who have the power there. Mobilization that is based on the same old criteria is always easier. So indicators matter. What does not matter much is which types of indicators are politicized..., with one exception: there may be hundreds of cultural indicators, but one of them is very real, and that is the family.

The Middle East is based on the family. What does this mean? Arab, Iranian, Hindu, Muslim and Christian societies in the Middle East are *endogamous*. Their members marry among themselves. For a long time this was the norm: you had to marry your first cousin, and if you didn't, you at least had to give some kind of explanation.

A parliamentary candidate in Lebanon does not need electoral fiddles; families vote for their own members. More than anywhere else in the world, Middle Eastern societies are characterized by intense cohesion in large families.

This cohesion is also a business. In Western business courses, we are told that a family business might work for one or two generations, but come the third generation it will encounter problems: the heir is not capable of running the business or would rather do something else, let's say painting or travelling. So the company is sold or ends up going bankrupt. However, in the Middle East and Pakistan, family businesses last five, six, seven, eight and nine generations. Why? Because the family is big enough to provide someone who wants to take charge of the business and is capable of doing so. This is economically good for families that stick together. There is also a political rationality in this. As long as you don't have properties or an elaborate welfare system, the family will be the only social network.

If you are ill, or if you are disabled, if you have more children than you can afford, and generally you want to have lots of children, you can rely

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on your family. Therefore, the family is a social and economic network, which is extremely important. And if this is the case, why should a political network be any different? Politics is an activity in which families compete against each other.

In Middle Eastern societies it is perfectly rational to combine economic and political interests in the form of families and extended families. If the religious flag is waved in these families, as in Lebanon, and you also live alongside 19 other different communities, this comes across as "confessionalism". But communities that are based on extended families also exist without the flags of religion. They exist in Syria; they exist in Jordan. They are part and parcel of Middle East politics. This being the case, we might have to live with segmentation for a long time.

As for the near future, this region will continue to be built on the basis on families, and in some places these families have religious flags. Moreover, there are very limited opportunities for the development of State welfare. Only a State in which people can support each other for their most urgent needs offers conditions under which trust in the family might be obsolete. In short: segments are here to stay.

Just as we should stop accusing Islam as if it were a barrier to democracy, we should also stop attacking tribalism. Tribalism and the family-based mode of organization is not something bad. There are various societies in which it is perfectly normal to talk about tribes. What we have to ask ourselves is not whether tribalism is right or wrong, but how tribes can coexist. However, if we are looking for an analogy that exemplifies the division in societies, we should not look at France or the United States, but at the European Union, where associations are based on a neutral interest, which means that its members do not need to have complete proportionality.

Israeli society is very diverse, where the minority that represents a fifth of the population thinks of itself as different in historical, ethnic, religious and linguistic terms. The diversity of Israeli society, in which social, religious and cultural groups of the most diverse origins live together (or coexist), is exceptional, and this is the main cause of the political instability that considerably affects the governability of the country.

The difficulties that the State of Israel has faced since the outset seemed insurmountable and are such that they did not exactly encourage democratic institutions; for example, the arrival of waves of immigrants from countries where democracy was unknown, which was not exactly a cohesive factor. Nevertheless, Jewish Israelis share the feeling of belonging to a people, with common history, religion and cultures. The non-Jewish minorities, on the other hand, perceive themselves differently.

Israel today is a country of great cultural and social heterogeneity. It is not just a country developed by immigrants, but a country still run mainly by immigrants. It took in waves of immigrants of diverse origins, cultures and educational levels, who coexist with important ethnic and religious minorities. The diversity of Israeli society is exceptional: an overlapping of social and cultural groups that exists in very few countries. We could define it as a multi-ethnic, religious, cultural society comprising groups of the most diverse origins. As an accredited Spanish correspondent in Israel wrote, "The twelve tribes of Israel mentioned in Genesis would not suffice to portray the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Israelis".

The Israel of today is very different from its earliest incarnation and from the State designed by its founders. The original founding core, predominantly European and for the most part ideologically motivated, were soon joined by immigrants from other continents, such as Africa, Asia and America. The country has continually undergone important changes. Some of the most influential institutions in the early years have been transformed. The Israelis have lost faith in them, which has led to the development of a more pluralist, stratified and divided society.

Many voices can be heard in the Israel of today, but not all of them in unison. The Israelis' mood now swings between a double existence, that of national survival and that of their private life, which does not compare unfavourably with that of the average citizen of any developed country.

2.2. Identities, Religions and Minorities

The Middle East is formed of different countries and, within the latter, various ethnic identities, religions and, within each religion, various

denominations. Two religions are present in the Arab societies of the Middle East: Islam and Christianity, and since the creation of the State of Israel, the three monotheistic religions have existed side by side, each with its respective role and influence on society.

Religion, the two religions, Islam and Christianity, were and still are a factor of division. Within the same religion, Islam has its principal division between Sunnis and Shiites, a powerful factor of division; and in Christianity, the denominations create an individualistic confessional mentality that prevents the Christian contribution from being a factor of unity and strength in its societies.

Arab Christians are present in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Egypt and Sudan. These are the lands of its origins and roots.

Some would like to present Christians simply as Christians, without belonging to a particular society or land. This is simply part of the fragmentation process and it stands in contradiction to the nature of any human being who normally belongs to a society and a land.

The Middle East Council of Churches represents all these Churches, bringing them together in four families: the Greek Orthodox family (Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem and the Archbishopric of Cyprus), the Eastern Orthodox family (the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia; the Catholic family with its seven Patriarchates (Alexandria, of the Coptic Catholics; Antioch, with three Patriarchates: Syrian Catholic, Maronite and Greek Catholic; the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate of Cilicia, with headquarters currently in Antelias (Lebanon); the Chaldean Patriarchate of Babylon, in Baghdad; and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem); and finally, the Protestant family with various Churches or ecclesiastical communities (the main ones being those of the Anglicans, the Lutherans and the Presbyterians).

Another body, the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the Orient, brings together all the Catholic Churches of the region. These two Councils represent all the Arab Christians in all the Arab countries (Middle East, Persian Gulf, Sudan and North Africa).

The languages of the Churches reveal the original variety of the ethnic groups in the area; the Copts of Egypt, the Syriac-Aramaeans of Syria, Lebanon and Iraq (the Maronites are part of this family), the Armenians, who were dispersed throughout all the Arab countries; and the Greek community, which comes from the time of the Byzantine empire (called Roman –*rum*- in Arabic in reference to the Eastern Roman Empire, with which the Arabs came into confrontation). All these Churches, without losing their own language, especially in literature, very soon adopted Arabic, which became the common language of all Middle East Christians. Only the Syriacs, the Aramaeans, and the Armenians, of course, still (and partially) speak their mother tongue, as well as Arabic. In the Arab countries of the Middle East, everyone is aware of belonging to the Arab world.

Israeli society is not made up exclusively of Jews. About 20% of the country's population belong to different national, religious and ethnic minorities. The definition of an Israeli identity therefore affects these sectors. The majority of the Arab citizens of Israel, who constitute nearly 20% of the population, define themselves as Israeli Arabs who live in Israel, a country of which they are citizens with full rights, according to the Law. Most of them are connected to Islamic religion or to its tradition.

In fact, the Israeli Arabs constitute a national, ethnic, linguistic (Arabic is an official language, along with Hebrew) and religious minority. 15% of Arabs consider themselves secular. Just over 12% are Christians, who, when added to the Christian population who have emigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union countries, constitute slightly less than 3% of the country's total population.

The new generation of Arabs born and raised in Israel today cannot carry on suffering subjugation, discrimination and inequality. This point is very important, since this inequality is likely to cause radicalization in Israel and open another front in the internal resistance to the opposition.

The Jews who came to Israel from the Republics of the former Soviet Union, particularly after its collapse, have become an important force in the country. Around one million citizens, who constitute 17% of the population, with a significant electoral potential, have come to

represent a factor of gravitation in the culture –and also in the politics–
of the country, capable of deciding election results. The emergence of
parties comprising mainly immigrants from the former Soviet Union has
been an unprecedented phenomenon.

The Jewish population of Russian origin is perhaps the most highly-
educated group of immigrants: 61% have 13 years of education or more,
and 42% have had a university or scientific education.

There is no separation between State and religion in Israel. Much to the
regret of many, religious laws continue to control the lives of Israelis:
marriages, divorces, public transport on *Shabbat* and feast days,
gastronomy. The ethnic and cultural diversity is considerable.

Israeli legislation contains contradictions, just like the society itself,
which is both old and new, native and immigrant, tribal and universal.
The system of recognising and guaranteeing the fundamental rights of
citizens went through many changes: in less than fifty years it went
beyond the anachronistic Ottoman legislation of centuries past and that
of the British mandate. Israel, let us not forget, is by definition a Jewish
State, but it is actually a multi-ethnic and multi-religious State, in which
it is necessary to ensure the rights and the representation of religious
and ethnic minorities. Out of a total population of nearly 7.5 million,
more than 1,200,000 are Arabs, most of whom are Muslims. The rights of
this minority are far from being implemented as they should be. They
enjoy citizenship, but this does not cancel out the differences.

Ethnic minorities face serious difficulties throughout most of the Middle
East. In the case of Israel, the Israeli Arab minority suffers the
consequences of the confrontation that often puts it in an awkward
position of what we might call *my country at war against my people*.
Many of them lost relatives in Gaza, not to mention the fatalities and
those wounded in Northern Israel during the war with Lebanon in 2006,
or the numerous difficulties and accusations they have to face from all
sides of the conflict.

Israeli society is a temperamental and vehement society and tensions
run high, like the volume of rhetoric. A society with sectors aware of a
common destiny, but separated by tensions deriving from its origins and

various peculiarities. However, contradictory as it may seem, most of the population is tolerant, pluralist and peace-loving.

2.3. Religious extremisms

A return to religious extremism and tribal policies can be observed in the Middle East. Religion is increasingly attractive, especially to young and desperate people who see no hope in their life, which explains why the Islamic party emerged victorious in the Turkish general election, or why Hamas won the election in Gaza, and unfortunately for us, more and more people are allowing themselves to get swept away by fanaticism in Israel and the West Bank. This trend is particularly noticeable in fragmented societies and, politically, the most secular major parties, such as the Ba'ath Party, no longer have the same power as in the past.

Islamism is a movement which began to emerge in the wake of the war against Israel in June 1967. It is a permanent fact that, whether the groups are violent or not, or whether they operate abroad or not, will depend on one place or another or certain circumstances or others. But Islamism as a "solution" will be a constant element which our children will have to continue to take into consideration, from Morocco to Pakistan. We have to learn to live with this nationalist, socially authoritarian and intellectually intransigent movement. We can negotiate with them, but without holding out too much hope.

Islamist movements emerged firstly as a reaction to the already unstable situation of the modern Arab States which replaced the old Caliphate system and the system of the *Umma*, and, secondly, as a reaction to foreign domination. This domination, initially implicit in authoritarian regimes, later became more or less evident in a world of global politics that imposed foreign directives on local regimes. Today, in each Middle Eastern country, this tension between the regimes and society, or between the regimes and the Islamist movements, is present more or less explicitly, more or less contained, and the inevitable element of society's evolution remains.

Political Islamism (which takes many different forms) has emerged as the main source of criticism of the existing regimes and, sometimes, as

the most articulate expression of a possible alternative to these regimes. The causes of this private and public Islamization are complex and, once again, cannot be interpreted solely from a cultural or religious perspective. They are related to the inability of traditional ideologies to meet the needs of the population of the majority of Arab countries and to open up prospects for change. They also have to do with the new polarization which has taken place since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

The emergence of religious parties, some of them of an ethnic nature, is a particularly Israeli phenomenon, to which there is nothing comparable in other countries. The current problem of Israeli society is that the Orthodox religious minority has come to hold the balance of political power, a position that has given it a disproportionate political power. The vast majority of Israelis consider that there must be freedom of conscience and religious freedom. An Orthodox religious minority insists that its interpretation of religion must prevail in Israel.

The attitude of the Orthodox religious parties to the State is mainly instrumental, and the State's secular judicial system is scathingly criticised by all these parties. They focus their efforts mainly on expanding and improving the rabbinical seminaries and their school systems and the religious administrative apparatus. By exploiting their role as holders of the balance of political power, they have managed to obtain a legislation that guarantees their monopoly on the country's religious affairs and a considerable number of economic advantages for their sector, all to the detriment of other Jewish religious sectors, such as the reformist and conservative sectors.

One important right-wing religious party in Israel, of a nationalist nature, is the National Religious Party, for whom the territories of "Greater Israel", including the territories occupied in 1967, are sacred and, therefore, cannot be handed over, the exercise of Israeli sovereignty over these territories being a divine obligation. Some of the leaders of this party have broken away to form an ultranationalist far-right party. For the most extremist of the colonists living permanently in the settlements in the Palestinian territories of the West Bank, who identify with these parties, authority does not lie with the State government of Israel, but with the divine laws.

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The ultra-Orthodox never accepted secular Zionism, the political movement that led to the creation of the State of Israel. One of the manifestations of their radicalism is the rejection of the general culture. The most radical elements even question the very existence of the State of Israel. According to them, the destiny of the Jewish people is determined by established divine laws, and therefore it cannot escape its historical destiny. This vision includes exile and redemption. Hence they are opposed to the State, inasmuch as only the Redeeming Messiah can re-establish it and, therefore, the existence of the State resulting from the action of man jeopardizes their messianic vision. Furthermore, small Orthodox groups, inhabitants of the State, refuse to recognise it.

It should be pointed out here that there is a split between the majority of society and that messianic Orthodox religious minority, for whom democratic laws mean little or nothing at all, and who try by any means (albeit without resorting to violence, except in a few isolated cases) to prevent the resumption of the peace process with the Palestinians.

2.4. Multiple identities

It is important to emphasise the existence of different identities. Nowadays, people have different identities, and some prevail over others depending on the circumstances. In the political sphere there are identities that are now acquiring great importance in the region; thus, in many Arab countries, the Arab identity is still pan-Arabism at a cultural level, but at a practical level nationality predominates: Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian, etc. Three points need to be made here:

• The recovery of pre-national identities. For example, many Iraqis say: "we are Sumerians". Many Iranians are discovering Zoroastrianism, the local religion that preceded Islam. And in Egypt, many are beginning to recall the Pharaonic era and others.

• Regional identity. In Saudi Arabia today, many say they are not Saudis, as they did 20 years ago. But with falling incomes, many people say: "No, I'm Hijazi", "I'm from Sharqiya", "I'm from Zarawat"; in Yemen, they say "I'm from Hadramout", etc.

- There are new identities: cybernetic, Islamist, imported from other cultures due to the influence of globalization.

We exaggerate when we say there is a new awareness of the *Umma*. Religion, whether it be Judaism, Christianity or Islam, obviously creates ties of solidarity with others, but nationality is the most important identity. This is still the case, but where will the influence of modernity on the peoples of the Middle East lead to? Islamism is also a modern ideology: the concept of the State is not the Caliphate, but instead the dictatorial Jacobin concept: we take power and impose, and we do away with detractors and we stop any protest against the regime. This is the concept applied by all these radical groups, al-Qaeda and all the rest. So we are dealing with very modern concepts in a very modern world, and with ideas taken from Communism, Socialism, etc.

In the Near East, this dualizing logic has found fertile terrain in a geopolitical context where the local and the regional are permanently interrelated, creating extremely complex situations due to the number of actors involved, all of them highly volatile and with an exceptional capacity to affect the international agenda. This is a region in which any analysis that does not take into account the relationship between the whole and the part and tries to explain everything through the cultural or religious identity of the actors involved is bound to be ineffective.

From the ideological point of view, the State of Israel finds itself at a difficult crossroads, where it needs to define itself in a balanced way between a political and national Israeli identity, and a Jewish ethnic and cultural identity.

3.   ECONOMIC AND LEGAL FACTORS

Competition sometimes turns violent. Many countries that have gone through civil wars will be told that they once lived together happily. Generally, this is true, but what does "once" mean? There was a time when the "others" lived on the other side of the mountain; we knew them, their accent was slightly different, their olives weren't as good as ours, their customs were rather odd, but basically, they didn't bother us because they lived on the other side of the mountain. Only when economic modernization gets under way and people find themselves in

the city does the relationship change completely, but why? Because now they are competing. If people simply meet, they may or may not like each other. Meeting someone does not lead irremediably to sympathy or to hostility. But meeting someone under competitive conditions increases the likelihood of the latter. Hostility can increase very quickly. If someone from a segmented society does not find the job they want, they won't think it is because there was someone better for the job, but because their opponent belongs to specific group that plays dirty.

In short, modernization, economic integration and competition increase segmentation. Ethnic awareness grows with modernization and leads to the politicization of ethnicity. Segmentation does not disappear with modernization. The Marxists, like the Liberals, wrongly predicted that industrialization, mass communication and education for all would weaken links with the Church and family ties. Neither the family nor God returned. They were always strong in fragmented societies in spite of the fact that many analysts closed their eyes and refused to see the social reality.

The Israeli legal system cannot be described by comparing it with other systems. It will only be understood in the context of Israel's complex political, social and cultural reality. The period following the creation of the State was characterized by a determination to fill the vacuums left by the previous governing powers: the principal effort was devoted to setting up a legal system that would order the relations between citizens and protect their rights, as well as ensure the maximum representation of individuals and groups.

Legal precedents play an important role, given that Israel does not have a written organic Constitution, which in turn is the result of a lack of agreement regarding a definitive vision of what the State should be. But above all, this is due to the deep division between the secular and Orthodox religious sectors, which makes it impossible to reach a consensus: because of the Orthodox sectors' aim to regulate social life in accordance with religious principles.

The lack of a written Constitution is one of the serious problems of Israeli society, and its major problem is, and will continue to be for a long time, the compatibility or incompatibility between religion and democracy.

The Christian European countries took centuries to find an answer to the dilemma of the relations between the State and religions. Jews (and Muslims) have yet to find the right answer. The division between the Jewish secular majority and the Orthodox minorities who are opposed to the democratic rules of play is, for the time being, difficult to resolve.

Attitudes to Israeli Arabs derive, of course, from the Jewish nature of the State of Israel. Mutual suspicion persists, and it takes many forms. In recent weeks we have witnessed attempts by the far right (including a party belonging to the ruling coalition) to punish dissidence with the principles of the Jewish State. Their controversial bills have been rejected by sectors of Israeli society who have branded them as racist. This is clearly a case of racist activism that we hope will be rejected by the majority of Israelis.

Previously idealised as a socialist and democratic country, Israel suffers from the same phenomenon that afflicts many countries: a growing social divide between the rich, who are getting richer, and those who live in poverty. 30% of children live in poverty. This economic imbalance is the result of the neo-conservative policies of recent right-wing governments. Israel is no longer the egalitarian society that its founders dreamed of.

V.   FRAGMENTATION AND ITS REGULATION THROUGHOUT HISTORY
      AND THE WORLD

1.   ETHNIC CLEANSING

Throughout history, segmentation has been dealt with in various ways.
One of the most complex was the attempt to separate the different
groups by creating independent States, or that which involved
homogenizing the existing States by force. Ethnic cleansing is not a 20th
century invention. It has a long and terrible history. One of the biggest
operations of this type was the expulsion of Protestants from Nantes
after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Ethnic or religious cleansing
was successful in some places, but in most cases it failed. Multiethnic or
multinational States were broken down into smaller entities that are
just as multiethnic or multiracial as their predecessors. This can be
compared with Russian dolls; you open one, and you find another similar
one inside. In short, if you carve up a multiethnic society into different
States, you will end up with multiethnic entities again.

2.   APARTHEID AND ETHNIC DEMOCRACY

Another frequent method of regulating inter-group relations in
segmented societies involves one group dominating the others. It might
work, as certain cases demonstrate. The Belgian sociologist Pierre
Vandenberghe labelled the Hindu caste system as "apartheid four
thousand years on". Obviously, this system can be maintained for a time,
but it won't be safe forever. There are more civilized forms of
domination. Some Israeli scientists talk about "ethnic democracy".
Everybody has the same political rights, but one group, the biggest,
determines the symbols of the State by majority, and excludes the
minorities from any participation in the decision-making process. Some
Israeli political experts say that this is not democracy. However, ethnic
democracy may be better for the dominated than a system of open
domination.

3.   HOMOGENIZATION AND ASSIMILATION

There is a variety of domination called assimilation. The biggest and
most important group invites members of other groups to join it.

They obtain equal status if they renounce any other identity. Assimilation can work if the country is wealthy and can afford to "blackmail" at least a reasonable number of minorities so that they agree to merge with the majority. An historic case in Europe is 19th century France. All the minorities adopted standard French and became part of mainstream French culture, and they did so because the advantages of "joining up" were huge. However, there are not many other successful cases, either because the biggest group was not generous enough, or because they didn't have much to offer.

4.   POWER SHARING

Another frequent form of regulating inter-group relations involves sharing power. This normally happens after wars, when the different groups have tried to defeat one other, but have not managed to do so. If it was impossible to eliminate the other groups, they had to coexist. Impasses after civil wars have resulted in the political systems of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, Switzerland, Lebanon, and now, it would seem, Northern Ireland. Let us take the case of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The Protestants, like the Catholics, considered that their duty was to impose their correct interpretation of the Christian faith. And in the name of faith they were committed to doing away with the others. And as it didn't work, they had to admit defeat.

The first peace treaty between Protestants and Catholics was concluded in 1555 in Augsburg. Both factions agreed to postpone the use of military force, since they expected the reunification of the faith. As we all know, we're still waiting. But the use of violence was not suspended because the will to eliminate the others disappeared, but because the mutual elimination effort had failed. The effort was renewed in the Thirty Years' War, which again led to a deadlock. Then power was shared for want of something better. In the same way, power sharing emerged everywhere when attempts to dominate failed and those who supported the conflict decided that it was better to take a piece of the cake than to carry on suffering while trying to take it all.

5.   DEPOLITICIZATION AND OPEN DEMOCRACY

Finally, there is another way of living together in peace in a segmented society: the depoliticization of an ethnic group in an open democracy.

This occurs in the traditional countries of immigration: United States, Austria and, to a certain extent, Canada. Non-ethnic open democracy is facilitated by the fact that people may come from different cultural strata, but they all have one thing in common: they are there of their own free will. The person who goes to the United States has made the decision to abandon at least part of their previous identity and become an American. On the contrary, in Northern Ireland there is nobody who is not either Protestant or Catholic. Nobody is prepared to stop being one thing or the other to be simply Northern Irish. For immigration countries it is easier to adopt a non-ethnic open democracy than it is for countries where ethnic groups have existed for generations.

However, there are also non-immigration countries that have organized their coexistence among segments by means of an open democracy. The most important case is that of India. This country has several religions, many languages and numerous ethnic groups. It has experienced conflicts between the segments but has managed to regulate them by means of an open democracy that allowed a considerable degree of cultural autonomy among its segments. India was very good at depoliticizing its various cultural identifiers as a result of the tremendous linguistic conflict that took place after it gained independence in 1947. Let us analyse what they did:

•   Firstly, they extended some of the country's borders in areas where there was more linguistic homogeneity, albeit without achieving the latter.

•   Secondly, they undertook generous exchanges for all the linguistic groups by offering them access to the courts in their own language, to the civil service in their own language, education in their own language, giving them maximum cultural autonomy. So at least there was no competition at school; competition was postponed until later, in the labour market, which considerably reduced competition. In all those cases in which people have tried to force assimilation, say, by manipulating the education system and by imposing a single official language, there have been problems; in Sri Lanka a terrible war occurred, and now the extent of its victory is difficult to predict.

6.   MINORÍTIES AND SYSTEMS OF DOMINANCE

If you happen to be the dominant majority, you can afford to do everything: establish an ethnic democracy or impose ethnic domination without any democracy. If you happen to be a minority with power, such as the Alawites in Syria or the Tutsis in Ruanda, be advised that you would do well to adopt the Jacobin ideology: we are a nation and there are no differences between us. The colonial powers invented ethnic differences and they should be completely ignored. By using this strategy, the dominant minority can only maintain its power through national unity. The toughest strategies that communities face arise when countries have more or less the same military force. If a group underestimates or overestimates its capabilities, conflict is inevitable. On the other hand, if its assessment is realistic, they may be able to share power and avoid a civil war. One of the most beautiful cases was that of Belgium. Although the two segments have never been very friendly since the creation of the State, not a single person has been killed in Belgium. If Belgian conflicts are tribal, they are cases of happy tribalism. What remains is the case of a non-dominant minority.

What can be done? The answer is obvious: if you can't beat the enemy, join them. Generally speaking, small minorities profess universal convictions. If you are a Christian in the Arab world, you are secular, and an Arab is a nationalist, except in Lebanon. If you are Jewish in any country in Europe or the world, you are in favour of secular nationalism. French Jews are the group most in favour of laicism as the ideology of the French Republic, but, of course, this is not the case of Jews in Israel, where they are not a dominated minority, but the majority. In general, minorities defined by a religious indicator tend to be secular, whereas with other ethnic indicators they are inclined towards nationalism. Both strategies offer them the best opportunities to achieve equality.

7.   SECULARISM AND LAICISM

So cultural autonomy, giving minorities maximum free expression in their own language and allowing them to freely exercise their religious beliefs can help to reduce the political importance, the political weight, of fragmentation. But the main issue is equality. In Germany, there was no secularization, but instead a constitutional change, a basic law, which

states that all the groups in all the regions of the country have to be equally represented in the federal administration.

This is not the case in the Lebanese system, where jobs are allocated to someone on the grounds of being Catholic, Orthodox, Shiite, etc. But there has to be a fundamental balance, and once it is achieved people are happy. To simplify the issue considerably, if we look at Switzerland, Belgium or Denmark, we see that they treat their minorities particularly well. In Belgium there is a small German-speaking minority of around 35,000 people, but they have their own schools, their own TV channels, their own radio station, a specific public administration for all kinds of agricultural and industrial affairs, and they are the quietest Belgian citizens. So, on the one hand, decentralization of decisions and, on the other, offering additional advantages to small groups, is not very costly but is, however, very useful.

Differences are part of a country's richness; identity is something that should be preserved, something that should be valued and make people feel secure. Laicism is the way in which reason tries to forge a synthesis out of any number of different positions as virtuously and effectively as possible. The religious value: if we do not want people to become economic models for profit, if we do not want the profits of some to legitimize a form of self-reference, we have to offer a dimension that transcends this spiral.

If the fundamental question is how to get people from different backgrounds to live together, then secularism is not a solution to the fundamental question, because it presupposes that if we want to put oranges, apples and pears in the same basket, they all have to be turned into bananas, and now there are no more differences. Secularism, therefore, could be a response to the problem, but it certainly isn't a satisfactory answer to the question of how to put all those varieties in the same basket, maintaining coexistence and without losing diversity.

The model of democracy in the West has many advantages, which have been proved over many decades, but there are also disadvantages, because democracy is not a system that establishes itself once and for all. Democracy is a reality which is built from day to day, and which is also constructed by analysing the defects and shortcomings we

encounter, and guaranteeing rights means constantly working on the political models we live in, so as to make the most of the advantages they can offer.

VI.   FRAGMENTATION AND ITS POLITICAL REGULATION IN THE MIDDLE
      EAST

When one looks at a map of the Middle East, one immediately perceives
the phenomenon of diversity: of ethnic groups, languages, religious
denominations, ideologies, cultural traditions, etc. Perhaps it might be
interesting to analyse how some of the political models that operate in
the region have tried to respond to this phenomenon:

•   Lebanese integration model. This model tries to integrate diversity
      into the structure of the State, so that everyone is represented and,
      by institutionalizing the differences, decisions are based on
      consensus. This has led to a certain degree of paralysis, since
      decision-making becomes impossible when the differences are so
      pronounced. But the response aims to be positive by integrating
      the differences into the model.

•   Israeli model. This model is at the opposite end of spectrum to the
      Lebanese model, in that it excludes differences -such as the Israeli
      Arab minority- and only attends to the Jewish majority, which is very
      diverse in terms of its origins, ideology, traditions, etc. The identity
      issue prevails here; in the previous model the key is integration,
      whereas here it is identity, and of course, we can't oppose integration
      or identity, but we can realise that if values are not integrated, we
      are going to encounter problems that are difficult to solve.

•   Theocratic-revolutionary model (Palestinian-Iranian). This is the model
      that Hamas is trying to implement and which, to a certain extent, the
      Iranian regime has already prefigured: a theocratic model of government,
      and a universal model, which brings all Muslims into the *Umma*.

•   The autocratic model (Syria or, until recently, Iraq -Ba'ath regime-),
      socialist and secular. The State is governed by a single individual or
      clan, which governs the destiny of the people as it pleases according
      to its interests or objectives. It may generate more internal stability,
      but respect for freedoms is not guaranteed.

•   Mixed (autocratic-democratic) model (Jordan). The monarchy
      possesses all powers, although elections have been held in recent

years, and it is the people who choose the parliament. It is a type of shared sovereignty, which goes from the King and the royal family to the people.

The keywords are integration, difference, theocracy, laicism. Each and every one of these models has tried to give a positive response to a part of the problem. Nobody has set out to give a negative response, although we can see the negative effects of some of these models.

Attitudes to the phenomenon of plurality in the Middle East can be divided into two broad categories. On the one hand, there are those who reject diversity or would like to make it disappear as a way of solving the problem, for example, through policies geared towards secularism, the weakening of family ties, the promotion of mixed marriages. This type of model, which belongs to the first category mentioned above, testifies to this tendency, which, by getting the wrong end of the stick, does not really offer a solution to the problem: how to manage diversity? An extreme example of this attitude is that of Turkey. When the country wanted to adopt a secular State they decided to get rid of the Armenians and the Greeks, and to reject the existence of the Kurds, and so Turkey lost the richness of its diversity. On the other hand, there are those who deal with the issue as it stands by asking themselves: instead of putting an end to diversity, how can I cope with it by offering an effective and satisfactory model?, because it is obvious that, for example, the Lebanese model has not been very successful, and neither has the Israeli model.

A special case study concerning management of fragmentation: *the limitations of the Israeli democratic model*

Israel's proportional electoral system has caused a compartmentalization of politics that makes it very difficult to establish homogeneous and stable governments. Its political system is very democratic, but it hinders the governability of the State. Legislation is drawn up by Parliament, the Knesset, which has considerable power in the absence of a formal Constitution. The Basic Laws which are passed in a gradual process and which, in short, will constitute the foundations of the Constitution (with a mechanism that prevents them from being easily amended) are considered insufficient.

The Israeli political system is a multi-party system, with certain dominant parties and, until quite recently, fairly stable coalition governments. The electoral mechanism adopted from the outset was that of proportional representation. Up until a few years ago, two major parties (one centre-left and the other centre-right) constituted the central axis of Israeli politics, mainly because they did not limit themselves to outlining a political path, but instead penetrated practically every sphere of social life, where they enjoyed considerable hegemony, accumulating economic assets and creating various social and cultural institutions. It could therefore be concluded that during the formative years of the State, they constituted the foundation on which society was built.

But the power of the major parties in Israel has been diluted, and they are currently undergoing a process of erosion. New sectorial forces have emerged, motivated by narrow ideologies or the interests of certain sectors of society. At the expense of the major parties, new parties emerged to represent religious and immigrant groups, according to their ethnic origin, and they are becoming a force to be reckoned with in elections. This has fragmented the Knesset, hindering its decision-making capacity.

The decline of the major political forces accelerated considerably following the adoption of a new electoral law that separated parliamentary elections from government leadership elections. Up until 1996, the political system was exclusively parliamentary and the government was formed on the basis of the support of a majority of the Knesset for the candidature of one of its members for the post of Prime Minister. Once the government was formed and approved by the Knesset, the supporting parliamentary factions formed part of the governing coalition.

The approved Israeli political system was therefore a cross between a European model parliamentary regime and a quasi-presidential regime. Here it was proved that the best is an enemy of the good. If partisan politics was until then the essence of the Israeli political system, the decision-making centre shifted, in practice, to an individual. This happened while the major parties, as we have already mentioned, were losing power to the benefit of the small religious and ethnic parties or

the parties that represent immigrant groups or certain political interests. When some of them came to hold the balance of political power, they were in a better position than before to constantly blackmail the incumbent Prime Minister. (The intention of those who proposed the change in the electoral system was precisely the opposite, that of reducing the "blackmailing" capacity of the small parties, on the assumption that their position as holders of the balance of political power would be undermined by losing their capacity to decide which party would form the government or who would head it).

That electoral system turned political bargaining into an uninterrupted bargaining in Israel. The result was contradictory: more power for the head of government at the expense of the Parliament, but, paradoxically, more vulnerability to extortion by the parties that held the balance of power. Consequently, the traditional system was restored a few years later. The decline of the political parties, the change in the electoral system, as well as the media revolution (the impact of television on Israeli political culture is extremely important), have profoundly affected Israeli democracy and could bring about further changes in the political life of the country in the not too distant future.

The major parties in Israel have grown weaker because they have lost the capacity to properly represent the wishes of the electorate, due to, among other reasons, the elimination of the overlap between the economic and social segment and the political party, and, of course, the impact of the conflict with the Palestinians. The result is the dwindling credibility of the political system, whose image has deteriorated considerably in recent years. The new parties reflect the changes that have been taking place in Israeli society. Representation of minorities is, for example, greater in the parties that have emerged in recent years: among Israeli Arabs, 14% of their representatives in the Knesset have been elected by recently created parties. 20% of the representatives of the group of immigrants from the countries of the former Soviet Union were elected in new parties. Among religious Jews, this figure reaches 40%.

In fact, the new Israeli parties have become a factor of change in the way various sectors of the population are represented, improving the

participation of those who did not consider themselves adequately represented, but considerably fragmenting political representation in Parliament.

The Israeli political system is increasingly fragmented. Nearly all the political groups now have some role or other in the political process. The political parties constitute a set of sectorial interests, tribal identities, personal interests and a miscellany of coalitions that reward factionalism and disharmony, instead of unity and the search for consensus. The frequent changes of government (once every two years on average) are nothing but a symptom of society's lack of confidence in its political class.

It is true that the Knesset represents the diversity of Israeli society and reflects the profound transformation it is undergoing. But in the present situation, sectorial interests "flourish", inasmuch as the government is constantly exposed to pressures and dictates, which condemns the Knesset to a chronic fragmentation. This sometimes creates a political vacuum that has to be filled by the Supreme Court of Justice, which is called upon to determine what is right or wrong (something which, incidentally, provokes angry reactions, especially from the extreme right-wing parties, giving rise to serious controversies).

The composition of ethnic representation has increased, which is transforming the Knesset into a social hotbed. When the two most important parties up until a few years ago, Labour and the rightist Likud, each controlled more than a third of the Knesset, they were a relatively moderating factor (in the current Knesset, if we add Kadima, the party created shortly before the 2006 election, the three parties combined control just over 50%).

Israel has been witnessing a revolution in the world of mass communication media, with significant effects on politics. The impact of electronic communication media and the media in general on Israeli politics has been extremely important and has given rise to various phenomena, including what someone has defined as telepopulism, a model containing elements of traditional political populism. Some political leaders, in their eagerness to gain popular support, often kowtow to the lowest common denominator in their attempts to connect

directly with the masses, producing a situation in which symbols become more important than actual political actions.

Historically, the political parties in Israel that represent the Arabs have been in opposition, and although they are represented in the Knesset, it can be said that they have hardly ever had a real opportunity to participate in the country's decision-making process regarding both domestic and foreign affairs. Israel's Arab society can be divided into three main groups:

1.   Those who abstain from voting for various reasons, such as lack of confidence in the system, and even rejection of the State of Israel.

2.   Those who vote for the traditional Jewish parties or their Arab satellite parties.

3.   Those who vote for Arab parties.

Arabs are not proportionally represented in any Israeli State body. Only 12 of the 120 members of the Knesset are Arabs. If all the Arabs went to the polls, they would have a representation of 18 to 20 MPs. This minority's abstention and the Arab parties' inability to agree on a common programme mean that they are not represented in the Knesset according to their percentage of the country's population. They have particularly opposed the policy of different governments regarding the Palestinian question (except during the period immediately following the signing of the Oslo Declaration of Principles). The perceptions of a part of the Jewish population have so far prevented them from being accepted by the governing parties as full members of the coalition governments.

Three main forces have established themselves in Israel's Arab electorate:

1.   The left-wing secular sector (37%), which supports the establishment of a Palestinian State alongside Israel and demands that Israel renounce its Jewish-Zionist status and become a State "of all its citizens". This sector has liberal points of view on issues such as religion or the status of women.

2.   The religious-traditionalist sector, comprising a majority of Islamists. They are opposed to liberal measures and reject the political and religious *modus vivendi*. They constitute approximately a quarter of the Arab population. It should be pointed out here that the Islamic movement has developed considerably in recent years and become an increasingly significant force among the Israeli Arab population, one which is diametrically opposed to the traditional Arab political parties. Historically, the Islamic movement in Israel, as well as the fundamentalist Hamas movement in Palestine, have fed on the same ideological sources, e.g. the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, although it is worth pointing out that the Islamic movement in Israel has expressed its opposition to the use of violence.

3.   The sector comprising those who vote for Jewish parties in the belief that a direct participation in these parties will better serve their interests. In this way, they feel they can participate, albeit indirectly, in decision-making processes.

So far, Israeli Arabs have been unable to convert their political power into achievements, not having managed, as mentioned earlier, to penetrate the decision-making centres. Therefore, their representation is fairly limited. The Jewish nature of the State has caused a marginalization that has limited their influence. The Law guarantees them everything on paper, but in practice there remains much to be done to put them on the same level as the Jewish majority of the population. The process of incorporating the Arab minority and granting them adequate representation is extremely slow. The barriers to equality between Jews and Arabs are high. In fact, Arab members of parliament in Israel have yet to ascend higher than the post of deputy minister in Labour governments. The previous centre-left government had a Muslim Arab minister (Labour Party representative in the Knesset).

The Russian population in Israel feels alienated from the left-wing parties after its miserable experience under the Communist regime and having been exposed to intense anti-Semitism in their countries of origin. They show distrust towards the Arabs and are exposed to the nationalist rhetoric of the Israeli Right.

VII. FRAGMENTATION AND CONFLICT, PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

PALESTINE

The second stage of the creation of Palestine took place in 1948, when the State of Israel was announced. The establishment of Israel in 1948 as the Jewish State resulted in the refugee question. We began to label the different groups of Palestinians. First we had the Arabs of '48, the West Bank Palestinians, under Jordanian rule, the Gaza Palestinians, under Egyptian control, the refugees in the West Bank, the refugees in Gaza and the refugees in neighbouring Arab countries. All these groups began to have different interests based on their own problems. The refugees from neighbouring Arab countries wanted to return to their former homes, whereas the Arabs of '48 discussed with Israel their rights of existence and survival under the rules and regulations of the Israeli government. Furthermore, the establishment of the State of Israel gave rise to different political and religious rivals such as Fatah, the Maronites and the Druzes, who fought against the various colonial powers in Palestine and Lebanon.

The third stage ended up fragmenting the Palestinians even more: the 1967 War. This conflict led to the displacement and disintegration of Palestinian families and to further categorization; Arabs of '48, West Bank Palestinians, Gaza Palestinians, refugees in the West Bank, refugees in Gaza, refugees in neighbouring Arab countries, refugees of '67 and refugees of '48. This meant new challenges for each group to deal with.

The most significant fragmentation came with the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. The agreement had different levels of impact on Palestinian fragmentation. Its content was the first blow. The West Bank was to be divided into areas A, B and C. Israel would have to build a road to link it with Gaza, something which it never did, and now the West Bank Palestinians are not allowed to enter the area. The agreement also resulted in the division of Jerusalem into East and West Jerusalem.

It also had consequences on Palestine's internal affairs. Edward Said once said: "The Oslo Accords affected Palestinian moral unity". They

demoralized people. The agreement gave credence to the idea that the national struggle should be rewarded by granting power and position to people who might or might not be prepared for the post. The consequence was corruption in the Palestinian government. The idea of establishing the Authority in order to obtain State status was promoted. People were persuaded that they should accept it in order to become a State. It divided Palestinians all over the world. They began to feel that their sacrifice had been in vain, and frustration spread throughout the Palestinian community.

In fact, since the Oslo Accords, the number of settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem has increased considerably, as has the number of checkpoints. According to a recent OCHA report, more than 600 physical barriers have been imposed by Israel against the Palestinians.

The fifth stage leading to fragmentation was the construction of the Wall in 2002. The wall divided the towns of the West Bank into ghettos. Between 2000 and 2007, confiscation of land increased by 31%; this land was confiscated to build roads for the exclusive use of colonists, to build settlements and to erect the wall. 85% of the land on which it was built belonged to Palestinians. Israel did not buy the land and did not ask Palestine for permission to build on it.

According to a very recent OCHA report, which was published a few weeks ago in the local press and posted on the Office's website, if the wall surrounding most of the city of Bethlehem is completed, 28,000 Palestinians will be displaced and will have very limited access to the city. The Bethlehem district covers an area of 660 km^2; 66% constitutes area C (under the exclusive authority of Israel) and only 7.5% corresponds to area A (exclusive authority of the PNA, responsible for civil matters and security). There are 86,000 Israelis living in 19 settlements and 16 Jewish enclaves around Bethlehem. According to the same report, Israel intends to add 10% more of the Bethlehem District to Jerusalem. Bethlehem is surrounded by settlements on all sides, but Israel aims to establish another one.

The final stage of fragmentation is the Fatah vs. Hamas conflict. An important point that should not be forgotten is that this conflict did not start in 2006; its origin dates back many years.

ISRAEL

The greatest difficulty that Israel has had to face is the situation of conflict in which the State came into being and which was not the most appropriate for the purpose of organizing itself democratically. It is, moreover, a democratic State immersed in an absolutist world. Decades of war with neighbouring countries: each decade has brought its own war (1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, in the 1990s the first Intifada, and in 2000 the second, which lasted five years; and in 2006 the "Second Lebanon War").

The permanent situation of conflict between Israel and its neighbours has had a profound effect on as yet unconsolidated democracy with relatively unsettled structures and one of the most deficient electoral systems among the existing democratic systems. At first glance, the most surprising aspect of Israeli parliamentary democracy -with its parties, communication media and the existing freedom of expression- is, perhaps, its very existence.

The State of Israel has experienced, and is still experiencing, extremely tense political situations. The circumstances in which the Israelis live are more than enough to discourage the most optimistic among them. Perhaps Israel's most important achievement in more 60 years of independence has been to persevere as a sovereign State on the world map. In the light of the intense hostility it has had to cope with, its capacity to not only survive, but also develop, is an odyssey.

After 61 years of independence, Israel has neither managed to assure its citizens a normal life nor gained legitimacy in a region which is arguably the most volatile in the world. The occupation of Palestinian territories has created an increasingly unsustainable situation, and negotiations with the Palestinians continually run into the inflexible hostility of the extremists on both sides, which has given it the dubious honour of being one of the world's main producers of news. National security has dominated Israel's agenda since the day it came into existence. It has worked miracles in the desert, but is incapable of overcoming its most formidable challenge: resolving the conflict with its neighbours.

Israeli society is deeply divided over the issue of peace with its Arab neighbours, between left and right, between secularism and religion, between its constituent ethnic groups.

Israel is immersed in a political crisis at a time when security issues, such as the insoluble conflict with the Palestinians, the possibility of another war with Syria and/or with the Lebanese radical fundamentalist movement Hezbollah and, above all, the Iranian nuclear threat and its president's call for Israel to be wiped off the map, are a cause for serious concern. In view of this growing trend, nurtured largely by Iran, which exports both ideology and the means to spread it, many of the pragmatic Arab countries believe that they share a common interest with Israel in wanting to fight against these factors, which could destabilize their regimes.

The writer Amos Oz considers that Israelis are confused and disappointed because they have yet to achieve normality. Israel has had more Nobel Prize winners than the rest of the Middle Eastern countries put together, but Israelis would rather live in a normal country than carry on receiving such awards. But this will not happen until it achieves a lasting peace, which for the time being seems a long way off. The feeling of living under an existential threat has decreased, but it is still very much present.

The level of respect for human rights in Israel is lower than in European democracies, but considerably higher than in other Middle Eastern countries. It is evident that the principle of equality before the Law is not strictly adhered to in the case of the Arab minority, which currently constitutes one fifth of the country's population, but this discrimination manifests itself in practice rather than in the laws themselves, in that this minority does not enjoy equal treatment for reasons deriving from the conflict with its Arab neighbours.

VIII. OVERCOMING DIVISIONS

1.   SOME HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

There are some societies that have been severely segmented in the past, such as Austria before and after the civil war of 1934; the Netherlands with its strong religious ideology up until the 1960s; Germany, which was a slightly confessional country for 500 years, where being Protestant or Catholic largely determined whether you achieved your aims in life; or Alsace, where Protestants and Catholics, according to a renowned anthropologist, constituted two different nations until recently. But in all these countries or regions, segmentation has been reduced. What were the reasons?

•   The number of mixed marriages greatly increased. In Germany, up until the 1960s, marriages between Protestants and Catholics accounted for 5% of all marriages, but now the figure is around 35%. In the next generation there will be no Catholics or Protestants. The children will have to decide whether they want to be one or the other, something else, or nothing. Unfortunately, the number of those who don't want to be anything is increasing. Therefore, it can be said that mixed marriages and the decline in religious practice seem to go hand in hand to some extent. The future conflicts in these societies will not be the fault of religion. However, the main factor that eases the conflict is not the secularization of behaviour, but the disappearance of the previously existing link between denominative affiliation, on the one hand, and advantage or disadvantage, on the other.

•   In the second German Republic there is no Protestant domination as there was during the Bismarck Empire and even during the Weimar Republic. For the time being, a Catholic has the same opportunities as a Protestant. The same occurs in the Netherlands. The institutionalized pillars still exist with Catholics and Protestants, liberal and social-democrat schools, universities, radio stations and television channels, but sometimes it is difficult to detect the differences. Obviously, depoliticization is possible, and the main indicator is mixed marriage.

- Claude Levy-Strauss has said that social integration requires an "exchange of women". This is not a chauvinist statement. It simply means that, in order to achieve social integration, marriages must be two-way traffic. Unfortunately, there is no "two-way traffic" in the Middle East. Islam accepts marriage between a Muslim and a Christian or a Jew, but not vice versa. And the minority religions react in exactly the same way. If they don't want it, then neither do we. Lebanon, which used to be the country with the highest percentage of mixed marriages, has witnessed a decline in these marriages over the last 30 years, and now even between Sunnis and Shiites.

- When mentioning the lack of pragmatism in relations between Middle East States, it must be said that the same phenomenon existed for a long time in Europe. Our continent witnessed hegemony-seeking policies, from Napoleon to Hitler. For now we know that all the attempts to unify Europe under hegemony have failed, and that Europe has paid a high price for those attempts. Only since the end of the Second World War have the majority of people in nearly all the EU countries reached the conclusion that unification is not based on hegemony. Small, medium-size and large countries participate in the decision-making process. In contrast, the modern Middle East has experienced one hegemonic undertaking after another, and the inland States have ended up establishing the segmentation of societies and policies.

In the West we have this plurality at the heart of our societies, but after centuries of wars and continual confrontations, we have managed to live in relative peace and harmony, collaborating in the development of all countries, in spite of the fact that attempts at social segregation can still be seen, such as in the Basque Country, Northern Ireland or the Balkans.

2.   POLITICAL REFORMS: FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND RULE OF LAW

Experience tells us that when States begin to weaken and a common project that holds plural societies together starts to run out of steam, divisions arise. The centripetal force of the State –which tries to unite the diverse- comes up against the centrifugal force of those who put the emphasis on differences between people rather than on what unites us.

The first step towards peaceful coexistence in the Middle East involves everyone recognising the right to exist -and to exist in peace- of Palestinians and Israelis alike, without threats or coercions. Knowing the other and recognising the other are the bases in the Middle East for being able to continue towards that process which we hope will, one day, lead not only to peace, but also to justice.

It will be difficult to overcome fragmentation as long as it concerns collective identities rather than individual identities. When those collective identities tend to divide society into sealed compartments that don't communicate or mix with one other, or when ethnic or religious groups are divided over a long period of time, it is easier to fragment a society and more difficult to progress towards cohesion in order to face the future. If people are classified in a collective identity, this pigeonholing might make them feel satisfied, but it is also possible that they are actually limiting their own mentality and personal aspirations. On the other hand, if citizens are made subject to their personal freedom, each individual can forge their own identity, engage with others and act without restrictions. And in this way it might be easy to overcome fragmentation and improve coexistence. The future of the region cannot be conceived of without a return to the concept of personal freedom, of the freedom of the individual.

Respect for identity at a personal and national level requires a corresponding assumption of social responsibility. Justice will thus be regarded as the most important quality of life, which demands a mature and conscious globalization, both in the social sphere and in the political arena. Justice is either global or it is not justice. Protection of human rights is either universal or it is not real. The international dimension is a reality to which all countries are now committed, for so many reasons -economic, scientific, security-, ranging from the natural mobility of young people who travel to study, to businesspeople who travel for business reasons, or to members of the general public who travel for tourist and cultural reasons.

Furthermore, when religion -frequently Islam- is accused of being an obstacle to democracy, it is conveniently forgotten that rigorous reports carried out in the different countries of the region show that religion is not a relevant factor, whereas education is. Rights such as access to

education or to good vocational training, setting up one's own business or choosing a Government are not exclusive to Western -or the most prosperous- societies. It is the other way round: the prosperity of these societies is the result of the enjoyment of these rights. Equality between men and women and universal access to education, but also to freedom of expression; these are rights that must be developed and consolidated in the Middle East if we want prosperity for this region.

We need to focus everyone's attention on the issue of human rights, and to understand that justice is either global or it is not justice, and that attempts to ensure justice are no longer the preserve of individual countries or spheres. We need to develop a more open mentality in which we feel responsible for justice as a way of life, at a personal, national and international level. Such a mentality is particularly important for those engaged in political activity, parliamentary activity. In this respect, there is always someone who is wrong when we talk about the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man or the Declaration of the Universal Rights of Man: whether the universality applies to the fact of declaring them, or whether it means that the rights apply to everyone. The time has come for the whole world to develop an acute awareness of the fact that we either recognise the universal dimension of all the rights of all mankind, or destroy every kind of right, whether universal or individual, since the universality of human rights implies in itself a connection between one's own rights and those of others; they are indivisible and interrelated, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes clear.

Beyond the political sphere, the meaning of human rights in the West has prompted numerous organizations to work in the Middle East with genuine determination and, on occasions, in opposition to the colonialist policies that began to operate at the end of the Ottoman Empire era and which are still being implemented. These associations or NGOs, such as the FPSC and many others, have also contributed, besides their direct efforts in the educational, social and human spheres, an important aspect for dialogue between people, and a positive model of cooperation between East and West. In the atmosphere of confrontation and colonization between East and West, the presence of several of these entities demonstrates with sincere support that the "others", the West, are not enemies, that they are not all colonizers. Many of them are in

fact friends, and staunch defenders of human rights and the dignity of the individual, beyond nationalist or religious considerations.

In this process of advancing towards freedom, international cooperation is becoming an extremely important element for being able to offer the region's inhabitants options that allow them to improve their living situation. International cooperation must promote those fundamental rights if it wants to achieve effective results. The Regional Government of Madrid's recently approved General Development Cooperation Plan for 2009-2012 is based on the virtuous circle in which the expansion of freedom creates the necessary conditions for fostering development and whose consequence is the reduction of poverty.

The work of international cooperation agents should focus on helping countries learn to have confidence in the capabilities of their own citizens.

It is worth stopping to consider politics and what it actually means. Foreign policy basically involves setting certain national or international objectives. But before talking about these objectives, the following point has to be made: politics is only possible if it has limits and if there are societies that limit power. If there are totalitarian regimes, there is no politics. There was no politics in National Socialist Germany, there was no politics under the Stalin regime, etc. Politics is, above all, about putting limits on power. What are these limits? The limit of politics has to be freedom and the dignity of the individual, and that is universal.

In modern society, the term "Rule of Law" refers to something that is not unique to any particular culture, or to any particular civilization. Furthermore, as an aside, I don't think the word "civilization" admits the plural. There is one civilization, which has different manifestations, but one cannot speak of "civilizations" in the plural, because civilization is what respects the universality of the dignity and freedom of each individual, of all individuals. And of groups, too, we could argue, but let's focus on the fundamental.

3.   POLITICAL REFORMS: GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY

It seems to me that there has been a fundamental change in the Middle East over the last eight years, which has to do with ideas. Ideas are very

important, and they also have consequences. And an idea that has changed over the last eight years is the Bush doctrine. The Bush doctrine, which can be interpreted in many ways, said something fundamental that has not been remembered: that our security and our freedom depend on freedom and democracy abroad. It might have been applied badly, many stupid mistakes may have been made, and many tragedies may have occurred, but that fundamental idea, established in a speech before the US Congress, is a basic idea that we have all assimilated, whether we are conservatives, Trotskyists or whatever. Now it is a question of how we put it into practice.

The US response to the internationalization of the Middle East conflict, after 9/11, has been the democratization of the region, but this initiative, laudable at first sight, has not taken into account that it is not possible to base the peaceful coexistence of so many peoples and so many countries on a purely formal structure. Societies are not transformed from outside in, but vice versa. This American policy has failed, judging by what has happened in Iraq.

Democracy can only be established from within and by itself. It cannot be given by another and from outside; it is the result of a personal, national, shared conquest and, as we have already said, it is a continuous conquest.

Having assimilated this idea, it is clear that when we say democracy, we are making a simplification, because democracy is not just about elections. Democracy is democracy and freedom. There is no democracy if power is not limited; it is not about choosing a dictator, a tyrant. There is no democracy if the rights of individuals are not respected. In other words, there is no democracy if power is not exercised within the strict limits of respecting the rights and freedoms of individuals; and ultimately, democracy, freedom and prosperity. History has proved that where there have been prosperous societies, where wealth has been created, there has been, continuously, Rule of Law, guaranteed political freedoms and open societies.

Is this only for a few? No, it is for all. This can happen in the Middle East, without a doubt. What do we have to do? Acknowledge it and work towards it with our best intentions. This gist of President Obama's Cairo

speech does not seem to differ that much from what his predecessor said; that is, it seems he was talking about not being at war with Islam –which is obvious, because you can't be at war with a religion-, and that is what President Bush said the day after the 9/11 attacks when he visited a mosque; Obama has talked about a two-State solution, something his predecessor also mentioned in Congress; and he talks about specific issues such as the nuclear question, democracy, religious freedom and women's rights. This is called a freedom agenda for the region. I don't know whether these words will be enough in themselves to bring about what we want, the political goals we want for the region, but whatever is done must be guided by those principles: freedom and democracy for all individuals in the region.

Reform of the Israeli political system should be one of the main priorities of Israeli society. Although many, "sick and tired" of the terrible results of the electoral reform that took place a few years ago, are against the idea and take the "better the devil you know" view, in that they would rather maintain an imperfect system which nevertheless allows nearly all sectors to be represented. Political polarization is one of the matters pending in Israel's political system, which previously requires the resolution of the conflict with its neighbouring countries.

What differentiates the West's approach to this phenomenon from the way in which it is tackled in the Middle East? Perhaps the difference lies in the fact that the West has legal and democratic tools, i.e. forums where we can all express, in a civil manner, our differences of opinion, without undermining integrity and without having to resort to violence to protect our own interests or defend our rights. In other words, the State is still strong enough to tackle this problem and guarantee the rights of all its citizens, including the rights of those who don't want to be citizens.

One of the values that society in the Middle East cannot renounce, especially those who have to cope with situations of conflict on a daily basis, is hope. Hope for the real possibility of reaching a final, lasting and just solution that puts en end to years of war and violence. Those of us who live in the Middle East must make an effort not to abandon hope and to be optimistic, because there is no other way to remain there and carry on actively looking for solutions, without giving in and

resigning ourselves to the situation of confrontation that we live through from day to day. A better life is possible for us and for our children.

4.   ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

If people can have an area of economic, political and social freedom, development will take place naturally. There are excellent examples all over the world of this having happened. And when citizens -in this specific case, of the Middle East– can prosper by themselves, their countries will be able to face the future with hope and will achieve the necessary conditions that give rise to peaceful coexistence, based on freedom, equal access to opportunities and individual responsibility for building their future.

What should our political objectives for the Middle East be? There are two: stability and security, because we do not want our security to be in question or threatened by what happens there, and, secondly, development. Economic development, because it is in our interests and because we would prefer there to be prosperity and wealth throughout the world and for there not to be countries immersed in poverty.

Since 2004, Madrid has invested nearly three million Euros in various projects and programmes in the Middle East, two of them emergency projects in Lebanon and the others in the Palestinian Territories. The main objective of these projects has been to promote education and training as tools for developing the talent and the capacity to progress of the most disadvantaged.

Over the last year (2008-2009), for example, precisely with the collaboration of the FPSC, the Regional Government of Madrid has redeveloped a school where around 1,000 girls from Bethlehem are improving their academic education and 400 women from the district have acquired technical skills in textile production and in selling the products they make.

Similar projects have also been implemented in Gaza, aimed at economically disadvantaged Palestinian women, who have received vocational training courses. A catering college in Jerusalem has been fitted out with the necessary equipment and facilities, and the

corresponding grants have been provided to enable young Palestinians to take training courses there.

It seems that, as has been highlighted by the FPSC's work in the Middle East, supporting civil society and all the peaceful initiatives that fight for the common good, whatever the solution or solutions to this phenomenon may be, it/they must be reached by consensus and achieved through joint effort, so that all the external actors who work in the region (United States, European Union, United Nations) from different spheres (political, diplomatic, cooperation, etc.) push in the same direction and with a long-term approach.

The socialist and highly centralized Israeli economy of the early decades has been replaced by a liberal capitalist economy with less and less government intervention. The country is increasingly prosperous, but its future is rather more uncertain than that of its neighbouring countries. The State of Israel's economy has made remarkable progress, having reached an income per capita similar to that of developed European countries, just over 20,000 Euros. Israel occupies a place of honour in the field of high technology, and is second only to Japan in the registration of patents. Some of the Windows XP and NT systems were developed in Israeli laboratories. Bill Gates once said that Israel represents the acme of innovation.

Israel has the best universities and medical centres in the Middle East and is a world leader in irrigation technology, medical research and the development of alternative energy. The Israeli companies listed on NASDAQ currently occupy third place, behind the United States and Canada. Its cultural life is in the vanguard, with a film industry that attracts international attention. For several years up until the beginning of the global crisis that affects us all, the economy had an annual growth rate of 4%, higher than that of most developed Western countries.

5.   RELIGION AS PART OF THE SOLUTION AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Religious freedom and the values that emanate from the three monotheistic religions must be respected and protected. Religion is an essential element of public and individual life in the region, and therefore we cannot push it aside. These religious values and practices

are promoted by society, and also by its rulers; perhaps they see in them a way of maintaining public order when people have an adequate understanding of their beliefs. There are also outbreaks of extremism and deviations from religious conduct, supposedly under the umbrella of religion itself. Looking to the future, with a view to upholding our religious beliefs and contributing to the prosperity of our societies, what we need is a good religious education. The banishment of religion from the public arena, as has occurred in Europe, will not contribute to our development at all; we need the values it can give us in order to make progress in the future and in our own lives.

Pope Benedict XVI, during his recent visit to several Middle Eastern countries, spoke out against hatred and prejudices on numerous occasions, and called on Christians, Jews and Muslims to build bridges and thereby find the means for peaceful coexistence, and to overcome the tensions that have damaged the relations between them. The Pope pronounced himself against the walls that separate and the barriers and obstacles that oppose the sense of human fraternity that is present in all religions. His call for respect for religious freedom throughout the world stressed that religion should be an element of unity for mankind and never of division. That is why he reminded us of the obligation to "highlight the love that it is at the core of the three religions". Benedict XVI, speaking to journalists on his way to Amman, made a call for dialogue among the three monotheistic religions and, quoting from the Amman Message of 2004, said: "These noble initiatives have had good results for promoting an alliance of civilizations between the Western and Muslim worlds, thus contradicting the forecasts that consider violence and conflict inevitable".

After Benedict XVI's tour of the Middle East, nothing will be the same as before, and the dialogue among the three religions and among all the countries involved has received clear, strong and concrete support, sustained by the hope and commitment of all the region's inhabitants, as well as the work that the FPSC is doing through this seminar organized by the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies (CEMO) to promote peace in the Middle East and, from the Middle East, throughout the entire world.

Benedict XVI has spoken of the unifying value that the three great monotheistic religions have, and of the fact that at the core of religion

lies a message of love, that is, of solidarity, of unity, of mutual understanding, of mutual support. And that is also a great force that religion can offer. Religion lived as personal enrichment, represented in the public arena and also guaranteed by the State, but without this being able to become a cause of conflict.

The future of peace in the Middle East must count on the guarantee of the pact among the three religions with a completely secular approach, i.e. based on maximum personal responsibility, encouraging everyone to find the way to ensure the progress of future negotiations, based on the synthesis between rationality and religion.

In 2009, the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the Orient published its 10th Pastoral Letter on "Arab Christians Facing Today's Challenges", addressed to all Christians in the Middle East. The letter contains three chapters: the first presents the current situation in our Arab countries, the second the Christian reality of these countries, and the third a view of the future. Some of the elements of this outlook are the following:

•	Religion is a basic and necessary component of Middle East society. Hence the need for a genuine religious education that makes it clear that the essence of any religion is the love of God and of all God's creatures. The criterion of genuinely religious behaviour is proper behaviour towards others; as Jesus said: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Mt 7:12). Religion should not be a barrier but a bridge between people. Up until today, religion based on a tribal concept and behaviour has been and still is a factor of separation, both between religions and between branches of the same religion.

•	Another important aspect in the sphere of religious education, especially in a situation of conflict such as the one that exists in the Middle East, is that religion cannot become an instrument of violence. Hence the need to distinguish, in all the religions of the region, between genuinely religious behaviour and extremist behaviour, which in God's name excludes or kills others.

•	In a situation of conflict, one has to be educated or educate oneself, in order to see through the other person's eyes. At the

same time, one must have a sense of justice, of how one's behaviour affects others, of whether one is an oppressor or oppressed. Forgiveness and reconciliation can only be founded on truth, on sincerity and on respect for the rights of others.

By finding common ground in matters of religion and beliefs, rifts can become bridges, we can come together thanks to a common belief in human values, and we can achieve open dialogue based on mutual respect and on building a freer society.

The solution to the Middle East's problems is therefore subject to a double complexity: that of the whole and the parts, on the one hand, and, on the other, that of the inextricable link between the political and the self-defining (singularly the religious). In his speech to the Muslim world in Cairo, President Obama tried to come to terms with this double vicious circle in which the future of the Middle East is trapped. Besides referring to the local and regional aspects that determine the solution to the Palestinian drama, the American president assumed that the way in which Muslims live and practice their religion must be accepted and respected by the West as an element of cultural identity compatible with all other cultures and religions, and not as an objective factor of incomprehension and confrontation. His lengthy disquisition in favour of this recognition was not always well received by the West, particularly by the champions of the most secular and laicist political discourse. Imbued with a religious culture such as America's, purer than Europe's, Obama tried to tackle the most difficult issue in the dialogue between the West and Islam: the definition of a mutual territory, shaped by shared values among which those values that can be derived from religious traditions are destined to play an essential role.

6.   THE PEACE PROCESS AND RESOLUTION OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is undoubtedly one of the biggest obstacles to the full integration of the Arab minority.

Resolving the conflict with the Palestinians and recognising the Israeli Arab minority as a national minority, as well as their right to a

proportional participation in State affairs, could qualitatively change the status of this important national-ethnic-religious minority.

Can it be said that human rights are reasonably respected in Israel? On the whole, yes, but it must also be acknowledged that more than a few violations have been recorded. Here it should also be stressed that we must distinguish between observance of human rights in Israel and in those territories under Israeli military occupation, where it leaves much to be desired. Human rights and military occupation are incompatible terms, and this situation will not find an adequate solution until there is a just and permanent solution to the conflict with the Palestinians. Israel cannot and must not carry on keeping under its control more than three million Palestinians, whose basic rights are not fully respected.

What needs to be done to prepare a solid path towards the process of negotiation and resolution? There are two essential elements: the first is trust, and the second is international pressure. The Palestinians do not trust the Israelis, and neither do the Syrians and the Lebanese, and they have very good reasons for not trusting them. And the Israelis do not trust the Palestinians, or the Syrians, or the Lebanese, and they too have very good reasons for not trusting them.

This is the Gordian knot that has to be cut, but it is a real problem, this lack of trust. The only thing that can resolve this lack of trust, barring unforeseeable events such as Sadat's journey to Jerusalem, is the international community. This is the unavoidable role that the international community has to play: giving the parties sufficient assurance that any agreement is going to be fulfilled. The other role that the international community has to play, and the experience of many shows that without this role the parties are not capable, is that of exerting pressure; this is the second essential element.

We must always try to find ways that allow us to overcome or put an end to the fragmentation in Palestine. Firstly, the occupation has to stop, and for this to happen, justice must reign and the Palestinians should enjoy their rights to move freely and possess land and water, etc. Secondly, the Palestinian government must put the interests of the people before anything else. We need the new rulers of the people to be

well prepared, honest and capable of leading the Palestinians towards peace and justice. We need freedom of the press, Rule of Law and transparency.

The resumption of negotiations with the Palestinians will be the result of a process of maturation of leaders and political parties which, sooner or later, will bear fruit in Israel (and among Palestinians, I would add). This process, which will sooner or later bring further territorial concessions, will surely create new situations that will probably lead to a realignment of political forces in the not too distant future, thus giving rise to a new political reality, for the time being unforeseeable.

The majority of Israelis and the majority of Palestinians support the two-State solution for two peoples living together peacefully, which will be the focal point of the negotiations with the Palestinians, when they resume, of course. The occupied territories are not regarded as essential components of the Israeli identity, and the vast majority, who consider the situation in the occupied territories unsustainable, are willing to make concessions and abandon most of the West Bank. Gaza, as you will recall, has already been evacuated. The majority of Israeli citizens, according to the writer David Grossman, have already understood what needs to be done to put an end to the conflict: divide up the land in order to establish a Palestinian State.

The Arab population of Israel is discriminated against and deprived in all aspects of everyday life. The commonly accepted opinion is that after regional peace, the situation of Israeli Arabs will improve considerably and equality will be achieved for the minorities in Israel.

Israel can no longer control its foreign policy without a peace initiative with its Arab neighbours (the Saudi Plan of 2002) and with America's express initiative of a two-State solution.

President Obama has declared that he is interested in pacifying the Arab world. This will only be possible through a peace process in the Middle East and, moreover, the process cannot be conducted from afar, as the Bush Administration tried to do, but through the appointment of envoys and clear and direct debate. It is necessary to try to reach an agreement that deals with the following issues:

- Peace between Israel and Palestine.

- Peace between Israel and Syria.

- Peace between Israel and Lebanon.

- Peace between Israel and Hamas.

This strategy depends on the Arabs' initiative and the Arab States' promise to establish diplomatic relations with Israel: a regional peace. A plan with two main goals must be carried out:

- The beginning of a new peace that includes a permanent agreement between Palestinians and Israelis, as well as between Syrians and Israelis.

- The creation of a contractual link between the resolution of the Israel/Palestine conflict and the normalization of Israel's relations with the Arab world. (This initiative must be based on the initiative of the Arab States).

Israel's foreign policy as regards the Palestinians must be based on the following:

- Improvement of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank in preparation for its creation as a State.

- Fulfilment of the principle of two States for two peoples.

- Commitment to the existing agreements, such as the Camp David Accords of 1979, The Madrid Process, the Oslo Accords or the Road Map. All these agreements deal with how to bring the Israeli occupation in Palestine to an end and how to meet Israel's security needs.

- Blocking the construction of new settlements until the subject of borders is discussed.

The initiative of the Arab League offers the normalization of Israel's relations with all the Arab States and the termination of the Arab-Israeli

conflict. In exchange, Israel would have to accept a return to the 1967 borders, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, and reach a solution and an agreement on the issue of Palestinian refugees. Israel cannot adopt an indifferent and apathetic attitude to this initiative in view of the United States' new impetus and energy and, especially, the new reality that is currently taking shape: the reinforcement of Hezbollah and Hamas, and the Iranian threat.

It is necessary to design a new policy after the largely unsuccessful Annapolis Agreements. A new and more relevant strategy needs to be devised with clearly defined goals and schedules, bearing in mind the following points:

- Acceptance of the Arab Peace Plan for the negotiation. This initiative constitutes closer links to foster peaceful relations between Israel and the Arab world, and provides a permanent solution for the Palestine and Syria question.

- A new American/international peace to be based on the Arab Peace Plan, and which will benefit from broad international support.

- Reaching a permanent solution as opposed to an interim agreement: experience shows us that interim agreements as a stepping stone to permanent agreements fail. Therefore, we need to achieve a permanent agreement, such as the Israel-Egypt and Israel-Jordan agreements. These examples prove that such agreements are possible and that they have put an end to the conflicts and ten years of wars.

- Establishing a regional peace treaty: combining all the aforementioned factors so that Israel can be indulgent with Palestine and reach a permanent agreement, as established in Oslo and Annapolis, and not in accordance with the Road Map, which was based on establishing a Palestinian State with temporary borders.

If we need to have peace, justice must come first, and justice means that both parties are treated equally, but in order to be treated equally, both parties must believe in themselves. As far as the Palestinians are

concerned, they must have confidence in their capacity to achieve recognition of their unobserved rights. At present, Palestinian lack self-confidence, they cannot ensure their rights, or achieve their State, or whatever one wishes to call it.

It is surprising that so much emphasis is placed on the fact that the Israeli Right finds it very difficult to reach an understanding with the Palestinians, given that the previous understanding with the Arabs was reached precisely by a right-wing government led by Menachem Begin, when the Camp David Accords resulted in Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. There are those of us who think that only a strong government can reach a more stable peace agreement with the Palestinians. Furthermore, when it is has been insistently argued that perhaps the Palestinians are still not mature enough to reach a definitive peace agreement with Israel, I also wonder whether it is the Israelis, the State of Israel, Israel's leaders, and not Israeli society, who are not mature enough to accept a definitive peace agreement with the Palestinians, inasmuch as Israel puts security before peace, without thinking that peace is what could actually provide that security.

The counter-argument is that the peace signing between Egypt and Israel in 1978 cannot be compared with the peace signing between Israel and Palestine. Firstly, what happened in 1978 at Camp David was part of a strategy. Egypt was the regional power at that time, so it was important for Israel to sign a peace agreement with Egypt in order to ensure one of its borders, since there were many problems with Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Another point is that was no problem with refugees, or water, or settlement, or the status of Jerusalem, to be negotiated with Egypt. But with Palestine there are many complex issues that Israel and Palestine need to negotiate and resolve in a fair and reasonable manner.

There are those who see things from a radically different point of view: the conflict is never going to be resolved, because we hate each other and have always hated each other; our goals are incompatible and always will be. This attitude is not much use at all. There are many people who think that the Middle East is a special case and that there will never be any kind of solution. On the other hand, there are also some of us who think that it is absolutely soluble, and that what is lacking is political will. The problems are as normal as in any other part

of world, and if they can be resolved in other parts of the world, why can't they be resolved in the Middle East, too?

Countless texts testify to the possibility of a solution, and these texts are not written by academics who reach an ideal solution, but by people who have negotiated the latest solutions to these problems: the Clinton Parameters, the Taba Talks (which failed to yield an agreement), the Mitchell Report, Oslo I, Oslo II, the Geneva Initiative, the Arab Peace Initiative, etc. There are numerous codified texts containing the principles, and even details of how complex issues could be resolved, such as: Jerusalem, refugees, borders, water, security, etc. We also have Golan, or Southern Lebanon. These are complex questions, but no more complex than others that have been resolved.

Is the question of a future regional peace a utopia or a reality? Is there hope this time, or only disappointment? The reality is fraught with difficulties, and the challenges are numerous. President Obama, unlike President Bush, has made it clear that he is happy to continue with the Annapolis Process or with any other positive process. On the other hand, he has done nothing to obstruct processes that seem negative or unproductive (such as the demarcation of borders). It is important to emphasise that President Obama currently enjoys great support, thanks to which he can afford to undertake drastic processes that President Bush avoided during his eight years in office. This is the reality, and not a utopia, that will influence the progress of proceedings and prevent deadlocks. On the one hand, the US President puts emphasis on the responsibility of the United States and Israel and the strong bond between them and, on the other, makes it very clear that he intends to work actively and rapidly towards a two-State solution for two peoples.

7.   A POSITIVE NOTE: THE CHARM OF THE DIFFERENT

Fragmented societies are not without their charm. In the majority of the cases I have studied, from Lebanon to Indonesia or South Africa, people are perfectly willing to live with others. They even enjoy their differences, not to extent of wanting to marry each other, but they want to have the "others" nearby and annoy them every so often. Of course, each segment wants to have more advantages than the other, but they all think that homogeneous societies are boring.

My wife was born in Alexandria and came to Europe when she was 16 years old. She said: "I thought Europe was a big Alexandria". No, France is too French and Germany is too German, and this is too boring. In short: the pleasure of diversity exists in many of these segmented societies. So the best advice I could give is: don't worry about your society not being like French or German society. Homogeneity has come to European countries at a very high price, whereas in Lebanon, for example, communities have never tried to eliminate one another. There have been problems, but there has never been a serious attempt at genocide.

Ethnic cleansing in Europe has been considerably bloodier than any conflict between Islam and Christianity. Huntington is completely wrong. Forms of coexistence are possible and can be enjoyed.

IX.   THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

1.   DECISIVE EXTERNAL ACTORS: THE EUROPEAN AND THE UNITED
     STATES. A CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

The US or the EU, or the major powers, act out of necessity. One of the
things that Obama has said in all his speeches since he arrived at the
White House is that he wants to tackle the Middle East question even if
the context is difficult and he has many domestic problems, because it
is in his country's interest to do so. Therefore, it is not just a policy of
acting as a world power. In the American public opinion there is a
growing awareness of the fact that the lack of peace in the Middle East,
the lack of more stable and positive relationship with the Arab world
and the Muslim world, could have devastating effects for the country's
safety, and this is a feeling that has spread, logically, ever since 9/11.

What can be done from outside? Neither Europe nor the United States
has much room for manoeuvre; we will be able to help in the negotiation
process if the local actors want us to. Human Rights principles can be
maintained; all the military forces and terrorist groups should be
criticised for their infringements of the laws of war. In the Second
Lebanon War of 2006, in the Gaza war of 2009, all of them committed
crimes, violations of the rights of civilians, women and children, and this
must be stated very clearly. We are willing to negotiate and we have to
do it. The Barcelona Process serves as a reminder that they are our
neighbours and, therefore, we have to apply pressure, negotiate, albeit
without harbouring high hopes.

In the EU, this perception of our interest in resolving the problems of the
Middle East is not so clear, which is why there is no clearly defined policy
in the European Union. In recent years, however, the awareness of the
fact that it is also in Europe's interests to resolve this situation has grown
in the EU, and even in the countries of Central and Northern Europe,
which have so much proximity to the Mediterranean region, not only
because of the terrorist phenomenon, of course, but also, and above all,
due to the migration phenomenon and the fact Europe is now home to
14 or 15 million Muslims. Therefore, any destabilization or complication
immediately has a certain impact within Europe. This is what gave rise
to the Barcelona Process.

The Barcelona Process was partly a Spanish idea, promoted by Felipe González, but in which Helmut Kohl played a very important role. Why did Germany commit itself to this process, which it would also have to finance, to a large extent, as the greater financer of European politics? Well, because there was an awareness of the fact that the Mediterranean is a factor, an important dimension of European politics as a whole, and not only of the countries of Southern Europe. The good thing is that this awareness of Europe's interest is increasing, and this is what makes people commit themselves and provide resources, political will.

There is a certain window of opportunity for Europe and the United States to collaborate in finding a solution to the region's problems. And this has been one of the weaknesses of the Barcelona Process, namely, that it has been carried out behind the back of American politics, even at the outset, and then, of course, during the Bush Administration, when it emerged as a multilateral process at odds with Bush's worldview. The governments of all the countries in the Euro-Mediterranean area feel that they should contribute to an American-European collaboration in order to solve the problems of this area. We cannot be very optimistic, not only because of the situation in the area, but also because of the situation within Europe. Europe has many internal problems and we do not know whether it will have sufficient energy to develop an active policy in this sphere.

The international community, principally the European Union and the United States, must realise that this is a region in which any analysis that does not take into account the relationship between the whole and the parts and tries to explain everything in terms of isolated factors -cultural identity, religious affiliation of the actors involved-, without taking into account the overlapping of these aspects with many others, such as economic interests (hydrocarbons), military conflicts (Palestine-Israel), hegemonic competition for control of power in the region (the nuclear "race"), etc., is bound to be ineffective.

We are faced with a new scenario and a unique possibility that could reverse this fragmentation trend, which is real, and set in motion a process of consolidation of States and of a certain democratization of these States. One of the conditions to ensure its success or to open up a genuinely new perspective, and not to succumb to that highly negative

scenario, is that there must be a greater collaboration between the United States and Europe in the region, and there are possibilities for this collaboration now. Let us see whether Europe, the new Europe, the one that is going to emerge from the new Parliament, the new Commission, is capable of defining a single policy, which at present it does not have, and of playing the role of partner in America's new policy in the region.

Can this policy reverse the process of fragmentation we are witnessing in the region and which could destabilize the majority of the countries there? In view of the internal processes of the majority of the countries in the region, where resistance to change is the norm, and in view of the political disintegration phenomena that exist in Israel, Lebanon, Palestine and, above all, Iraq, it is difficult to be optimistic. We now know that dual approaches and ideological simplifications (e.g. the fall of Saddam Hussein will bring democracy and stability to the Middle East) lead nowhere. We know that another policy is necessary, but we still do not know whether this other policy is possible.

Does this policy stand a chance? Can the foreign policy of a power such as the United States be managed with subtlety and due regard for the complexity of the matter, combining the political with the religious, the local with the regional, or, on the contrary, are we doomed, by history and by realism, to a simplification, to a policy of "goodies and baddies", hoping, of course, that our side wins? This is the whole difference between the last two US administrations. It is not so much a question of using force or not (Obama is using it in Afghanistan and in the difficult pursuit of Al Qaeda) as an acceptance of the complexity of the causes, of the interrelation of the phenomena, which requires articulated, multilateral responses, where the political, the cultural and the military have their raison d'être, but cannot be excluded.

Gilles Kepel has underlined this approach in a text about the "fractures of the Levante", in which he defines the Middle East as an area of conflict where interdependencies are increasingly pronounced. His approach is interesting for the matter that concerns us, because it puts the emphasis on the political dimension of the Middle East crisis, which constitutes an invitation to avoid the fashionable culturalist amalgams, as seductive as they are sterile. The three interrelated crises that Kepel

mentions in this text are those that the new Obama Administration is trying to deal with in order to develop a new policy in the region based on multilateralism and inclusion:

- The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

- The confrontation between Iran and the Arabs (and between Shiites and Sunnis, with hydrocarbons and Iraq in the background).

- And finally, the increasingly critical situation that prevails in the Afpak region, with the Taliban at the gates of Kabul and a country like Pakistan, so important from the strategic point of view, profoundly destabilized by the conflict.

It is necessary to stress that in the Middle East there are many players who influence the political situation. As we know, the United States is the main player, and we cannot ignore the International Community, or the influence of Europe. The central question that concerns both Israelis and Palestinians is: are we dealing with a new initiative that will fail or stagnate at the end of the process, like all the previous initiatives, or is this the beginning of a new era?

As of today, Israelis and Palestinians are not capable of negotiating by themselves, and so the intervention of the international community is extremely important. Furthermore, the international community should exert pressure so that they reach an agreement. They will reach this agreement insofar as this pressure is exerted.

The danger that this type of foreign intervention entails is that the parties concerned, or at least some of them, may end up playing the role of spectators as their destiny unfolds, instead of the leading role that they need to play in the active search for their own progress.

As the popular saying goes, it takes two to tango. So if we want the Arabs –the Palestinians- to play a more active role, they must start to believe in themselves and convince themselves that they can work together, control their own interests and benefit from them. At the same time, the international community, the West, must start thinking that the priority is not only the security of Israel, but also that of the Arabs, the

neighbouring Arab countries, and the Palestinians. If both become a priority for the international community, then the Arabs and the State of Israel, together with the West, will be able to work together to achieve a just peace.

Since he was elected, President Barak Obama has sent out a clear message to the region's leaders, whereby he aims to be a key player, and he has expressed his intention to intervene immediately and intensely. Furthermore, Israel now has a new far-right Government which since being elected has clearly expressed its objection to the two-State solution for two peoples.

Rather than making progress in the Middle East, President Obama is more interested in gaining the support of the Arab leaders, which depends on taking real actions and not just on making declarations. The Obama Government is emphasising the need to freeze the construction of settlements as the best way to achieve satisfactory relations with the Arab world.

In relation to the changes in today's political reality, President Obama, as far as his foreign policy is concerned, is keen to provoke a drastic change. He believes that there is a clear need for and interest in the pragmatic Arab coalition. He also needs this coalition in order to withdraw from Iraq. This coalition will create a link only if the US Administration is capable of controlling it decisively for the benefit of the peace between Israel and Palestine, and for peace in Syria. This will only be achieved through an active American alliance. Therefore, the policy should be characterized by dialogue and an effort to avoid the deterioration of relations with Iran.

This past, which could be described as negative, seems to reached a turning point with Obama's speech in Cairo on July 4, 2009: "The relationship between Islam and the West includes centuries of coexistence and cooperation, but also conflict and religious wars. More recently, tension has been fed by colonialism that denied rights and opportunities to many Muslims, and a Cold War in which Muslim-majority countries were too often treated as proxies without regard to their own aspirations. Moreover, the sweeping change brought by modernity and globalization led many Muslims to view the West as hostile to the

traditions of Islam. This cycle of suspicion and discord must end […] I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect".

Although Obama spoke only on behalf of the United States, this is the first formal declaration that puts an end to the lengthy situation of military confrontation and dispute between East and West, Islam and Christianity, and it is the first formal call for a new beginning in East-West relations. Since the emergence of Islam, relations between East and West have been marked by military confrontation. In the first phase of the confrontation, i.e. up to the mid-18th century and the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, power was in the hands of the East. Then it shifted to the West and Western colonialism began in the Middle East under different forms, and still continues to this day.

President Obama's speech marks this past of confrontation in two senses: "The relationship between Islam and the West includes centuries of coexistence and cooperation, but also conflict and religious wars." And a new call: "This cycle of suspicion and discord must end […] I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect".

This is a new page of history. Obama's speech, very important, very clear, and the first of its kind to come out of the US in many years, its rhetoric undoubtedly the best since Kennedy, has opened the doors to hope. There have been restrained reactions of the "we'll see" variety, but it can certainly be said that this speech has marked the beginning of a new stage, but converting these good intentions into effective actions will depend on the will of all concerned.

In recent weeks, we have witnessed considerable political activity: President Barak Obama's meetings with Israeli leaders and with the Palestinians and leaders of the Arab world. The new Washington Administration is offering Israel this new opportunity. The idea of advancing on various fronts, while at the same time trying to reach a regional agreement, makes a lot of sense. It could also strengthen the Palestinians and help them with the decisions they will be forced to make.

Interesting expectations of change are perceived. After Obama's speech at Cairo University, we all perceive prospects for change, a moment of hope. But this is also a time of huge destructive accumulation in the region. In other words, if Obama fails, if we all fail, if the burning issues and conflicts are not resolved, we will be heading towards an irreversible situation in the Middle East. Pascal Boniface has just published a book in France called "Towards a Fourth World War?", because indeed if this fails, the accumulation of destructive capacity will be greater than ever. The fall of the Iraqi pole that served to offset Iranian power has led to an extremely complex situation in the region, hence the enormous significance of the Middle East question for the world agenda. There is a general awareness that failure to resolve the situation –or at least to reduce the tension- in a relatively short space of time could create a very serious situation with a widespread conflict involving all the parties concerned.

The need to tackle the whole and the parts at the same time explains the strategy chosen by President Obama, because first he makes a speech for all Muslims, a speech that stems from the realization that Bush's policy has created an unsustainable situation in ordinary Arab society, and that nothing is possible unless a certain level of credibility is restored, but whether or not he has achieved this is another matter. Second, he sets out a policy of confrontation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, a conventional strong power confrontation with the Taliban. Third, a negotiation with Iran, which in my opinion is fundamental, bearing in mind that Iran is an emerging power, of extreme importance in the region. Fourth, he visits Istanbul before going to El Cairo, and therefore he goes to see the other great emerging power in the Middle East, Turkey, which has increasing credibility and influence. Fifth, he tries to draw up a framework for relations between Israel and Palestine -two States-, says no to the policy of colonization and leaves a door open to Hamas under certain conditions, as interlocutor.

When we talk about the future, we take it for granted, and rightly so, that the future is not inevitable. In other words, there is no such thing as historical inevitability. This has happened throughout history. But sometimes in the Middle East, people tend to think that things are inevitable, but that is not true. The reverse of this temptation is Adamism, believing that the world is born anew every day, or with each

small political change. Something similar is happening now with Obama. The Obama era seems to have dawned; there are prophets of the new advent, something interstellar and galactic. But that is not true, either.

2.   CHALLENGES IN THE REGION

When the Israelis are eventually forced to draw permanent borders with their neighbours, they will be faced with serious decisions that will have a profound impact on the nature and international position of their country. In the internal battle for the future of Israel, political divisions, not to mention other types of rifts, will become even sharper. After more than sixty years, questions of existence and status already resolved by the majority of countries have yet to be resolved in Israel, such as the balance between the religious and secular sectors of society, and between the majority and the minorities.

In Israel there is no shortage of people who are convinced that severe challenges await the country in the not too distant future. The situation in Gaza, currently dominated by the radical fundamentalist movement Hamas, the Palestinian discord or the threat of Islamic terrorist organizations are a cause for great concern. But it is the nuclear arms race of a fanatical clerical regime, that of Iran, whose president declares, time and time again, that "Israel must be wiped off the map", that is causing most concern among the Israelis, who see in this regime a threat to their existence. Judging by public opinion polls, the topic that most concerns the Israelis and affects their mood is the Iranian threat.

The end of the conflict with the Palestinians and Israel's other Arab neighbours will surely allow Israeli society to try to move in the right direction and find a way out of the difficult situation it finds itself in, that of defining itself in a balanced way between an Israeli political and national identity and a Jewish ethnic and cultural identity. Israeli society must overcome internal tensions, such as the political polarization caused by the conflict with neighbouring countries, the secular-Orthodox confrontation, the status of the Israeli Arab minority, etc.

Freedom of expression and the legal system, bastion of citizens' rights, coexist with war and occupation. In the context of an imperfect democracy and the absence of a written Constitution, the situation of

conflict that the country is living through prevents the implementation of the rights of all its citizens. It must find a suitable alternative that considers both the aspirations to shape a secular society and those rooted in religion, as well as the interests of all the religious and ethnic minorities; an alternative that allows the majority to undertake a national solution while others can carry on living in accordance with their religious values. This is the great unresolved matter, and it will require a great deal of political vision to come up with such an alternative. But it will be extremely difficult to achieve this as long as the country remains immersed in an existential conflict with its neighbours.

There is no doubt that the Middle East is going through a period of rapid change:

•   The new Israeli Government is right-wing.

•   The strengthening of Hamas in Gaza and the weakening of Fatah in the West Bank.

•   The Lebanese elections in June, when we will see whether Hezbollah has more influence on the Lebanese Government.

•   The Iranian elections and Iran's nuclear armament.

•   The intervention of the Arab States, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Arab League.

•   Whether or not Syria takes the question of peace seriously.

The Lebanese elections on 7 June 2009 are also an element of hope; after all, the moderate coalition won. Hezbollah has acknowledged that it lost the election, in what we might call a democratic gesture; let us see what internal influence it could have in an always fragile Lebanon, always influenced by the surrounding environment, and always limited by its tribal, ethnic or religious structures.

The unresolved matter concerns the Palestinians achieving an internal unity that allows them to negotiate among themselves and then with the Israelis.

The political reality exposes the gaps between an American government that promises change and rearranges its regional policy and the current Israeli government. Today, in order to achieve small and specific changes, the new policy needs to be devised in relation to the situation in the region, an extreme right-wing government in Israel that does not believe in achieving peace with its neighbours, and a two-headed Palestinian government that does not seem to be able to reach a consensus.

In order for the solution, or more accurately the solutions, to be agreed by consensus, they must be characterized by a high level of popular participation:

•   At an information level. The conditions must be created to enable all the parties concerned (the countries with their own complexity and the communities within them that reflect the different souls of the country) to have as much shared information as possible, updated in real time.

•   At an organizational level. All the countries involved in this process and all their coexisting communities should be able to intervene in the decisions of any public management process, whether in relation to political or socioeconomic organizational models.

•   At an economic level. A clear and strong battle needs to be fought against different forms of poverty -material, social and cultural- so that the division that exists between the different social classes gradually disappears, thus gradually enhancing the meaning of life for the citizens of all the countries involved in the negotiations.

•   At a financial level. The need to create promotion and development opportunities that permit an all-round improvement of living conditions in each country, and which improve not only the quality of care, but also the standards of education and training in the different countries.

If these levels of participation are ensured, it will be possible for each and every country to rid itself of the fear of seeing their respective cultural identities, traditions, creeds and religious convictions diluted to the point of extinction.

X.   FINAL THOUGHTS

Does the Israeli democratic system allow the pluralist diversities of its society to join together? The answer is only partially affirmative, given the imperfections of the system. Nevertheless, it is expected to evolve and improve in the future. In its six decades of existence, the State of Israel has managed to guarantee its survival, but it has not managed to achieve peace with all its neighbours and thus ensure a normal life for its citizens.

As regards foreign intervention in the area, how can we manage conflicts in which, on the one hand, the parties involved seem incapable of finding a solution by themselves and therefore require external intervention, as in the case of Lebanon, without forgetting, on the other hand, that those interventions have prevented, so far, the peoples of the Middle East from playing an active role in their own destiny?

When we tackle the subject of fragmented societies, we only need to think of Europe. Let's take the case of Italy, which also has a history in which unity has been achieved by combining the very different political, cultural and historical realities that lay behind many parts of the country. Even today, when we confront various problems, we notice the problem of the South with its typical difficulties in relation to the problem of the North, for example. Central Italy has different problems, because it also has different histories, but all these parts form a single country, a country which in its way has a certain degree of fragmentation. Nevertheless, there is peace, and the difficulties are economic difficulties, or social difficulties, or difficulties in terms of economic outlook or prospects for industrial development, but at the end of the day it is a single country.

Why couldn't a satisfactory solution to the fragmentation of the Middle East countries be a form of single country, but with its federation, a kind of United States of Israel, for example, in which all the existing differences are accounted for? It could have autonomies, as occurs in Spain, but, at the same time, be a unified country. The case of Israel has been that of a country built on heavy immigration, but if there is no adequate demographic policy, Israel will experience something that could also probably happen in Italy: the inadequate domestic

demographic policies could provoke the arrival, via immigration channels, of other cultures, even other religions, which will gradually alter the social picture, the cultural picture, the traditions people live by. In short, why might a formula such as that of a federation of regions with a certain degree of autonomy, but also with an adequate level of integration, not be a profitable hypothesis?

Concepts to bear in mind when tackling the question that concerns us:

• Unity and difference. How to go from disintegration to integration?

• Laicism and faith in government action: the public space of religion. How to make a totally secular State compatible with a space capable of guaranteeing the right to religious freedom, among other human rights?

• Individual rights and international responsibility: towards a global justice. This is the highest value that needs to be globalized; we are globalizing the economy, but the first thing we need to globalize is justice.

What alternative policies should the West apply to the Middle East? In the light the new policy put forward by the American government during its visit to Cairo, what can Europe do?

How to curb the logic of sectarianism and the tribal mentality, the belief –and even the conviction- that it should be clan who looks after the security and rights of the group's members, and no the State?

What to say about the feeling of threat that troubles these groups, who feel that their own identity is endangered, and who sometimes face a choice between becoming assimilated or disappearing? This is where the big issue of integrating while maintaining identities arises.

Is there a way to guarantee the survival of these identities and restore their confidence? Why is the identity of the societies that make up these countries so bound up with what divides instead of what unites: ethnic origin, language, religious denomination, etc., in short, the logic of tribalism?

The fundamental question is simply: how to get to a situation in which people with different convictions and traditions can live and coexist in the same State? Here there is a clash between two ideals. One of them probably comes from Europe, namely, the Westphalia ideal of forming a unified society, as well as a unified State, or a homogeneous State. The other probably comes from the Middle East, namely, creating a State in which there is coexistence. It doesn't have to be unified, it doesn't have to be egalitarian, but coexistence is a greater value than homogeneity. In fact, homogeneity is slightly repulsive for the people of the Middle East. Therefore, these two ideals stand in contradiction to each other. In the history of the Middle East, these two ideals have been in confrontation in the formation of States. The States in the region are not very old.

Taking into consideration the formation of the State of Israel and the formation of the Lebanese State, the fundamental question that Zionists and Lebanese asked themselves at the beginning of the 20th century was: how to survive in the region with so many different religions and cultures, including the history of the two peoples?

The dilemma facing Lebanese Christians, which underlay the formation of the State, was whether to anchor themselves to Mount Lebanon, where there was a homogeneous Christian population, or whether to take a risk and create a "Greater Lebanon" that would be far more viable economically, but where they would definitely have to coexist with different religious groups, principally Sunnis and Shiites.

Something similar happened with the Zionist movement. The movement's first writings spoke about the integration of the whole of Syria, not exactly Palestine, and there would be a return to the region that would bring practical knowledge and capital, and they would integrate themselves into the societies, developing the geographically large region of Syria. The opposite theory upheld the creation of a model ghetto, according to which it would be a purely Jewish State. There is a parallel between these two questions in both countries. In Lebanon, it was the idea of a "Greater Lebanon" that gained ground; in Israel, the idea of an exclusively homogeneous model prevailed.

Obviously, neither model has proved successful, since Israel is not so homogeneous, it is not merely a Jewish State. And the Lebanese model

of coexistence has also had its problems. So we have a conflict of models, two different societies, which have chosen two opposing paths. If one of them is the right one, the other one must be wrong. This can be demonstrated by the way in which each studies the other. When we listen to Israeli historians talk about the Mount Lebanon that annexed the Bekaa and the coast, we sense that they are considering, to some extent, the possibility of Israel annexing the West Bank and Gaza; whether it is to make all parties one according to a two-nation State or the opposite, this is impossible. If Lebanon were viable, then they could do it, but Lebanon is not viable, so they should not follow this path. These are just some of the questions that the Lebanese and the Israelis have debated in their ongoing study of each other.

When I was a student I had the opportunity to receive classes from Mrs. Thatcher's adviser, who, addressing his students, explained to us that we could discuss theories about socialism and capitalism for ever, or look at what is actually happening and consider an experiment that was already taking place; indeed, at that time there were two societies separated by the Berlin Wall. He said to us: We have an experiment, two societies separated by a Wall: one is socialist, the other capitalist. Where would people go if the Wall came down? Do you think people in the Western world would be in a hurry to go and live in the Soviet bloc, or do you think it would be the other way round?

The same, albeit somewhat more complicated, question applies to the Middle East, since there is also an experiment. We have two societies that have followed two different paths, two diametrically opposed paths. The answer to this question is in the long term: which path is more viable?

The Israeli model is heading towards crisis because, demographically speaking, one wonders how it can exist with the Jewish character of the State being a problem. Of course, the incorporation of Diaspora Jews might be a solution. But even then it will be impossible to maintain this model.

In Lebanon there are also signs of crisis. If you talk to a Lebanese you realise that they don't know whether the system works, or whether it paralyses the functioning of the State, or creates conflict, or foreign

intervention, etc. But the latest elections have brought more optimistic results, because the voting patterns and the divisions in society have been almost entirely political, rather than stemming from tribal or familial tendencies.

Very important transformations are taking place in the Arab world, which have to do with modernity, and there is a process of individualization that cannot be underestimated in Arab societies, because people attach themselves to new identities, through, for example, modern communication media, which puts people in touch with new realities. Beneath the apparent homogeneity of the Arab world there is great diversity, especially among young people, and it is not that clear whether modernity only reinforces fragmentation. In any case, it creates new factors of fragmentation, new identities, or more complex identities, which is not only a European phenomenon, but also a phenomenon in Arab societies. To what extent does this factor come into play when imagining the future of Middle Eastern countries?

It is worth drawing attention to a frequently overlooked point that is extremely significant in the region, namely, the destructive effect that Henry Kissinger's *constructive ambiguity* has had on the Middle East. Constructive ambiguity has been responsible for the disaster of the UN Security Council's Resolution 242 and its double interpretation, the Oslo disaster, and many other things besides. There can be no constructive ambiguity when it comes to justice, and the same goes for truth. There might be two different truths, but not constructive ambiguity, and related to this are the double standards that President Obama referred to in his speech, the double standards that need to be done away with.

XI.   CONCLUSIONS

The new Middle East was fragmented from the outset, as has already been mentioned, and the pressure to keep it fragmented persisted and continues to persist. The internal factors of fragmentation obviously help the external pressure to keep the whole region fragmented instead of becoming a unit.

Some of the elements of fragmentation are: the confrontation between religious and secular people in the socio-political sphere, the secular political parties, the Muslim religious parties, the Christians -of different denominations- in search of their role in their Arab society and their contribution to the general evolution of the region, the ethnic-religious minorities, the foreign intervention of countries and international organizations, which has further accentuated group awareness and, on occasions, the enmities between them (the clearest example of the external struggle for control of the region being the build-up to the Crimean War), and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which has divided the Palestinian people (Hamas and al-Fatah) and is simply the most superficial reflection of deeper splits, affecting by extension the Arab world in general and the State of Israel, whose place and role in the region has yet to be defined.

Recently, during the Bush Administration, there was talk of remodelling the Middle East, which meant the creation of new geographic and ethnic borders; in other words, more fragmentation of what had already been fragmented after the First World War.

This is a key moment, there are new horizons, Obama has changed the direction of hitherto rigid foreign intervention. He did not talk about intervention in Cairo. The question is: how can we manage conflicts in which, on the one hand, the parties involved seem incapable of finding a solution by themselves and therefore require external intervention, as in the case of Lebanon, without forgetting, on the other hand, that those interventions have prevented, so far, the peoples of the Middle East from playing an active role in their own destiny?

The plurality and diversity of Middle Eastern societies raises the question of the need to integrate while maintaining identities; in other words,

the European-style homogenizing model based on the Westphalia principles is not a complete solution to the problem, because although it could stabilize, it would also suppress multiplicity and banish religions from public life, something unacceptable in this part of the world. So why couldn't a formula such as a federation of regions with a certain degree of autonomy, but also with an adequate level of integration, be a profitable hypothesis, a kind of United States or Switzerland for the countries of the region?

The search for models of coexistence requires rejecting Orientalist clichés that suggest that Middle Eastern societies are afflicted by a congenital disease in their very essence, or assuming that the Islamic Arab countries are incompatible with democracy, or that what is happening in the region is an epiphenomenon of a more widespread confrontation between cultures, a clash between East and West. The region's problems are as common and as soluble as any others in the world, but they require a firm political will and a more serious involvement of the international community. There are successful cases in which coexistence models have been applied to plural and multiethnic societies, such as that of India. The depoliticization of cultural indicators by eliminating the link between the indicator and its association with privilege or discrimination is one way of transforming closed societies into open societies and democracies, while a certain degree of decentralization and autonomous concessions (giving public space to the different languages, permitting the free exercise of religion, etc.) also played an important role there.

We hope that, thanks to the efforts of so much dialogue that had already begun between the Muslim Arab world and the West prior to Obama's speech, and with this latest call for sincere collaboration, that a new Middle East will emerge, in accordance with what its society wants and not what others want for them; a new, healthy, stable, united and independent Middle East in which the presence of the different ethnic-religious minorities, even though it is gradually diminishing as a result of emigration and the political and social instability of the region, can play a more efficient role.

XII.   APPENDIX I. Ethnic, religious and linguistic groups by countries

LEBANON

POPULATION:
4,125,247 (July 2010)
ETHNIC GROUPS:
Arabs 95%; Armenians 4%; others (Jews, Sirios, Kurdos, etc.) 1% Note: Many Lebanese Christians do not identify themselves as Arabs, but as descendants of the ancient Canaanites and prefer to be called Phoenicians.
RELIGIONS:
Muslims (Shiite and Sunni), Druzes, Ishmaelites, Alawis or Nusayris 59.7%; Christians (Catholic Maronite, Greek-Orthodox, Catholic Melchite, Armenian Orthodox, Catholic Syrian, Catholic Armenian, Syrian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Coptic, Protestant) 39%; others 1.3% Note: 17 recognised religious denominations.

LANGUAGES:

Arabic (official); French; English; Armenian; Kurdish, etc.

JORDAN

POPULATION:

6,407,085 (July 2010)

ETHNIC GROUPS:

Arabs 98%; Circassians 1%; Armenians 1%
Others: Nomadic Bedouins, Kurds, Druzes and Chechens.

RELIGIONS:

Sunni Muslims 92%; Christians (the majority Greek-Orthodox, but also Greek and Roman Catholic, Orthodox Syrian, Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Protestant denominations) 6%; others (small groups of Shiite Muslims and Druzes) 2%

LANGUAGES:

Arabic (official); English (widely understood among the middle and upper classes); Circassian; Armenian; Kurdish, etc.

SIRIA

POPULATION:

22,198,110 (July 2010)

ETHNIC GROUPS:

Arabs 90.3%; Kurds, Armenians, Circassians and others 9.7%

RELIGIONS:

Sunni Muslims 74%; Christians (various denominations) 10%; others (including Alawis, Druzes, and Jews -small communities in Damascus, Al Qamishli and Aleppo-) 16%

LANGUAGES:

Arabic (official); Kurdish; Armenian; Aramaic; Circassian (widely understood); French; English (only a small percentage).

ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

POPULATION:
7,353,985 (July 2010) Note: The population estimated here for the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights is currently under review.
ETHNIC GROUPS:
Jews 76.4% (born in Israel 67.1%, born in Europe/America 22.6%, born in Africa 5.9%, born in Asia 4.2%); non-Jews (mainly Arabs, but also Armenians, Circassians and other minorities) 23.6%
RELIGIONS:
Jews 76.4% (Haredi 5%, Orthodox 13%); Muslims 14.6%; Christians 2.1% (Greek-Catholic, Greek-Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian, Protestant/Christian Arabs 1.7%, of whom 0.4% are non-Arab); Druzes 1.6%; unspecified 3.9%
LANGUAGES:
Hebrew (official); Arabic (used officially for the Arab minority); Russian; Yiddish; Spanish; Ladino; Armenian; English (as the most commonly used foreign language), etc.

EGYPT

POPULATION:
80,471,869 (July 2010)
ETHNIC GROUPS:
Egyptians, Bedouins, Berbers, etc. 99.6%; others (Nubians, Armenians, Greeks and other Europeans, mainly Italians and French) 0.4%
RELIGIONS:
Muslims (mainly Sunni) 90%; Christians (Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Greek and Syrian Orthodox; Catholic: including Armenian, Chaldean, Greek, Melchite, Roman and Syrian; Evangelical Protestant denominations) 10% Others: Baha'i and a small Jewish community.
LANGUAGES:
Arabic (official); English and French –widely understood by the educated classes-; Nubian; Berber, etc.

IRAQ

POPULATION:
29,671,605 (July 2010)
ETHNIC GROUPS:
Arabs 75%-80%; Kurds 15%-20%; Turkmen 2%; Assyrians, Armenians 3.5%; Circassians and others 0.5% Note: The Iranians who were expelled from Iran in 1960, 1970 and 1980 are now returning in large numbers.
RELIGIONS:
Muslims 95% (Shiite 60%-65%, Sunni 32%-37%); Assyrians, Armenians, Chaldeans, Sabian Mandaeans (followers of John the Baptist) 3%; others (Kaka'is, Yarisans, Yezidis, etc.) 2%
LANGUAGES:
Arabic 73.5%; Kurdish (official in the Kurdish regions) 20.5%; Turkoman (Turkish dialect) 2%; Assyrian (Neo-Aramaic), Syriac and Armenian 3%; Mandaean Aramaic 0.5%; others (Luri, Persian, Circassian, etc.) 0.5%

IRAN

POPULATION:
67,037,517 (July 2010)
ETHNIC GROUPS:
Persian 51%; Azeri 24%; Gilaki and Mazandarani 8%; Kurds 7%; Arabs 3%; Lurs 2%; Baloch 2%; Turkmen 2%; others 1%
RELIGIONS:
Muslims 98% (Shiite 89%, Sunni 9%); others (including Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians and Baha'i) 2%
LANGUAGES:
Persian and Persian dialects 58%; Turkic and Turkic dialects 26%; Kurdish 9%; Luri 2%; Balochi 1%; Arabic 1%; Turkish 1%; others (Gilaki, Mazandarani, Qashqa'i, Raji, etc.) 2%

XIII. APPENDIX II. Schedule of the International Seminar "Middle East, fragmented societies, What future?"

TUESDAY 9TH JUNE

15.30 h. Welcome and greetings

H. E. Mr. Javier Fernández-Lasquetty. Counselor on Immigration and Development for the Madrid Autonomous Community.
Ms. Jumana Trad. Tribunes and Seminars of Casa Árabe-IEAM and member of CEMOFPSC Executive Committee.
Prof. Nadim Shehadi. Associate Fellow in the Middle East Program at Chatham House. Member of the Executive Committee CEMOFPSC.
Ms. Pilar Lara. President of Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.

15.50 h. 1st Session. Opening conference

H. E. Msgr. Michel Sabbah. Latin Patriarch Emeritus of Jerusalem. Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.
H. E. Mr. Samuel Hadas. Ambassador of Israel. Intercultural Development Advisor at the Peres Center for Peace. Former and first Ambassador of Israel in Spain and Former Ambassador to the Holy See.

Presents:
H. E. Mr. Pedro López Aguirrebengoa. Ambassador of Spain. Former and first Ambassador of Spain in Israel.

17.00 h. 2nd Session. The political reconfiguration of Middle East: Utopia or reality?

H. I. Ms. Nadia Hilou. Former member of the Israeli Parliament.

Moderator:
H. E. Mr. José María Ferré. Ambassador at large for the Relations with Foreign Islamic Communities and Organizations.

17.30 - 19.00 h. Debate on 1st and 2nd Session

21.00 h. Dinner-colloquium

Ms. Janice Smith. Assistant of the vice-president of the Heritage Foundation.

WEDNESDAY 10TH JUNE

H. E. Mr. Diego del Alcázar. President of the Instituto de Empresa and Vocento Group.

9.30 h. 3rd Session. Fragmented societies in Middle East, an irreversible fact?

Mr. Theodor Hanf. Research Professor Emeritus of sociology at the German Institute for International Educational Research (Frankfurt/Main).
Mr. Andreu Claret. Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation.

Moderator:
H. E. Mr. Giuseppe Cassini. Ambassador of the Italian Republic. Former Political advisor to the Italian forces UNIFIL PLUS.

10.00 h. Speakers:

Prof. Fred Halliday. ICREA Research Professor of the IBEI (Institut Barcelona D'Etudis Internacionals).
Ms. Dina Awwad. Public Relations and Development Officer at Bethlehem University.

Moderator:
H. E. Ms. Silvia Escobar. Ambassador at large for Human Rights.

11.30 h. Debate

11.50 h. 4th Session. The future and the alternative politics (policies)

H. I. Paola Binetti. Member of the Italian Parliament.
Mr. Diego de Ojeda. General Director of Casa Sefarad.

Moderator:
Mr. Rafael Puyol. President of IE Business School University.

12.30 h. Debate

13.00 h. Speakers:

Prof. Nadim Shehadi. Associate Fellow in the Middle East Program at Chatham House. Member of the Executive Committee CEMOFPSC.
H. E. Mr. Alberto Carnero. Spanish Diplomat and Director of International Affairs. FAES Foundation.
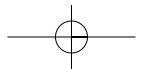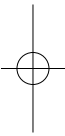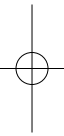
Moderator:
Ms. Jumana Trad. Tribunes and Seminars of Casa Árabe-IEAM and member of CEMOFPSC Executive Committee.

13.30 h. General debate and conclusions

14.15 h. Closing act and cocktail

Ms. Janice Smith. Assistant of the vice-president of the Heritage Foundation.
Ms. Pilar Lara. President of Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.

## XIV. APPENDIX III. List of participants in the Seminar

1. Ms. Pilar Lara. President of Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.
2. H. E. Mr. Javier Fernández-Lasquetty. Counselor on Immigration and Development for the Madrid Autonomous Community.
3. H. E. Mr. Diego del Alcázar. President of the Instituto de Empresa and Vocento Group.
4. H. E. Msgr. Mons. Michel Sabbah. Latin Patriarch Emeritus of Jerusalem. Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.
5. H. E. Mr. Samuel Hadas. Ambassador of Israel. Intercultural Development Advisor at the Peres Center for Peace. Former and first Ambassador of Israel in Spain and Former Ambassador to the Holy See.
6. H. E. Mr. Pedro López Aguirrebengoa. Ambassador of Spain. Former and first Ambassador of Spain in Israel.
7. H. E. Mr. Giuseppe Cassini. Ambassador of the Italian Republic. Former political advisor to the Italian forces UNIFIL PLUS.
8. H. E. Mr. Omar Azziman. Ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco.
9. H. E. Ms. Silvia Escobar. Ambassador at large for Human Rights.
10. H. E. Mr. José María Ferré de la Peña. Ambassador at large for the Relacions with Foreing Islamic Communities and Organizations.
11. H. E. Mr. Alberto Carnero. Spanish Diplomar and Director of International Affairs. FAES Foundation.
12. H. E. Mr. Eduardo Gutiérrez Saénz de Buruaga. Spanish Diplomat.
13. H. I. Ms. Paola Binetti. Member of the Italian Parliament.
14. H. I. Ms. Nadia Hilou. Former member of the Israeli Parliament.
15. H. I. Ms. Dña. Rawa Fakhohry. Chargé D'Affaires, Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.
16. H. I. Ms. Giuliana del Papa. First Secretary of the Ambassy of Italy.
17. H. I. Mr. Ahmed Tayia. Chargé d'Affaires of the Ambassy of Egypt.
18. H. I. Mr. François Bonet. First Counselor of the Embassy of France.
19. H. I. Mr. Alberto Ucelay. Deputy Director of the Department of Foreign Policy. Ministry of Foreign Affaires and Cooperation.
20. Mr. Rafael Puyol. President of IE Business School University.
21. Mr. Jacobo Israel Garzón. President of the Federation of the Jewish Communities of Spain.
22. Ms. Rosario Martín Gutiérrez de Cabiedes. President of the Board of Directors. Europa Press.

23. Mr. Pere Vilanova. Director of the Division Strategic Affaires and Security. Ministry of Defense.
24. Prof. Nadim Shehadi. Associate Fellow in the Middle East Program at Chatham House. Member of the Executive Committee CEMOFPSC.
25. Mr. Andreu Claret. Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation.
26. Mr. Diego de Ojeda. General Director of Casa Sefarad.
27. Ms. Janice Smith. Assistant of the vice-president of the Heritage Foundation.
28. Mr. Theodor Hanf. Research Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the German Institute for International Educational Research (Frankfurt/Main).
29. Prof. Fred Halliday. ICREA Research Professor of the IBEI (Institut Barcelona D'Etudis Internacionals).
30. Mr. Germinal Gil. Department of Middle East and Dialogue of Cultures. Fundación Tres Culturas del Mediterráneo.
31. Mr. Rafael Bustos García de Castro. Coordinator of area Magreb-Middle East. Observatorio de política exterior española Fundación Alternativas.
32. Mr. Héctor Cebolla Boado. Department of Sociology II (Estructura Social). Alternativas Foundation.
33. Mr. John Bell. Director of Projects Middle East and North of Africa, International Centre for Peace (CITPAX).
34. Ms. Jumana Trad. Tribunes and Seminars of Casa Árabe-IEAM and member of CEMOFPSC Executive Committee.
35. Ms. Dina Awwad. Public Relations and Development Officer at Bethlehem University.
36. Ms. Ana María Vega Gutiérrez. Professor of Ecclesiastical Law University of La Rioja.
37. Prof. Paloma Durán. Member of the Faculty of the Law School. Complutense University of Madrid.
38. Ms. María José Molina García. Law School. University centre of Rey Juan Carlos University.
39. Mr. Francisco Galvache. Professor of CEU San Pablo University.
40. Prof. Celia de Anca. Director of the Center for Diversity in Global Management of Instituto de Empresa (IE).
41. Ms. Cristina Manzano. Director of Foreign Policy Magazine.
42. Mr. Pedro González Martín. Former Director of International Affaires in the Public Broadcasting Media (RTVE).
43. Ms. María Fernández. Journalist. AC Comunicación.

44. Mr. Javier Gila. President of the Association AIDA, Aid, Exchange
     and Development.

FOUNDATION FOR THE SOCIAL PROMOTION OF CULTURE

45. Ms. Teresa María Pérez-Payán. Member of the Board of Foundation
     for the Social Promotion of Culture.
46. Ms. Mónica Bohigues. Vice-president of Advisory Committee of
     Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.
47. Mr. Juan Kindelán. Director. Foundation for the Social Promotion of
     Culture.
48. Ms. Macarena Cotelo. Member of the Board and Project Director of
     Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.
49. Mr. Félix Sánchez. Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.
50. Mr. Enric Roig. Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.
51. Ms. Blanca de Mesa. Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.
52. Ms. Carmen García. Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.
53. Mr. Jaime Armenteros. Foundation for the Social Promotion of
     Culture.
54. Ms. María Jesús Ruiz. Foundation for the Social Promotion of
     Culture.
55. Ms. Lucía García. Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.
56. Ms. Irene Pérez. Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.
57. Ms. María González Pardo. Foundation for the Social Promotion of
     Culture.
58. Mr. Roberto Aguado. Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.
59. Ms. Ana García. Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.
60. Mr. Antonio Arriero. Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture.
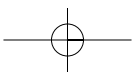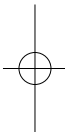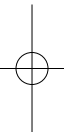
CENTRE FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES
OF THE FOUNDATION FOR THE SOCIAL PROMOTION OF CULTURE
(CEMOFPSC)

www.fundacionfpsc.org

The Centre for Middle Eastern Studies of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture (CEMOFPSC, Centro de Estudios de Oriente Medio de la Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura) was created in 2006 to promote research into and analysis of matters relating to the Middle East (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Egypt and Jordan), and with intention of contributing to a better understanding of the different cultures and peoples and, therefore, to peacebuilding.

Its international nature and multidisciplinary approach aim to facilitate reflection, analysis and the exchange of opinions among intellectuals and experts from such diverse spheres as sociology, history, economics, communication, ethics, law, politics, cooperation for development, in order to help spread a better understanding of the constituent elements of the social reality of these countries, and to offer proposals which, from an apolitical, impartial and balanced perspective, favour the search for peaceful solutions that promote social and human development and focus on dialogue and reconciliation.

The people and institutions that form part of the CEMOFPSC or participate in its activities share a vision of society and the individual based on justice, on a profound respect for freedom of thought and on the desire to contribute to social progress, understanding among peoples, peace and the common good of mankind.

The CEMOFPSC's public activity commenced on 3rd February 2007 with the Inaugural Speech given by Nadim Shehadi, Associate Fellow in the Middle East Programme at Chatham House (United Kingdom) and Ana Menéndez, Spanish diplomat and former Ambassador on the Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York.

ORGANISATION

The CEMOFPSC is an institution sponsored by the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture (FPSC). Its small and flexible structure corresponds to its multidisciplinary nature and its aims of promoting and spreading a better understanding of the aspects that make up the reality of the countries in the Middle East region.

The Centre for Middle Eastern Studies comprises an Advisory Committee, an Executive Committee and a group of Middle East experts.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

High Level consultative body made up of representatives of institutions and important personalities in the different areas of activity of the CEMOFPSC. Its mission is to advise the Executive Committee on how to define the CEMOFPSC's courses of action and how to carry out specific actions.

- Nadim Shehadi
  Associate Fellow, Middle East Programme, Chatham House. United Kingdom.
- Samuel Hadas
  Israeli Ambassador.
- Riad Malki
  Minister of Foreign Affaire of the PNA. Palestinian Territories.
- Youssef El Khalil
  Director of the Department of Financial Operations of the Bank of Lebanon. President and founding member of the Association for the Development of Rural Capacities (ADR). Lecturer at the American University of Beirut. Lebanon.
- Pedro López Aguirrebengoa
  Spanish Ambassador.
- Giuseppe Cassini
  Italian Ambassador.
- Manuel Cimadevilla
  Casa Sefarad Delegate in Jerusalem.
- Mark Singleton
  Development Cooperation Consultant.

- Catholic University of America.
- American University of Beirut.
- Bethlehem University.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

This body is directly responsible for defining and executing the CEMOFPSC's work programme.

- Pilar Lara
  President of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture (FPSC, Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura).
- Macarena Cotelo
  President of the Euro-Arab Network of NGOs for Development and Integration (READI). FPSC Project Director.
- Jumana Trad
  Member of the Advisory Board of the FPSC. Tribune and Seminars department of Casa Árabe-IEAM. Honorary President of the READI.
- Juan Kindelán
  Director General of the FPSC.
- Ana Menéndez
  Diplomat.

OBJECTIVES

The CEMOFPSC's priority objective is to *educate and inform* experts, academics, communication media, politicians, development agents and civil society in general on matters relating to the Middle East.

The CEMOFPSC supports international postgraduate programmes in the field of social development, international cooperation, the political and social sciences, etc. and sponsors and promotes the training of young researchers and the specialization of academic experts.

The CEMOFPSC intends to establish a multidisciplinary network of Middle East experts made up of Spanish and international organisations and personalities who share its vocation to *educate and inform*. For this reason, it counts on the collaboration of universities, think tanks,

organisations, experts, academics, communication media, politicians, development agents and other interested parties.

With the aim of encouraging an open and independent debate at its seminars and conferences, the CEMOFPSC maintains the confidentiality of the views and opinions expressed by members, speakers and guests during the work sessions, seminars, conferences or meetings that it organises.

ACTIVITIES

In order to achieve its objectives, the CEMOFPSC organises various types of activities:

> • Expert meetings. Dinner-debates, round-table conferences, work sessions, congresses, seminars and conferences. Specialists from various academic disciplines meet to discuss important issues in the Middle East.
> • Post-graduate education. The CEMOFPSC supports international postgraduate programmes in the field of social development, international cooperation, the political and social sciences, etc. It also sponsors and promotes the training of young researchers and academic experts in their specialist fields.
> • Alliances. The CEMOFPSC establishes alliances and partnerships with internationally renowned institutions and people in order to achieve common goals.
> • Publications. The CEMOFPSC devotes special effort to publishing and disseminating the work carried out in its different spheres of activity. The publications will take the form of: work documents, expert papers, and the conclusions of debates and expert work sessions.

The CEMOFPSC disseminates all this work through its website. The content of research papers and important texts, both internal and external, can be consulted at www.fundacionfpsc.org.

The CEMOFPSC's activities will be open unless the speaker invokes the rule of confidentiality. If the speaker does not consider the rule sufficiently strict, the CEMOFPSC activity in question may be considered subject to the highest degree of confidentiality.

CENTRE FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES
OF THE FOUNDATION FOR THE SOCIAL PROMOTION OF CULTURE
(CEMOFPSC)

CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS DE ORIENTE MEDIO
DE LA FUNDACIÓN PROMOCIÓN SOCIAL DE LA CULTURA
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