

## Speech by Hedayat Soltanzadeh in Brussels Conference, EU Parliament, 1-2 April 2009

Draft of speech

Ladies and gentlemen

As a representative of Azerbaijani Federal Democratic Movement, first of all I have to express my thanks for organisers of this conference and in providing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of South Azerbaijanis, the largest nationality without political and cultural rights in Iran, while its size of population is more than three times of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the north and its magnitude in terms of political activists and scientific cadres are paramount with the Persians.

Azerbaijanis were always in the forefront of the all democratic upheavals in modern times and by reliance on such a tradition and legacy of the past that we are trying today to put on a common pool the efforts for a democratic change for all nationalities in Iran.

To be faire, I have to say that all political and cultural Azerbaijani activists share the idea of self-determination, but they may have different perceptions on its connotations and how it could be materialised in the socio-political context of Iran.

I believe that the term derives its meaning from the nation-state and carries with itself the political rights of a given nation for statehood. As the first historical experience in French revolution has demonstrated, the idea of the self-determination originally did mean a democratic control of a nation to state apparatus. It is with such an understanding of the sovereignty of a nation that Azerbaijani Federal Democratic Movement considers the concept of self-determination and the prospect of democratic governance.

In a multi-national country, the application of the idea of self-determination could be nothing else than the common sharing of statehood and equality of the collective right of all nationalities to different levels of the power sharing. The political tools of such a common sharing of statehood and realisation of self-determination in a multi-national society could only be a federative state. It necessitates that the distinct identity of the different nationalities within a country to be recognised, respected and enshrined in the constitution of the federative state. Modern history is a rich source experience on this matter, from the host country of this conference to Canada, Switzerland, Brazil and others, and more important, the current move of the Europe on that direction. It is also rich source theoretical insights, by taking into account that most nationalities in Iran , including we Azerbaijanis are a divided nation. And it is a common fact that in multi-national countries, distinct national identities are one the defining features of federalism.

The present political structure of our country does not provide the minimum opportunity to reshape it on a federative basis. In addition, it is more rigid to be reformed.

Within the context of the Iran, we have a double anomaly of political structure which affects the question nationalities: in the first place, the existence of an ideological religious system with multi-level apartheid policies vis-a-vis of the whole society from one hand, which I categorise it as totalitarian, and : secondly ,the antinomy of one national political structure based on the single political power of one nationality, namely the Persians , and the imposing of Farsi language by force, in such a multi-national multicultural society, who compose the majority of the population on the other hand. This has caused ideological ambiguity even within the opposing groups. Some may equate any claims of rights with separatism. Others may think that establishment of simple individual rights or observing of human rights, could lead to the normality in political system. While such steps have its own credentials, they cannot guaranty the requirements of a federative state which is based essentially on the collective rights of the different nationalities within defined frontiers of single state.

We may imagine the removal of the present totalitarian ideological political system from the political scene of Iran , without any change in the national oppression , as it happened with Revolution of 1979 and with the change of the monarchy to Republic Islamic, which moved on instantly on the reinforcement of national oppression . However, the ability to establish a federative state demands a change on the foundations of the one nationality political structure within a multi-national society, and pertinent to it, the change in the prerogative of Farsi language on detriment of other languages. Preserving of a one dimensional political structure will create a constant tension within a multi-national society, preventing of a peaceful existence of.

One of the negative effects of national discrimination is the creation of first world-third world relationship within the Iranian society as all physical and human development investments are being carried out mainly on the Farsi speaking areas, even if in economic terms , lacking any rationalism. The growing importance of knowledge in social capital of societies will push more than ever the oppressed nationalities in our society into the margin of life, and in my view, national discrimination assumes a class formation role, making them unskilled workers of the dominant nation.

Now the question I may pose is that: can a democratic system be imagined without a democratic solution for the suppressed nationality issues in Iran? I believe that the democratic solution of the nationality issues is one the main building blocks of the democracy in our country. I believe also that it is a simultaneous process of a democratic change in Iran. We have not one abstract phase of realisation of the so-called "Democracy" and another phase of finding out the solution for the nationality oppression. Elimination of the national discrimination constitutes itself a part of any democratic change. To achieve it , it is not enough that an ideological religious government to be replaced by an apparently secular system. While secularism and free elections are necessary elements of good governance, they cannot per se guaranty the existence of a fully democratic system. We need to take further steps. We need that the one dimensional political structure on the governance based on dominance of Persian nationality and disguised under a false "nationality of Iran" and pretence of Farsi as the common language of all nationalities, to be replaced by a pluralistic multi-national and multi-language political system, reflecting the reality of Iranian society. Because, Iran is only a name of geographic area and per se does not indicate any national identity. And its size and shape have never remained unchanged. Therefore that will be a misrepresentation of the history to identify all nationalities with a common indicator of Iran as nationality which is practically interpreted as Persians and with the language of Farsi.

Finally, any democratic solution for eliminating of national discrimination and establishment of a democratic federative political system can come from within Iranian society. Democracy cannot be realised by military invasion of external forces. They can create a long lasting mess, but surly not democracy, and invasion to Iraq or Afghanistan are good examples it. We don't believe that the democracy could be built on the skulls of victims of violence and military intervention. Even if it may appear as climbing of a rocky mountain, Iranian society has enough maturity and civic wisdom to achieve the noble end of democratic governance, accommodating the wishes of equality between all nationalities in Iran. It is only possible with convergence of all democratic movement inside of the country, Solidarity of the nationalities, the movements of the women for gender equality and teachers and labour movements for social justice and freedom. To build a real democratic political system, we need not only solidarity and putting hand in hand of all nationalities in Iran, but also we need to democratise it by internalising the drive for social justice and freedom of masses, the ideal of equality of women with men in all areas of social life with right to self-determination. In such a case, the building blocks of the democracy will be laid down by convergence of the different civic movements and establishment of a democratic federative system will not be far from the sight. And as David Hume once had said, the force is always on the side of the people and whenever it rises, it will be obeyed.

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Thank you

H.Soltanzadeh