

Syria

Problems are to be resolved in negotiations

“There should be no military interference from outside”

The magazine “Zaman” discusses the Syria-conflict with Professor Dr Hans Köchler of the University of Innsbruck

Zaman: Key-word Syria conflict.

Professor Hans Köchler: I advise against any foreign intervention, because problems that have to do with the relationships between social and religious groups and even with decades of internal political differences and resulting tensions cannot be solved by military means. A conflict of this kind can only be solved permanently within the country. Other countries should try to play a constructive role; they may possibly take over the role of a neutral mediator. That is my opinion about the task of former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

[...]

The EU has recognized the opposition group as a representative. That’s a dangerous intrusion into an entirely confusing situation.

That seems problematic. There are just different groups that are now in conflict with each other and they are involved in military conflicts, as well. From abroad, you should not interfere. That would be my principle. You can maintain contact to various groups, but one should be cautious about the recognition of groups as official representatives. Above all, one must also consider: The political constellation of the world contains a conflict on which a homogenous assessment cannot be formed by the decisive powers within the United Nations.

[...]

Iran and Lebanon are already at the negotiating table and want to contribute to a solution. It is true that a military intervention will result in more bloodshed.

Exactly. It must also be remembered that the Syrian conflict can easily turn into a

regional conflict. It may very well spill over borders, and you have to watch and see that no one is playing with fire, no matter how bad the situation is. If you intervene in foreign countries – if it is not possible to do it in a non-partisan way – it makes the situation much more difficult. The question is how to stabilize the situation from abroad in a non-partisan way. Non-partisan action can be humanitarian action such as the International Committee of the Red Cross – these are very clear procedures, and this is all about humanitarian aid. However, if this means supporting the opposition or the government, the whole situation escalates. Syria is not some mini-state over which you can just run roughshod and whose fate can be decided at the round table in Paris, London or elsewhere

From what you are saying, there is no short-term solution to be expected in Syria.

[...]

What makes me also worry with regard to the relations between the Islamic world and Europe is this: What will be the situation for Christians? Many are scared that they have no future in Syria – after what happened in Iraq. This will have serious implications for relations with the West. This problem is so complex that you really have to proceed very carefully.[...]

You often visit Muslim countries such as Qatar. Even in the Arab League there is no consensus about Syria. The region is once again very complex. The situation in Egypt as well.

[...]

As the situation presents itself at the moment, the problem in the Arab World and

the Middle East is probably that in the course of colonization from outside this whole region was submitted to reorganization. The countries that exist today are in many ways the result of the intervention of the former Great Powers – the colonial powers, especially Britain and France. For nearly a century these peoples were ruled from the outside. They were exposed to this policy à la “divide et impera” (divide and conquer). This has been the situation since the end of the Ottoman Empire. The last, in a way more or less, balanced situation in which the individual peoples could express themselves, was probably the time of the Ottoman Empire. But that came to an abrupt end. The new political structures had the effect that the countries aligned themselves to various power centres, such as Paris or London. The new structures do not seem to allow the people, respectively the people of the Arab League to act as a union and in a coordinated way, and to realize common interests.

What is the probability that the US or Israel attack Iran?

[...]

We are facing of course a dangerous period of time before the elections in the United States. Until then, above all, one actor, namely Israel, has a special manoeuvring room. After the elections this will be reduced again, especially if this president is re-elected. But an attack on Iran would, not only in my view, be a violation of international law, and there would be even more oil poured into the regional fire. It would widely destabilize everything. •

Source: *Zaman*, 20 March 2012, Reporter: *Seyit Arslan*
(Translation *Current Concerns*)