



Transcript

A Democratic Egypt: From Revolution to Institution

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Roula Khalaf:

Good evening... shall we get started?

Good, we have the go-ahead. I am Roula Khalaf, I am the Middle East Editor at the *Financial Times*, and I will be moderating what I expect to be a fascinating panel discussion about 'A Democratic Egypt: From Revolution to Institution.' Let me just... if you could take note of a couple of things. First of all, make sure that your mobiles are turned off, the speakers too, please. [Laughter] I have also been asked to request that you vote for the Chatham House Prize. You can do this either online or on your way out. This meeting is on the record, so you can be free to quote.

Before I introduce the speakers, all three are members and officials from the Freedom and Justice Party. As you may know this is a party that is very young, yet very powerful. It was started... it was founded last year by the Muslim Brotherhood after the Egyptian revolution, and it won just over 46% of the seats in the parliamentary elections. The party is now considering whether to run a presidential candidate. It has already helped to form the constitutional committee that will draft the new constitution, a democratic constitution for Egypt. I am sure you will all have many questions about the economic policies of Freedom and Justice, about the constitution, and about the presidential elections.

We will start this evening with Dr Amr Darrag, who is the founding member... a founding member of the party. He is also Secretary General of the party in Giza. Next we will move to Fatema Abouzeid, who is a member of the constituent assembly. She is and an activist and researcher, and she will be focusing more on the drafting of the constitution. We will then move to Gehad El Haddad, who is a senior member to the executive committee of the party, and he is a member of the Renaissance Project, this is a development project that Freedom and Justice has been working on.

Amr Darrag:

Thank you very much, Roula, and thank you everybody for coming this evening. I have a feeling that we have a distinguished group of honourable guests this evening, and I hope that we are up to your aspirations.

For your information, we have had a revolution in Egypt, as you know, and this revolution is... has been going through some difficulties, but it is going through a dry patch. The first green outcome of that revolution was the election for the first time in the Egyptian history or a freely elected parliament

with its two chambers – The Sha’ab [People’s Assembly] and the Shura Council – that really represent the Egyptian people. Now we are... we have just completed the formulation of the constituent assembly to be drafting the constitution, we have one member of that assembly with us this evening. Again, this was done through a process that was according to the will of the people, and through the mechanisms that have been established through the referendum that was passed by the Egyptian people. And, afterwards we will be looking... after drafting that constitution we will be looking for the election of a president who represents the Egyptian people by the free will of the Egyptians.

So, all these institutions – and that is a brilliant title of this event this evening, ‘From Revolution to Institution’ – this really represents milestones in Egyptian history. We have never had such formulation of such institutions that are formed by the people, and we have never had a constitution that was developed by the Egyptian people to be given to the Egyptian people. We have had good constitution documents, but all of them were drafted by elite who were selected by the governing authority. Regardless, these documents, some of these documents were pretty good, but yet they were not really developed by the people. That is why we are excited by this... by this event, that we are, for the first time, going to draft our own constitution.

The process has not been easy. We have been passing through so many obstacles. There are so many forces that are not really keen for a good... for a strong Egypt, for a prosperous Egypt, and they are trying to do everything they can to hinder our path and our activities. Nevertheless, we have a new player on the scene; that is the will of the Egyptian people. Again, I keep repeating this because this is the new thing. Before, everything... the Egyptian people was used to dictating everything on them from above. And I am not just referring to the [Hosni] Mubarak era, I am talking from the [inaudible] era, you know, thousands of years ago. And this is for the first time something that we are really looking forward to.

Our priorities... actually, we have two priorities. Our priorities is [sic] to set a truly democratic state, and a truly civilian state. These are our... main priorities. Everybody knows what is meant by ‘democracy’, but I would like to clarify what we mean by ‘civilian state’. We would like a state that is free from the rule of the military, and also free of the control of the theocrats. We would like to have a state that is really directed by the will of the people, that really reflects what they are aspiring to, and that are following all the standards of any modern and good state, and hoping that this will be the start for a new

renaissance that Gehad is going to address that will take Egypt to the position that it deserves in the area and within the whole world.

This is what I wanted to start with, and I will leave other issues, which I am sure are many, to your questions.

Roula Khalaf:

Many thanks. We will turn now to Fatema. The constitution – or the process of selecting this constitutional committee – has been quite controversial and perhaps you can walk us through how it was reached, and explain to us why you are a member of it?

Fatema Abouzeid:

Okay. First of all let me thank all of you for coming today. I am really happy to be here today because... for two reasons mainly. For the first reason... the first reason is that for so long a time we have been reaching the outside world through certain elite inside Egypt, which have formulated our foreign relations in some kind that was really... was really under, beside... under what we were looking for. The other thing is that... the most important thing I like about travelling is meeting Egyptians abroad, because I feel very happy to meet Egyptians abroad and every time I travel I am really very keen to see the Egyptian community, which we miss, we really miss in Egypt.

Let me start by introducing myself in a quite detailed way as a way to answering the second question, which was why I was elected to this assembly. I am a graduate of political science and I did my master's in political science at Cairo University, and the topic of my thesis was mainly about the relations between different powers in the state and how this mechanism of power can affect the efficiency of the state. And the specific example I was using was the constitutional amendments between 2005 and 2007. So, this is the academic side. The other side is that I was a founding member of the Freedom and Justice Party, and I am a member of the foreign relations unit, heading the committee of research inside this unit. So, I have quite, I can say, a quite good experience either in the academic or the practical side.

Relating to the constitution and how the assembly was chosen. In the Freedom and Justice Party we had been for so long time, for months discussing with other parties the composition of this assembly. And we are... we believe that the best thing for the constitution to be accepted by the

Egyptian population through the referendum is to have the most... the most comprehensive insights we can get, a different spectrum of Egyptian society. So, we set a list of different members from our party, from the leftist parties, from liberal parties, from the nationalist parties, from the independent... the independent figures of society, and also we had representatives from institutions. We have representatives from the judiciary branch, from the professional syndicates, from the labour unions, from the student unions, from... I can claim that we tried to get representatives from each and every institution in the society.

Still, we know that you can't reach the ideal assembly of representing the whole demographic and the different categories of the society, so we are building networks, trying to reach, to consult different people in different area, remote areas and others. We are trying to get the most discussions... the most possible discussions and insights as a way to get a constitution that meet the peoples' needs and ambitions for the coming decades. Because in the first beginning we are willing to... we are willing to establish a new democracy that is really responding to the people, and is really reflecting their needs and ambitions. For our party, particularly, we believe that if the constitution is not well representing what the people needs, then we will have problems in the coming steps of establishing Egyptian democracy.

We gave our list to the parliament and there were elections, and finally we got to a composition of the assembly in which we have 30 members, 25 from inside the parliament and five from outside the parliament in this assembly. And since we have about 40%, let me clarify this point: we have 40% of the people's assembly as a party, and as a coalition we have 47%. So, having 40% and having 30% of the assembly, we saw it as quite fair. This is the first point. Then... we now understand that some people are not accepting this, but this is not the majority. And those that are not accepting, we are questioning the point if through the ballot box the results won't be accepted, so what is the other alternative? We believe it is a kind of... we have to be working on a culture of accepting what the ballot box gives us because the other alternative may return us again to the previous regime in the way it was functioning.

This is a general image of the way things are going. Today was the first day of... the first meeting of the assembly. Unfortunately, I could not attend because I knew I was elected when I was in the airport and everything was already organised, but since the meeting was kind of procedural so they told me I could attend the coming one. I welcome your questions, and I hope I could satisfy you with good questions... with good answers.

Roula Khalaf:

Thank you, Fatema. I am sure that there will be a lot of questions.

Gehad El Haddad, you are a member of the steering committee for what is called the Renaissance Project; can you explain to us what the Renaissance Project is?

Gehad El Haddad:

Certainly.

Roula Khalaf:

And what the vision of the party is?

Gehad El Haddad:

Certainly.

Thank you all for having us today. As you know the main driver for the revolution has been the ill-managed distribution of wealth in Egypt. This was the underlying driver for it, even the slogans were, [Arabic]... it started with bread, which at the end of the day, is economy. So, we were quite careful in the beginning as we identified that the first, second, and third priority of a new Egypt has to be the economy. But, we also identified early on that in order to address the economy, you need a stable political system that really can entrust both the population and investment community into the market, and this is the approach that we are currently working on. So, hopefully once the political procedures have stabilised, we will be able to address the economy on a much more active level.

The Renaissance Project is a facilitating body that has been created or initiated by the Muslim Brotherhood. It works in the backstage of all the different organisations and bodies of the state, and it makes sure that there are communications and facilitators that can allow all of these bodies to function with a much higher level of flexibility and fluidity than was the case during Mubarak's time. During Mubarak's time, those that have worked in Egypt, either in the business sector or have engaged with the bureaucracy of Egypt, know that the hardest thing to do is to get someone in one ministry to call someone in another ministry in Egypt, and it is always very difficult to do that cross-line. We think that this is a leftover culture within in the bureaucracy that we will have to try to deal with.

The Renaissance Project actually stems from the larger direction and the strategy of both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party. We believe that during Mubarak's time the size, the scale, the power and the reach of the state of Egypt has increased substantially to a state that has largely made it dysfunctional and a weight on the population of Egypt. And thus we have a strategic direction of trimming down and limiting that enlarged size of the state, both [sic] in reach, depth and other elements. The idea behind this, or the concept, is that we want to empower the private sector and the civil society sector, so that all three will coordinate as pillars of the state of Egypt, and will provide the necessary checks and balances to balance the next period in the renaissance of Egypt.

The Renaissance Project categorises a time plan of the coming Egypt into four segments. The first one is what we term 'The Hundred Days Project', and this is basically the first hundred days of government once a truly representative government is in office, which is not the case with the current government. And it is sets of activities and projects that have real influence on the peoples' lives and their daily needs.

The second phase is what we call the 'Firefighting Phase', which is probably two to three years, and will continue after the stabilisation of the transitional period. And in that phase every skeleton that Mubarak has built and dug into the sands of Egypt will start reappearing. So, it is a crisis management phase; it will be troublesome, and it will need very carefully dealing with it so the cohesion of the society does not break up at that point.

The third phase is what we call the 'Reconstruction and Maintenance Phase', and it is the point at which the infrastructure starts to break, and we believe that there is going to be a huge growth in the investment within that phase, and perhaps even in the demographic allocation in the population in new areas, rural areas around the Nile basin and deeper into the Egyptian land.

The last phase is where we see the substantial growth both within the market and the status of Egypt within the international community, where we will look towards the role of Egypt internationally and its positioning, rather than focusing, as we are now, at the inside problems in Egypt.

From the overall perspective, we believe that the current state at which the economy and the state is, the democracy of Egypt is, does not necessarily put it in a position to deal with the amount of difficulties that it will have to face – even if it does have a government that is representative of the people. And thus, we have a strong... to depend on the private sector to be the main driver for the renaissance of Egypt. Our rule of thumb is if that there is a job

that can be done by the private sector, whether it is or a service or a product, and it can be done cheaper and in better quality, then let the private sector do that job because the state does not want more burdens on it than it already has.

I think this sums up the general direction. I am sure there are going to be more intimate questions into the economic policy and the provision of cash flow and so on, but I think we can leave this open to the floor afterwards.

Thank you very much.

Roula Khalaf:

Thank you, Gehad. I think one aspect that we haven't touched on is foreign policy. Perhaps one of you might want to address what is different... what difference you see in the direction of foreign policy under a government that is going to be led by Freedom and Justice?

Amr Darrag:

Well, in the new era of Egypt we will be responsible in front of the Egyptian people, and accountable in front of the Egyptian people, and the needs of the people will be the driving force in our relations with everybody of the world. As a matter of fact, we are starting this now; we are almost touring the world to explore areas of collaboration, to explore ideas, to seek support from everybody.

As we speak here in London, we have some colleagues in China, a delegate is travelling to the US next week, there was a group in Germany last week, Delegate Gehad was in Singapore with some other colleagues last month. We have plans to go to India, to Brazil, to Poland... you know, all this is in the near future. And the main purpose of this is to try to draw a new map, and define new relationships with the whole world where there is a fair dealing with everybody that assures mutual benefits to everybody. We, as we said, we are accountable to the Egyptian people, so the Egyptian people does not want any upper-hands anymore, we would like the relationships to be equivalent, on an equivalent basis, and as I said, based on mutual interests.

This probably will lead us to the issue of peace in the area, and this is a very important aspect in foreign relations. We definitely declared many times that we acknowledged all international treaties that have been signed by previous governments, and we intend... and as dictated by the Egyptian people, we

intend to respect these treaties, namely our peace treaty with Israel. In a recent poll by, I think it was by Gallup, maybe more than 65% of Egyptian people said that they are *for* maintaining a stable treaty with Israel.

However... there is a feeling among Egyptians that Israel is not really respecting everything that is stated in that treaty when it comes to its commitments towards the Palestinians, in particular, because these are integral parts of the treaty, and also in terms of violations that have been repeatedly committed across the Egyptian borders and in addition to things like an inhumane blockade for Gaza and so on and so forth. So, we expect... and that used to pass before because Israel used to deal with just one person, who just dealt with this issue via his own will, and never listened to the people.

We have a new game right now, and as I said, as a government that is accounting to people, accountable in front of the people, it would be very difficult to ignore their aspirations. And let me give you a piece of information, we are the only political party in Egypt right now... the only major party that clearly announced we are going to honour the treaty. There are many parties that did not say anything, and some parties say they are not bound by this treaty. So, we are not interested in generating conflicts, this is the last thing that Egypt needs at the moment, and the last thing that the whole world needs at the moment. But, definitely we are for securing our rights, and securing the respect of the commitments of everybody who is dealing with us all over the world. This is a probably a summary of that.