

The Relevance of Fethullah Gülen's Thoughts for Democratic Reforms in the Muslim World

by Leonid R. Sykiainen on 21 November 2007. Posted in Peaceful Coexistence

Abstract

Today political reforms are a central public concern in the Muslim world, where Islamic traditions coexist with universally accepted standards and Western liberal values. In these countries politics and the operations of state power make up a specific sphere of interaction between Islamic principles and Western norms. Fethullah Gülen's believes that the fundamentals of Islam do not contradict political reform in the contemporary Muslim world; rather, they can contribute to it. His thoughts about the political reform of the Muslim world are of particular importance in the light of the necessary collaboration of different political and legal cultures. Gülen pays special attention to the involvement of Islam in political life and to Islamic methods of realizing political goals. While stressing the importance of law and order, he condemns absolutely violent and coercive ways of attaining political ends. He does not see a contradiction between genuine Islamic principles and democracy: he explains that the well-known principle of consultation is extremely flexible and responsive to the needs of every era. Gülen is an advocate of dialogue between different cultures and civilizations so as to benefit from each other's knowledge and views. in any case, he argues, people always need to learn from the experience of the experienced. This position opens the way for the Muslim world to benefit from modern democratic models of governance. Fethullah Gülen does not believe there is going to be a clash of cultures or civilizations. Instead of this idea he puts forward the principle of dialogue. The first step in establishing it is to forget the past, ignore polemics, and give precedence to the common points that far outnumber differences.

1. Introduction

It was late in the 20th century that Islam developed into a major issue of contemporary world politics. It left the realm of academic deliberations to be discussed by political scientists, publicists, and journalists. They normally concentrate on several subjects inherited from the past like Islam's attitude towards international terrorism and political extremism as well as several recent ones, namely the Muslim world's future in the context of political changes and the role of Islam in the process.

All these issues cannot be properly discussed outside the main trends of Islamic thoughts: ideas hold a special place in the Muslim world, in which all deep-cutting changes and important projects of national dimension are scrutinized through the prism of Islamic principles. What is more, devoid of an Islamic foundation they will never take off. This means that all positive solutions for the above-

mentioned issues should be sought within Islam. In other words, to discuss the prospects of political transformation of the Muslim world today means first of all to interpret Islam in the light of contemporary world realities. That is why Fethullah Gülen pays special attention to this problem when evaluating the Muslim world's political future.

2. "Today Islam is not understood properly"

In a number of his publications Fethullah Gülen analyses in a short but very deep manner the present situation in the Muslim world. He agrees that during a long period of time the Muslim societies have been witnessing a multidimensional political, social and cultural crisis. On one hand, this crisis embraces the Islamic thought and education at the moment. But on the other hand, it is itself caused by the decline of Islamic ideas and knowledge. That is why Fethullah Gülen's teachings must be estimated by their impact upon the development of the modern Islamic theory and by their contribution into overcoming the crisis of the Muslim world.

The thinker points out a few main reasons of the present weakness of the modern Muslim countries. In his view, the three ones deserve to be mentioned before others:

- prolonged and continuing political backwardness which manifests itself first of all in the absence of genuine democratic institutions and processes coupled with domination of the authoritarian regimes;
- spiritual and moral crisis which consists in particular in the growing influence of imported - western standards of life;
- unsatisfactory knowledge of Islam.

When touching leading roots of backwardness of the Muslim world the thinker underlines some key problems of Islamic societies linked directly with the perspectives of their political reformation. He especially stresses that Islamic societies entered the twentieth century as a world of the oppressed, the wronged, and the colonized. After their liberation and creation of independent states political authorities worked for the well-being of the dynasties of which they are members, rather than working for the prosperity of their countries and trying to establish the unity of public and the power, and thus these administrations have been degraded to the position of mere oppressors and are deserving of loathing in the eyes of the public (Gülen 2004:239-240).

Values like democracy, basic human rights, the spread of knowledge and education across society, economic prosperity, equality in production, the institutionalization of consumption and income in a way that prevents class formation, the supremacy of law and justice, values which today are general accepted throughout the world, have never been fully realized in Islamic societies (Gülen 2004:240).

Maybe more important than all of the above, the fact that religion, and the religious values, spirituality and ethics that are connected to religion have been eroded away throughout the world constitutes the most important source of major social problems that threaten humanity today. The Muslim world is going through a spiritual crisis as all the essential supporting pillars of humanity have collapsed and have been destroyed (Gülen 2004:241).

To sum up, Fethullah Gülen formulates the most important and bitter conclusion: today, in his opinion, an Islamic world does not really exist. There are places where Muslims live. Islam has become a way of living, a culture. It is not being followed as a faith. There are Muslims who have restructured Islam in accordance with their thoughts. It doesn't mean radical, extremist Muslims, but ordinary Muslims who live Islam as it suits them. The prerequisite for Islam is that one should "really" believe, and live accordingly. Muslims must assume the responsibilities inherent in Islam. It cannot be said that any such societies with this concept and philosophy exist within Islamic geography. There are no administrators having this vision. The Islamic world is pretty ignorant, despite a measured enlightenment that is coming into being nowadays.

Today, there is an Islam of the individual. There are some Muslims in different places of the world. One by one, all have been separated from one another. It's difficult to see anyone who is a perfect Muslim. If Muslims are not able to come into contact with one another and constitute a union, to work together to solve common problems, to interpret the universe, to understand it well, to consider the universe carefully according to the Qur'an, to interpret the future well, to generate projects for the future, to determine their place in the future, then we can't talk about an Islamic world. Since there is no Islamic world, every one acts individually. It could even be said that there are some Muslims with their own personal truths. It cannot be claimed that there is an Islamic understanding which has been agreed upon, approved by qualified scholars, reliably based upon the Qur'an, and repeatedly tested. It could be said that a Muslim culture is dominant, rather than Islamic culture. As a result we must realize that no Islamic country, when considered from viewpoint of administrative, legal, and economic matters, exists. Today Islam is not understood properly. At best we can say that Islam is not known at all (Gülen 2004:184).

3. Regarding Islam as A Political Force and An Instrument for Terrorism

To prove this sound idea it's enough to refer to Fethullah Gülen's ideas on Islam attitude towards politics and terrorism. First of all the thinker determines some principal theoretical approaches to this issue pointing out that if we want to analyze religion, democracy, or any other system or philosophy accurately, we should focus on humanity and human life. In this light Islam cannot be compared on the same basis with democracy or any other political, social, or economic system for it focuses primarily on the immutable aspects of life and existence, whereas political, social, and economic systems or ideologies concern only certain variable social aspects of our worldly life. The aspects of life with which Islam is primarily concerned are as valid today as they were at the dawn of humanity and will continue to be so in the future. Contrary to that, worldly systems change according to circumstances and so can be evaluated only according to their times (Gülen 2004:219).

At the same time Fethullah Gülen refers to the historic facts stressing that beginning from the first half of the century Islamic societies were engaged in wars of liberation and independence. During decades Islam assumed the role of an important factor uniting people and spurring them to action. As these wars were waged against what were seen as invaders, Islam, national independence, and liberation came to mean the same thing. When national states were established in these parts of the world, the states were not compatible with their public. Whereas the states should have instructed the public in Islam with its true identity and nature, they acted in a way which disregarded the public,

a way contrary to the values and traditions of Islam. This made the latter a pillar, a refuge against the administration in the eyes of the public. Consequently, it is regrettable to say, Islam has come to be regarded as a traditional political ideology by many. And what is more some Muslims and policy-makers consider and present it as a purely political, sociological, and economic ideology, rather than a religion (Gülen 2004:219, 239).

In the light of this evolution of Islam as a political force Fethullah Gülen pays special attention to the political process and the methods of ensuring political goals. In particular he never advocates the use of violence to attain political ends. He absolutely condemns violent and coercive means and methods and believes that the days of getting things done by brute force are over. Fethullah Gülen stresses on the importance of law and order in society and does not believe that respect for others can be instilled by force or that a modern world can be built by repression (Gülen 2004:246-247).

But the analysis of real circumstances makes him to recognise that in the countries Muslims live, some religious leaders and immature Muslims have no other weapon to hand than their fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. They use this to engage people in struggles that serve their own purposes. In fact, Islam is a true faith, and it should be lived truly. A Muslim cannot say, "I will kill a person and then go to Heaven." God's approval cannot be won by killing people. One of the most important goals for a Muslim is to win the approval of God, another being making the name of Almighty God known to the universe (Gülen 2004:185). This leads us to Fethullah Gülen's thoughts about relationships between Islam and terrorism.

To touch briefly this side of Fethullah Gülen's intellectual contribution into proper understanding of modern Islam it is enough to refer to his conclusion that it is hard for a person to remain a Muslim if he becomes involved in terrorism. In true Islam, terror does not exist (Gülen 2004:184-185).

Fethullah Gülen believes that any terrorist activity is the greatest blow to peace, democracy, humanity and religious values. Many Qur'anic verses are dealing with the concepts of justice and peace: "Deal fairly, and do not let the hatred of others for you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just, for that is next to piety; and fear Allah" (Al-Ma'ida 5:8); "If the enemy inclines toward peace, you (also) incline toward peace and trust in Allah, for He is the All-Hearing, All-Knowing" (Al-Anfal 8:61); and "O believers, enter into peace (Islam) wholeheartedly, and do not follow Satan's footsteps, for he is your avowed enemy" (Al-Baqara 2:208).

At the same time Fethullah Gülen quotes the famous Hadith, stressing that the Prophet describes Muslims as those people from whom others are secure from their tongues and hands. In other words, those Muslims who are not known for their provision of security and trustworthiness to others must reexamine their claim to be Muslim (Gülen 2002).

To sum up Fethullah Gülen underlines: " Please let me reassure you that Islam does not approve of terrorism in any form. Terrorism cannot be used to achieve any Islamic goal. No terrorist can be a Muslim, and no real Muslim can be a terrorist. Islam demands peace, and the Qur'an demands that every real Muslim be a symbol of peace and work to support the maintenance of basic human rights Even though at first sight terrorist acts seem to harm the target, all terrorist activities eventually do

more harm to the terrorists and their supporters" (Gülen 2004:261). Thus we can say with full confidence that there is no terror in Islam. They are sharply different from each other, and terror cannot approach Islam. In connection with the above logic, Muslims must be legitimate in their intentions when it comes to their goals, thoughts, and actions, for only a straight and allowed way can lead them to their exalted objective (Gülen 2002).

In other words, Fethullah Gülen believes that Islam couldn't be an instrument for attaining political goals. Rather it is a goal of political activity and that is why any political decisions must be enriched by Islamic religious and ethical values. If any Muslims are joined to or associated with terrorism and anarchy, it is because they do not understand Islam correctly and because the existing realities in their countries do not allow them to acquire a correct understanding. The thinker is convinced that this situation could be prevented by education: "There is a remedy for this. The remedy is to teach the truth directly" (Gülen 2004:190).

True understanding of Islam is closely connected with the political reforms which we are witnessing today in the Muslim world.

4. Democracy and Islam: Are They Opponents or Allies?

Recently the problems of democracy and human rights have acquired a special importance for forecasting the development of the Muslim world in the nearest future and in particular for evaluating the perspectives of the promotion of political reforms including democratization. It is quite natural for today most Muslim states are developing in a rather contradictory way in the political and legal sphere where Islamic traditions coexist with universally accepted standards and Western liberal values. We should always bear in mind that politics and the principles of state power functioning form a very specific sphere of interaction (cooperation and competition) between Islamic principles and Western patterns. Islamic thought believes that the most specific feature of this sphere is created by the fact that the traditional Muslim legal doctrine (fiqh) offers no detailed, exact, and unambiguous answers to the vast majority of specific questions. It limits itself to identifying the most general landmarks, such as consultation, fairness, and equality to be realized in different, including borrowed, versions. When applied, these general principles may produce different results. The consultation principle, for example, can be put into practice in the form of a consultative council accountable to the head of state or as representative body with full legislative powers elected by universal suffrage.

Today, Muslim legal postulates are invoked to prove that Western experience of parliamentarism, elections, political pluralism, the division of powers, and even human rights should be tapped. In these spheres, however, the borrowing is limited to outward features, yet the very fact that Islamic legal thought does not issue rigid instructions about the power system in general opens the road to the widest possible reliance on the experience of political democracy.

What is more, today any modernization and democratization project has good prospects in most Muslim states if realized within the Islamic political and legal tradition, or at least with due account of it. The opposite is also true: no political reform stands a chance of survival if it is aimed at setting up

formally democratic institutions that go against the grain of Islamic thought. Objectively, the people at the top and the public at large are interested in democratic developments if they are accompanied by political stability and security. This can be done if democratization is realized within the Muslim political and legal traditions, Islamic interpretation of all the changes included.

The strategy of political and legal reforms of the Muslim world should aim at incorporating it into the globalization process together with its Islamic values (legal and political among other things) that are compatible with the universal democratic principles and remolded to fit contemporary reality. This can be achieved if the positive potential of Islamic political and legal thought is tapped in a very active way and if the thinkers are encouraged to work on the problems connected with new realities and Islam's role in the globalizing world.

We should bear in mind that the use of Islamic arguments is neither a trick nor empty talk. The present state of mind in the Muslim world has made the attitude of the Muslim political and legal doctrine toward the possibility of blending Islamic and Western principles extremely important. The latest works of those Muslim thinkers who share a moderate and balanced attitude toward the Shari'a admit, at least theoretically that this blend can be achieved

Different sides of the intellectual achievements of Fethullah Gülen are of special interest for discussing the above mentioned issues. First of all it concerns the compatibility between the Western liberal and the Islamic approaches to democracy and human rights.

Regarding this subject Fethullah Gülen stressed that when comparing Islam with democracy, we must remember that on one hand democracy is a system that is being continually developed and revised. It also varies according to the places and circumstances where it is practiced. On the other hand, religion has established immutable principles related to faith, worship, and morality. Thus, only Islam's worldly aspects should be compared with democracy.

Estimating this point he argues that democracy -in spite of its shortcomings- is now the only viable political system, and people should strive to modernize and consolidate democratic institutions in order to build a society where individual rights and freedoms are respected and protected, where equal opportunity for all is more than a dream. According to the thinker, mankind has not yet designed a better governing system than democracy. Fethullah Gülen also maintains that as a political and governing system, democracy is, at present, the only alternative left in the world (Yilmaz 2005c:396).

As for Islam, it is characterized by immutable religious and ethical values. But it does not propose a certain unchangeable form of government or attempt to shape it. Instead, Islam establishes fundamental principles that orient a government's general character, leaving it to the people to choose the type and form of government according to time and circumstances. If we approach the matter in this light and compare Islam with the modern liberal democracy of today, we will be better able to understand the position of Islam and democracy with respect to each other (Gülen 2004:220).

Along with this idea Fethullah Gülen refers to the following fundamental principles of Islamic form of government:

- Power lies in truth, a repudiation of the common idea that truth relies upon power.
- Justice and the rule of law are essential.
- Freedom of belief and rights to life, personal property, reproduction, and health (both mental and physical) cannot be violated.
- The privacy and immunity of individual life must be maintained.
- No one can be convicted of a crime without evidence, or accused and punished for someone else's crime.
- An advisory system of administration is essential Fethullah Gülen does not see a contradiction between these principles and democracy. The duties entrusted to modern democratic systems are those that Islam refers to society and classifies as absolutely necessary, relatively necessary, and commendable to carry out. People cooperate with one another in sharing these duties and establishing the essential foundations necessary to perform them. The government is composed of all of these foundations. Thus, Islam recommends a government based on a social contract. People elect the administrators, and establish a council to debate common issues. Also, the society as a whole participates in auditing the administration. In short, Islam addresses the whole community and assigns it almost all the rights and duties entrusted to modern democratic system.

It is necessary to stress that regarding establishment of Islamic form of state Fethullah Gülen is in favor of a bottom-up approach and his desire is to transform individuals, an ideal that cannot be fulfilled by force or from the top. Islam considers a society to be composed of conscious individuals equipped with freewill and having responsibility toward both themselves and others. The Qur'an says: "God will not change the state of a people unless they change themselves (with respect to their beliefs, worldview, and lifestyle)" (Ar-Rad 13:11). In other words, Islamic society holds the reins of its fate in its own hands. The prophetic wording emphasizes this revelation: "You will be ruled according to how you are". This is the basic character and spirit of democracy which does not conflict with any Islamic principle (Gülen 2004:222). Answering a question whether can Islam live in democracy and vice versa Fethullah Gülen said: "It's wrong to see Islam and democracy as opposites" (Unal and Williams 2000:150).

In the light of these provisions Fethullah Gülen shows the main obstacle on the road leading to establishing the just Islamic rule: today's world presents a situation where regimes of oppression do not have much chance to continue unchecked. Instead of these regimes the thinker proposes the Islamic remedy - the famous Islamic principle of consultation.

5. Consultation and Human Rights as Key Directions of Political Reforms

Explaining the meaning of this principle for the modern Muslim world Fethullah Gülen states that for the Muslims of today, consultation (shura) is a vital attribute and an essential rule, just as it was for the first Islamic generations. According to the Qur'an, it is the clearest sign of a believing community. The consultation is mentioned in the Qur'an together with salat (prescribed prayers) and infaq (giving to maintain the religion and people for the sake of God): "...Those who hearken to their Lord, and

establish regular prayer, who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation, who spend out of what We have bestowed upon them for sustenance" (Shura 42:38).

In this verse, we are reminded that consultation as a type of conduct is like prayer. That is why a society which does not consider consultation important can hardly be considered to be a fully believing one, and a community which does not apply consultation is not accepted as being Muslim in the full and perfect sense.

In Islam, consultation is an absolute essential, which both the rulers and the ruled must obey. The ruler is responsible for conducting consultation about political, governing, legislation and all affairs related to society. The ruled are responsible for expressing and conveying their views and thoughts to the ruler.

The important things which should be noted are: consultation is the first condition for the success of a decision made on any issue. Even if a person has a superior nature and outstanding intellect, if he is content with his own opinion and is not receptive and respectful to the opinions of others, then he is more prone to make mistakes and errors than the average person. The most intelligent person is the one who most appreciates and respects mutual consultation and deliberation (mashwarat), and who benefits most from the ideas of others.

Consultation is one of the prime dynamics which keep the Islamic order standing as a system. To consult belongs the most important mission and duty of resolving affairs concerning the individual and the community, the people and the state, science and knowledge, and economics and sociology. Even if the head of state or the leader is confirmed by God and nurtured by revelation and inspiration, he is under obligation to conduct affairs by consultation.

This principle in the Qur'an is mentioned directly in two verses. The first of them was given above, and the second one, which does not require any interpretation whatsoever, is: "Consult them in the affairs (of moment)" (Al 'Imran 3: 159). Along with these commands the Messenger of God also saw the salvation and progress of his community in mutual consultation: "Those who consult can never lose", "One who consults will not have cause to regret", "One who consults will not come to harm", "One who consults is secure", "There has been no community which used consultation but could not reach the right result".

After discussing the fundamentals of consultation Fethullah Gülen declares the final conclusion: both of the revealed verses and the Prophet's sayings related to the principle of consultation are extremely flexible and responsive to the needs of every era. They have a breadth which surpasses all ages, such that, no matter how much the world changes and no matter how the times alter, even if humans were able to build cities in the sky, they would not feel the need to add new things to these decrees. In fact, all the other rules and principles of Islam are open to similar flexibility and universality, and have always retained, and will also retain in the future, their freshness, relevance and validity, despite the passing of time (Gülen 2005).

Fethullah Gülen follows the similar approach when discussing human rights as an important side of political reforms in the Muslim world. He is convinced that Islam is balanced, broad, and universal on this subject. Except for those who strive to tear down the state or the legitimate administration, or who have willingly taken someone's life, the Qur'an teaches us: "Anyone who kills a person, unless it be for murder or for causing dissension and spreading corruption in the land, it would be as if he killed humankind all together; and if any one saves a life, it would be as if he saved the life of humankind all together" (Al-Ma'ida 5:27-32). Pointing out the other side of the issue the Prophet stated: "Whoever is killed while defending their property is a martyr. Whoever is killed while defending their blood (life) is a martyr. Whoever is killed while defending their religion is a martyr. Whoever is killed while defending their family is a martyr." Ibn Abbas said that a murderer will stay in Hell for eternity. This is the same punishment that is assigned to unbelievers. This means that a murderer is subjected to the same punishment as an unbeliever (Unal and Williams 2000:133-134).

In short, in Islam, in terms of the punishment to be dealt on the Day of Judgment, a murderer will be considered to be as low as someone who has rejected God and the Prophet (an atheist in other words). If this is a fundamental principle of religion, then it should be taught in education (Gülen 2004:190).

Islam does not discriminate based on race, color, age, nationality, or physical traits. The Prophet declares that all people are equal as the teeth of a comb. He also declares: "You are all from Adam, and Adam is from earth. O servants of God, be brothers and sisters". At the same time - Fethullah Gülen is convinced - in Islam there are no minor or major rights. The right of the individual and the right of society are equal. One cannot be sacrificed for the other, to the extent that it has been decreed: "If a ship is carrying nine murderers and one innocent soul, that ship cannot be sunk to punish the nine murderers" (Gülen 2004:220-221, 230-231, 237).

The thinker analyses different rights recognized in Islam like the freedom of religion and belief, thought and expression, to own property and the sanctity of one's home, to marry and have children, to communicate and to travel, and the right to an unimpeded education. He underlines that the principles of Islamic jurisprudence are based on these and other rights, all of which have now been accepted by modern legal systems, such as the protection of life, religion, property, reproduction of humanity, and intellect, as well as the basic understanding of the equality of people, which is based on the fact that all people are human beings, and subsequently, the rejection of all racial, color, and linguistic discriminations.

Fethullah Gülen draws our attention to the fact that all these values have been protected as separate principles in modern legal systems which consider them as being "indispensable." Islam approaches human rights from the angle of these basic principles which will be - and should be - indispensable in the new millennium (Gülen 2004:169-170, 231).

6. Diversity and Dialogue as Indispensable Prerequisites for Political Reforms and Domination of Democracy

Compatibility between Islamic and modern democratic liberal values is not more than theoretical ground to combine the both for success of political reforms in the Muslim world. It will be possible only through the dialogue of different cultures and civilizations. In this respect Fethullah Gülen underlines that for centuries the civilizations of the East and the West existed separately from each other. This separation was based on the fact that the former retired from pursuits of intellect and science, while the latter retired from spirituality, metaphysics, and eternal and invariable values. But now the whole situation has changed. Modern means of communication and transportation have transformed the world into a large global village. So, those who expect that any radical changes in a country will be determined by that country alone and remain limited to it are unaware of current realities. This time is a period of interactive relations. Nations and peoples are more in need of and dependent on each other, a situation that causes closeness in mutual relations (Gülen 2004:230). More precisely Fethullah Gülen stresses that people must learn how to benefit from other people's knowledge and views, for these can be beneficial to their own system, thought and world. Especially they should always seek to benefit from the experiences of the experienced (Unal and Williams 2000:149). This position opens the way for the Muslim world to benefit from the modern Western democratic patterns.

Regarding Huntington's claim about the clash of civilizations, Fethullah Gülen considers that rather than being realistic evaluations regarding the future, these types of claims seem to be determining new goals in an attempt to influence public opinion. Actually, up until now, conflict is something that is desired by certain power centers. The masses have been put on alarm against a frequently conjectured and feared enemy. This enemy is more imaginary than real. It is in this manner that the masses have been prepared for every kind of war.

On the contrary, Islam is strictly against disorder, treachery, conflict, and oppression. Islam means peace, security, and well being. Thus, in a religion based on peace, security, and world harmony, war and conflict are negative aspects. In exceptional cases there is a right to self-defense but this can be done only according to certain principles. Islam has always breathed peace and goodness. Islam considers war as a secondary event. Rules have been placed in order to balance and limit it. For example, Islam takes justice and world peace as a basis: "Let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice" (Al-Ma'ida 5:8). In this respect, Fethullah Gülen states that tolerance and dialogue should be represented everywhere in the best possible way and should be an example to the whole world. Such an example will encourage people to come together, to gather round the same basic human values and, God willing, humankind will live one more spring before seeing the end of the world (Gülen 2004:257). Covering this issue from the other side Fethullah Gülen points out: "I don't believe there's going to be a clash between cultures or civilizations. If some people are planning such thing based on their current dreams and making claims on this subject, and if such a wave has risen and is on its way, then before we suffer such a clash, let's put a bigger wave in front of it and break their wave" (Unal and Williams 2000:189).

At the same time Fethullah Gülen sees diversity and pluralism as a natural fact. Even though the consideration of the world as a village becomes firmer and more prevalent over the course of time, different beliefs, races, customs, and traditions will continue to cohabit in this village. Each individual

is like a unique realm unto themselves. Therefore the desire for all humanity to be similar to one another is nothing more than wishing for the impossible. For this reason, the peace of this (global) village lies in respecting all these differences, considering these differences to be part of our nature and in ensuring that people appreciate these differences. Otherwise, it is unavoidable that the world will devour itself in a web of conflicts, disputes, fights, and the bloodiest of wars, thus preparing the way for its own end (Gülen 2004:250).

The thinker wants those differences to be admitted and professed explicitly. That is why he is an adamant supporter and promoter of inter-faith dialogue. In his view, a believer must communicate with any kind of thought and system. Fethullah Gülen points out that the dialogue has now expanded to wide regions of the world. In general, the results - he believes - have been positive. At the same time he is not optimistic about the present contribution of the Muslim world into this dialogue and does not suppose that Muslims will be able contribute much to the balance of the world in the near future. Till now they couldn't solve the problems of the world. Perhaps it could be achieved in the future (Gülen 2004:186). At the same time Fethullah Gülen puts forward the leading principles of such dialogue which is a must today. The first step in establishing it is forgetting the past, ignoring polemical arguments, and giving precedence to common points, which far outnumber polemical ones (Unal and Williams 2000:244-245).

7. Conclusion

Today, the Muslim world is torn between two contradictory trends: advancing along the road toward democratization and upsurges of radicalism. Modern Islam approaches these phenomena in quite a different way. Until recent times, balanced Islamic thought did not manifest the necessary dynamism when issues of democratization and political reforms or the possibility of the Muslim world joining the globalization process came up for discussion. In other words, even some decades ago this moderate trend of Islamic political and legal thought hadn't proposed definite and convincing solutions of the above mentioned problems based on the genuine Islamic mental tradition. We couldn't help but feel that, at the ideological level, Islam had so far been unable to meet the challenges of our times. No wonder, in the absence of a clear Islamic strategy, most contemporary authors remained reserved, or even pessimistic, about the future of the Islamic civilization. Those who would like to detach it from the world came up with a much clearer message.

There is still a widely shared opinion outside countries with predominantly Muslim populations that democracy and traditional Islamic values are incompatible. Islamic extremists share this view for different reasons: they are convinced that the contemporary developments threaten Islam. The global "Islamic project," or Islamization of mankind, is seen as the only adequate answer.

This leads to a question of fundamental importance: is Islamic ideological potential big enough to finally arrive at a formula that would bring Islamic values and the latest achievements of contemporary civilization together?

When trying to answer this question, we should take account of the fact that Islamic thought abounds in various trends, three of which until recently were considered the main ones. One of

them, the traditional trend, justifies conservation of sorts of Muslim society's present state; another, the fundamentalist trend, insists that the public and state structures should undergo radical changes and return to the literally understood Shari 'a. The modernist approach uses the outwardly Islamic interpretation in an attempt to justify liberal reforms patterned on the West.

Until recently, another of the many trends that interprets the contemporary world along Islamic lines remained lost to the public, which has its attention riveted on the three prominent trends. We have in mind the idea of tapping Islam's internal potential, which says that reality should be measured against the Shari 'a cornerstones, values, and general principles rather than its petty rules related to minor things and interpreted in a narrow-minded manner.

This is very close to what the Muslim reformers of the turn of the 20th century thought, even though they never got beyond the calls to return to ijihad and never tried to apply the other Shari'a principles to put their purely Islamic idea of the changing world on firmer ground. It should be added here that since the mid-20th century this position has been limited to the works of those scholars who preferred to concentrate on the immutable principles of the Shari 'a as opposed to its particular, and never consistent, solutions. Just recently, this theoretical construct had absolutely no influence on political and legal practices.

Now the situation is obviously changing: the formerly ignored trend has come to the fore as the most promising soil on which the strategy of contemporary Islam and the Muslim world will probably grow. Fethullah Gülen together with the other prominent Muslim thinkers played the decisive role in this evolution.

As it was shown, he has his own views on all above mentioned issues. In particular Fethullah Gülen believes that the only prospects of the Muslim world's political development and stability depend on its democratic transformation:

Democracy has developed over time. Just as it has gone through many different stages in the past, it will continue to evolve and improve in the future. Along the way, it will be shaped into a more humane and just system, one based on righteousness and reality. If human beings are considered as a whole, without disregarding the spiritual dimension of their existence and their spiritual needs, and without forgetting that human life is not limited to this mortal life and that all people have a great craving for eternity, democracy could reach the peak of perfection and bring even more happiness to humanity. Islamic principles of equality, tolerance, and justice can help it do just this (Gülen 2004:224).

It is obvious that Fethullah Gülen's thoughts about the role Islam could play to respond to these key questions are the most convincing ones. And what is more he has a movement which can implement his ideas (Yilmaz 2003; Yilmaz 2005a; Yilmaz 2005b:174-179).