

# KHADIJA MOSHEN-FINAN

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This workshop was organized around the questions Prince Turki AlFaysal was asked. They focused on the very title of the round table, i.e. the hopes arising from Gulf countries. Questions also focused on the social conditions of people coming from these countries, as well as those of people who live there, on human rights and on the status of women, on how Saudi Arabia sees the U.S. leadership, on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on the role of other countries in the region.

The expression "Arc of Hope" is opposed to that of "Arc of Crisis" formed by countries like Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

For Prince Turki AlFaysal, it is legitimate to speak of hope in light of the reforms undertaken by these countries: elections in Kuwait, political reforms in Bahrain, municipal elections in Saudi Arabia. He said that these reforms are carried out without violence, but nevertheless are reshaping the region. For the United States, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are first seen as producers of hydrocarbons, thus we see the rise of a Gulf diplomacy.

This hope is also seen by Western countries in these times of financial crisis because they expect a lot from the SWFs.

### **Social conditions and means of countering the social explosion**

For the Prince, the risks of social explosion are to be excluded to the extent that the state is generous. In Arabia, for example, school and medical care are free.

For Bassma Kodmani, there is no risk of social explosion but we are seeing a new discourse on poverty and a new view of the disadvantaged. We are thus discovering a portion of the population. All this was intended by the king to increase the awareness of the affluent. There is therefore clearly a new social discourse.

However, continued Bassma Kodmani, foreign populations of Indian or Iranian origin living in the Gulf countries, carry a risk of social explosion. In the small Gulf countries, that foreign population has not stopped increasing, yet these people must find their place within these societies. The question of social rights arises naturally at first, and in the longer term that of citizenship. Will these countries succeed in reconciling liberal economies and the recognition of their ethnic and cultural diversity?

### **Human rights and the position of women in society**

Saudi Arabia has enacted reforms in recent years, recognizing certain rights, revising its Constitution in 1993 and setting up an advisory board. But Saudi Arabia does not claim to democratize itself quickly. This country is aware of the importance of conservative forces including the Wahhabi religious establishment. They must move step by step while integrating religious values. Reforms will not come through the introduction of secularism. Gradually, women will participate in public life. This requires developing the educational system, women must have the same education as men. Today, in Arabia, in higher education, we have 55% of women but account for only 10% of the work force.

### **American leadership and the role of other countries**

For the Prince, Washington and Saudi Arabia must necessarily think about the outcome of the crises and tensions in the Middle East. They must be attentive to the way the world changes, to China's role, to that of Russia in international relations. We must develop together a more fair world and stop dictating a Western point of view. Some countries, like Syria or Iran, could take part in those discussions, trying for example, as suggested by Christophe Boltanski, to reconcile the parties in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but then we must define the conditions for dialogue. Regarding Iran, the Prince said that the attitude of the Gulf countries is not unanimous. Some States believe that Iran is a threat and others wish to find the terms of a regional neighbourhood policy.