

EIR Reconstruction Proposal Receives Unprecedented Attention in Syria

by Ulf Sandmark

Nov. 30—From November 14-22, 2015, Helga Zepp-La-Rouche's Schiller Institute brought a proposal directly into Syria for immediately starting reconstruction of that war-ravaged nation. The plan, published in the Nov. 13 edition of *EIR*, received extensive attention within leading institutions and media, showing the eagerness of that nation for such a reconstruction effort. Clearly a broad mobilization for reconstruction like the one that the Institute proposed—one led by the establishing of a national reconstruction bank, utilizing the most modern technology, and linking Syria with great infrastructure projects of the great New Silk Road development projects—is possible.

A fifteen-person delegation from the Swedish NGO Syrian Support Committee for Democracy took the Schiller plan, called Phoenix Project Syria, to Damascus. The delegation included this author, an economist from the Schiller Institute and *EIR*'s Stockholm correspondent.

The Swedish NGO is one of the best-known Syrian exile organizations supporting Syria today. It is pushing for re-establishment of diplomatic relations and an end to the murderous EU embargo. The delegation was able to meet with Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban, the political and media advisor to the President of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, and also with Prime Minister Wael al-Halqi and four ministries. Meetings also occurred with the Speaker of the Parliament; the chairmen of the al-Baath party, both



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The Swedish delegation meets with Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II. Reporter Ulf Sandmark is shown speaking to the Patriarch.

internationally and nationally; and the three top religious leaders of Syria,—the Grand Mufti of Syria, Dr. Badr al-Din Hasson, who made a point of receiving the delegation together with the Bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church, Lukas al-Khoury; and the Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Ignatius Aphrem II.

Patriarch Aphrem was already acquainted with Alexander Hamilton, upon whose work the Schiller Institute proposal heavily relies. Before his assumption of leadership of all of international Syrian Orthodoxy, Aphrem had been its bishop based in New Jersey, U.S.A.

The delegation also held discussions with leaders of several national aid organizations, including the Chairwoman of the national aid organization al-Waed, Rim Suleiman; Mother Agnes Miriam and her aid organization; the Executive Director of St. Ephrem Patriarchal

Development Committee, Shadi Sarweh; the Chairwoman of the National Family Organization (FAM); a Board member from The Syria Trust for Development, Talal Moualla; and the Chairman of the National organization of Medical Doctors. Two military rehabilitation hospitals were visited, at the invitation of the Surgeon General of the Syrian Army, Dr. Moriss Mowaz.

In all meetings the *EIR* article “Phoenix Project Syria: Discussion Points on Syrian Reconstruction” was briefly presented, in addition to the Arabic language translation.

Upon my return, I answered a series of questions from *EIR*, presented below:

EIR: Was there a formal press conference or presentation of the report?

Sandmark: At the agency responsible for reconstruction, the Syrian Investment Agency, I gave a presentation on the proposal to the General Director, Engineer Hala Ghazal, and her staff, as well as assembled journalists.

I described the creation of a Syrian Phoenix Reconstruction bank as an opportunity for Syria to kickstart rebuilding, and unite the nation. A credit system could finance the urgent necessity of putting all available unemployed labor to work in reconstruction and development. This would be especially important because it would make it possible to reconcile former rebels by bringing them into a common effort for the nation, and also to recruit back the very much missed youth who have gone abroad as refugees.

As the reconstruction proposal had been presented to this audience before our trip, my presentation stressed what was not known—how the Western world had adopted just such a dirigist economic policy during emergencies such as wars and depressions. Throughout the Third World and Eastern Europe, nations are only allowed to apply Western monetarist economics, such as now dominates every university, and are forced to submit to conditionalities for national reconstruction of the sort concocted by the IMF, World Bank, and the Western financial institutions.

The Schiller Institute proposal was enthusiastically received by both officials and some journalists. The major question during the many discussions during the visit was: Will they allow us to do this? However, when we pointed to the new paradigm of the BRICS, who are already working according to these economic principles, that was enough to reassure the questioner.

As the Syrian Investment Agency is open to immediately starting some projects, we discussed several Swedish private reconstruction projects to begin immediately; this would start to break the embargo. A joint working group was also suggested, which would involve Syrians refugees in Sweden and others who want to start planning a reconstruction project in Syria. Mapping would be needed to find out what kind of education and vocational training will be needed, and how the refugees can be brought into such education programs and job training.

Similar preparations would be necessary to identify the different industries and research institutes that have relevant technology for Syrian reconstruction and, in general, for the development of the whole New Silk Road. Studies and planning of all aspects of the New Silk Road and models of the Phoenix Reconstruction Bank would also begin, with the intention to spread such activities in organizations in Sweden. Each organization for each profession needs to start a working group, so that all aspects of the great New Silk Road Project can be mapped out; in this context, necessary attention can be paid to Syria as a very important transport node in the Silk Road network.

EIR: Can you give us more of an idea of the content of your discussions with the religious leaders, both informal and formal—and with other people you were able to discuss with?

Sandmark: The proposal for a Reconstruction Bank and a credit system was also discussed with the religious leaders. Actually they were the ones who could most easily see the moral dimension of creating credit “out of nothing” for realizing the great potentials of Syria. I picked up on this and emphasized the moral aspect in every subsequent presentation by noting that this economic policy is self-evident for a religious person. Just ask yourself: Should God have waited for the money, when he created the world out of nothing?

I also raised the issue of climate, as this now is being posed as a religious issue after the tragic mistake of the Pope, and left them with the *EIR* Special Report “[Global Warming Scare Is Population Reduction, Not Science.](#)”

EIR: You say there was lots of media coverage. Can you tell us more about its content, headlines? Was it TV, newspapers, radio?

Sandmark: The meetings were covered for five days in a row on TV. More and more the coverage,

which was also massive in newspapers, took up the idea of a Phoenix Reconstruction bank.

The TV coverage included three 50 minute interviews on Al-Ikhbaria and Al-Talaki, where members of the delegation spoke in Arabic about the activities in support of Syria in Sweden, but also about the idea of a Reconstruction bank and the New Silk Road policies. One of the hosts of the TV programs said that the interview he just did, was the best and most interesting he had done in his whole career.

EIR: What is the impact of the embargo on the Syrian people?

Sandmark: The most vicious impact of the EU/UN embargo is on the health sector, where it has had murderous effects. Humanitarian aid is supposed to be allowed under the embargo, but our visit to the Minister of Health, Dr. Nizar Yazigi, demonstrated that the West is not living up to such humanitarian duties. There is a lack of medicine, especially for long-term illnesses like cancer and diabetes. People with such illnesses just die if they do not get the medicines they require, which are smuggled into the country surreptitiously and at great expense.

The Minister described how every citizen of Syria still gets all medical treatment and the available medicines for free. This is despite the targeting of the pharmaceutical factories by the terrorists, who dismantled them, sold equipment to Turkey, and left them destroyed. New factories have been built, and with the help of Russia and Iran, Syria is now getting 89 percent of its needed medical supplies. Pharmacies in areas occupied by the terrorists are supplied with drugs by the government. The Minister proudly said that the nation has so far avoided any epidemics.

The 1200-bed Tishreen Military Hospital in Damascus was built by the French and has now been destroyed by terrorists. Half of its doctors were trained in France. Because most of the hospital equipment is from Europe, the embargo is very damaging to Syria in spite of words about allowing humanitarian aid. When machines are broken, they cannot be repaired. Spare parts smuggled via Jordan are sold at twice the normal price. As there are no medical instruments available from Russia, the aid from there and from Iran cannot solve these problems.

The World Health Organization helps with some of the things Syria lacks, and UNICEF supplies some children's medicines, but when asked about the Red Cross, the staff of the Health ministry said bluntly that "that is a political organization;" it only supplies those it likes.



Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban, the political and media advisor to Syrian President Bashar Assad, talking with state TV, after her meeting with the Swedish delegation.

The staffers said that nothing has been delivered to the government health sector from the Red Cross. However, often the nutritional special biscuits for children, supplied by the Red Cross, have been found in the possession of the terrorists.

EIR: Can you give us a sense of how people see the Russian intervention, whether people believe that ISIS can be defeated, and how they view Obama's personal role?

Sandmark: Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban started by explaining that she knows why the Western media and the TV stations Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya are lying. She got the shock treatment when meeting with State Department official William Burns and Elliott Abrams in Washington. After listening to Burns for a while, she dared to interrupt him saying: "Sorry, what you are saying is not relevant to the Syrian situation." To which Burns exclaimed: "Who cares about relevance? It's concepts!"

"Syria was the only Arab country against the NATO invasion of Libya. Where is the news about Libya today?" Dr. Shabaan asked. "Who speaks about Yemen? What did the Yemen people do? How can the West be silent about Yemen, as if on another planet? Of 19 hijackers on 9-11, 17 were from Saudi Arabia! We lost a lot. But the West lost its credibility among the Arab people." ... "They look at us as colonies and we take that into account."

She continued: "London embraced the Muslim Brotherhood. Most of the leaders those fighting in Syria



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Some unreconstructed suburbs of Damascus

are foreigners. They do not even show their faces to others while eating. It was when Russia heard the terrorists spoke Russian among themselves that they decided to intervene to defend their security in Syria. . . . The terrorists will have to leave. We've had many occupiers. They either die or leave. Syria will prevail."

Confidence in the government and the support by the Russians was visible in the decreased level of fear in the population, shown by more people in the streets in the evenings, compared to our last visit one year ago. The delegation was able to move into many more districts in Damascus, including areas that were closed to us last year. People are repairing the damage from the war as rapidly as possible. Going around by car, I tried to find any traces of the war, but they were nowhere to be seen in central Damascus and in the suburbs. Only in Eastern Ghouta, in the suburbs along the airport road, could I see war-damaged housing districts, but even those were under repair.

The military was disciplined and well-dressed in their Syrian-made uniforms and proceeded efficiently with their controls at the many military checkpoints in the city. The war was only heard at a distance from time to time, especially in the morning hours. On Thursday, Nov. 19th, when the terrorists took revenge against the Syrian army for killing three terrorist leaders in different places in Syria, Damascus was hit by 37 mortar shells, which killed and injured many ordinary citizens. The next day we saw that the damage had been cleaned up, and that people were going about their business in the same streets; this is a fully functioning capital city and home front.

EIR: Do you have anything else to add?

Sandmark: Yes, I would like to add an observation about something I had not expected to find so strong, even though, in retrospect, I should have expected it in a country with institutions thousands of years old. What I noted was that there is continuous discussion about such important cultural matters as the Nature of God (and therefore also of Man). I should have known, since Syria is already in a dialogue with China about their respective thousands of years of philosophical and cultural evolution.

I concluded that the dialogue on reconstruction is ready to become a dialogue of civilizations. Leading people in Syria are working to define a concept of nationhood from the highest standpoint of their very rich cultural heritage. This is part of a deep-going reaction against Islamic fundamentalism and a surge in the population for old values. We could see clearly, compared to last year, that now the Syrian flag is held up much more by the government to represent the nation. We could see that Syria is presented much more as a country where all groups with their many thousands of years-old cultures tolerate and live together. The ancient heritage monuments do not only represent the past but also the future Syria. It means that there is now a genuine openness for a dialogue of civilizations on the highest universal values, like those of Schiller.

In this way, the most efficient ideological counter-offensive against the barbaric ideas of ISIS can get underway, and also help Western countries find the weaknesses in their own cultures that allowed their countries to be used as a staging grounds for so many terrorists that were sent to attack Syria.