

'Conviviality will be reinstalled in Bosnia'

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By Suzan Fraser

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ANKARA: Anything that the west will attempt to do in Bosnia-Herzegovina cannot go beyond being a superficial, useless, corrective measure on a fait accompli, Professor Ghassan Salame, Director of Studies at France's prestigious CNRS research center, says on a pessimistic note.

But, on a more optimistic note, he believes in the possibility of establishing some level of conviviality between the communities in the former Yugoslavia.

He has seen "conviviality" reinstalled in Nigeria where terrible massacres -- worse in magnitude than those in Bosnia -- took place in the 1960s and in his native Lebanon, where he says, people now suffer from traffic jams more than anything else.

Salame, who professes a special interest in military intervention and ethnicity, says that civil wars are always worse than general wars, because people rape and kill their neighbors.

"But, history tells us also that after terrible massacres and rapes, people are too often ready to become realistic and to engage in new forms of conviviality."

In times of crisis people tend to forget their similarity and overvalue their differences -- in this case religion, contends Salame, who arrived in Turkey to give a series of conferences and meet with Turkish colleagues as guest of the French Institute in Ankara.

"Times of realism will come back sooner or later," he believes: "after all, there has been a lot of intermarriage and they have the same ethnicity."

He is pessimistic about the international community's role to precipitate a solution which is acceptable in Bosnia, but he is optimistic about the people's readiness to live together. "Times of civil peace last longer than times of civil war and rare are those countries where there is complete ethnic, linguistic and confessional homogeneity."

He is also highly critical of those in the west who encouraged the Bosnians to have ambitious unrealistic dreams about the support they were going to get. They were following short term interests, he maintains.

"Sometime we should go and punish, not those who were reluctant to help as much as those who promised, and knew already that they could not deliver."

He is optimistic that "conviviality" will unfold in Cyprus too.

He says there is some movement on the island, and the general opinion reigning in the world is that the deployment of U.N. forces may have complicated the settlement of the dispute. "Both communities know there is a buffer between the two and keep looking for maximum demands, knowing that if maximum demands are not met, the price to pay is a status quo. And, he says, neither side cares about changing the status quo." He explains that the threat of withdrawal of U.N. troops for financial reasons will compell the Cy-

prits to live together, and to realize that the alternative to a settlement is not a status quo.

Salame maintains that as "the ideological cleavage went down with the Cold War, other forms of cleavages have emerged of which ethnicity is just one them." There is ethnic revival in Africa, the Balkans and Central Asia, as people return to ethnicity as a form of protection and solidarity in times of crisis, like they turn to religion, family or tribes.



Prof. Ghassan Salame

He says that sometimes the ethnic revival in internationalized, as was the case with the Kurds in Northern Iraq. The Kurds were used to destabilize the regime in Iraq.

"If you depend so much on international politics in order to assert your ethnicity, you play with fire," he says, believing that the internationalization of their cause would be a curse for in the Iraq Kurds in long term.

"They will not be free to look after their own specific interest and have to abide by plans of the international community."

He personally hoped that in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War, the Iraqi Kurds would make a deal with Saddam Hussein and not fall for the manipulation by outside forces to ask for more. It is a curse to be protected so well, he says. He believes that the end of Cold War has opened many avenues for Turkey, but this, he says, may be a curse and a blessing for Turkey. Turkey is in the intersection of three subsystems -- the Middle East, Balkans and Central Asia -- and cannot avoid not being present in any one of them.

"Turkey has somehow to spread thin its influence because it cannot extract itself from any of these three subsystems," Salame argues.