



Fear of democracy

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The West stands by idly as its foundations are being rent asunder.

Last Friday the UN's Human Rights Council took a direct swipe at freedom of expression. In a unanimous 32-0 decision, the Council instructed its "expert on freedom of expression" to report to the Council on all instances in which individuals "abuse" their freedom of speech by giving expression to racial or religious bias.

The measure was proposed by paragons of freedom Egypt and Pakistan. It was supported by all Arab, Muslim and African countries - founts of liberty one and all. European states abstained from the vote.

The US, which is not a member of the Human Rights Council tried to oppose the measure. In a speech

before the Council, US Ambassador to the UN in Geneva Warren Tichenor warned that the resolution's purpose is to undermine freedom of expression because it imposes, "restrictions on individuals rather than emphasize[ing] the duty and responsibility of governments to guarantee, uphold, promote and protect human rights."

By seeking to criminalize free speech, the resolution stands in breach of the UN's Declaration of Human Rights. Article 19 of that document states explicitly, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

The Europeans' decision to abstain rather than oppose the measure seems, at first glance rather surprising. Given that the EU member states are among the UN's most emphatic champions, it would have seemed normal for them to have opposed a resolution that works to undermine one of the UN's foundational documents, and indeed, one of the most basic tenets of Western civilization.

But then again, given the EU's stands in recent years against freedom of expression, there really is nothing to be surprised about. The EU's current bow to intellectual thuggery is of course found in its response to the Internet release of Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders' film "Fitna."

The EU has gone out of its way to attack Wilders for daring to utilize his freedom of expression. The EU's presidency released a statement condemning the film for "inflaming hatred." Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende issued statements claiming that the film "serves no other purpose than to cause offense." Then too, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon blasted the film as "offensively anti-Islamic."

These statements follow the EU's quest to restrict freedom of speech following the 2005 publication of cartoons of Muhammed in Denmark's *Jyllands Posten* newspaper. They also come against the backdrop of the systematic silencing of anti-jihadist intellectuals throughout the continent. These intellectuals like Peter Redeker in France and

Paul Cliteur in the Netherlands, are threatened into silence by European jihadists. And the governments of Europe either do nothing to defend and protect the threatened thinkers or justify the intellectual blackmailers by sympathizing with their anger.

It is axiomatic that freedom of expression is the foundation of human freedom and progress. When people are not allowed to express themselves freely, there can be no debate or inquiry. It is only due to free debate and inquiry that humanity has progressed from the Dark Age to the Digital Age. This is why the first act of every would-be tyrant is to take control over the marketplace of ideas.

Yet today, the nations of Europe and indeed much of the Western world, either sit idly by and do nothing to defend that freedom or collaborate with unfree and often tyrannical Islamic states and terrorists in silencing debate and stifling dissent. There are two reasons that this is the case.

In the first instance, the political Left, which rules supreme in the EU's bureaucracy as well as in most of the intellectual centers of the free world, has shown through its actions that it has no real commitment to democratic values. Rather than embrace democratic values, the Left increasingly adopts the parlance of democracy cynically, with the aim of undermining free discourse in the public sphere in the name of "democracy."

Writing of the leftist uproar against Wilders' film in Europe in *Der Spiegel*, Henryk Broder noted that almost across the board, the European media has castigated Wilders as "a right wing populist." As Broder notes, on its face this assertion is absurd for Wilders is a radical liberal.

In "Fitna," the outspoken legislator shows how verses of the Koran are used by jihadists to justify the most heinous acts of mass murder and hatred. His film superimposes verses from the Koran calling for the murder of non-Muslims with actual scenes of jihadist carnage. It also superimposes verses from the Koran vilifying Jews with footage of Islamic clerics repeating the verses and with a three year old girl saying that she learned that Jews are monkeys and pigs from her Koran classes. "Fitna" concludes with a challenge to Muslims to expunge these hateful, murderous religious tenets from their belief system.

While arguably, but not necessarily inflammatory, Wilders' film serves an invitation to Europe and to the Islamic world to have an open debate. His film challenges viewers - both Muslim and non-Muslim - to think and to discuss whether Islam accords with the notions of human freedom and what can be done to stop jihadists from exploiting the Koran to justify their acts of murder, tyranny and hate.

As Broder notes, by calling Wilders a "right-wing populist," the Left seeks to silence both him and his call for an open discourse. The underlying message of such labeling is

that Wilders is somehow beyond the pale of polite company and therefore his message should be ignored by all right thinking people. If you don't want to be intellectually isolated and socially ostracized like Wilders, then you mustn't watch his film or take it seriously. Doing so would be an act of "right-wing populism" - and everyone knows what that means.

Like all anti-democratic movements, today's political Left seeks to silence debate and so undermine democracy first by demonizing anyone who doesn't agree with it and then, by passing laws that criminalize speech or override the people's right to decide how they wish to live. In the EU, the Lisbon Treaty effectively regurgitated by bureaucratic fiat the constitution that was rejected by voters in France and Holland and was set to be defeated by the British. In Britain, Parliament has labored for years to pass a law which would criminalize the act of insulting Islam. Then too, one of the first acts the Browne government took after entering office last summer was to prohibit its members from talking about "Islamic terrorism."

As in Europe so too, in Israel, the Left goes to extraordinary lengths to undermine democracy in the name of democracy. In just one recent example, this week, leftist law professor Mordechai Kremnitzer warned the Knesset not to pass a law enabling a referendum on the partition of Jerusalem and the surrender of the Golan Heights. As Kremnitzer sees it, "If the verdict of a referendum is determined by a small ma-

majority, that includes Arab voters then a certain sector whose view was not accepted is liable to attempt to reject the legitimacy of the referendum and may fight against it violently."

That "certain sector" Kremnitzer was referring to, of course are the Jews who oppose the partition of Jerusalem and the surrender of the Golan Heights by a large majority.

Kremnitzer's argument is both ridiculous and self-serving. It is ridiculous because he knows that in 2004, Likud members held a referendum of the government's planned withdrawal from Gaza and northern Samaria. Then prime minister Ariel Sharon pledged to abide by the results of his party's vote. But then, when 65 percent of Likud voters rejected his plan, he ignored them. And public's the reaction, while strong, was completely non-violent.

The only force that used sustained force and intimidation in the run-up to the withdrawal from Gaza and northern Samaria was the government. It deployed tens of thousands of policemen to break up protests, bar protesters from travelling to lawful demonstrations, and jailed protesters without trial for months. In its overtly anti-democratic and legally dubious actions, the government was ably defended by Kremnitzer and his colleagues who either stood by as the civil liberties of the protesters were trampled or enthusiastically defended the government's abandonment of democratic values by calling the protesters "anti-democratic." Indeed, in his testimony Wednesday, Kremnitzer

parroted that argument by claiming that referendums "are a recipe for harming democracy."

Aside from being factually and theoretically wrong, Kremnitzer's argument -- like the arguments of the EU bureaucracy which sidelined Europe's citizenry by passing the Lisbon Treaty -- is transparently self-serving. Like his EU counterparts, he knows full well that his support for an Israeli surrender of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights is a minority view. So his actual concern is not the health of Israeli democracy, but the power of the political Left to determine policy against the interests and wishes of the public.

The second reason that the Left acquiesces to the silencing of speech is because its members are just as concerned about the threat of Islamic supremacy as their political opponents. But unlike their opponents, they are too cowardly to do anything about it. This point was made clear too, in the wake of the release of Wilders' film.

This week a delegation of Christian and Muslim Dutch religious leaders travelled to Cairo to speak to religious Islamic leaders. Speaking to Radio Netherlands, Bas Plaisier, who heads the Dutch Protestant Church said that the delegation's mission was to "limit the possible consequences" of Wilders' film. The consequences he was referring to, of course, are the prospects of violent Muslim rioting and attacks against the Dutch and against Christians worldwide.

Radio Netherlands reported that Plaisier "has been receiving disturbing reports from Dutch nationals all over the world, including ones about fear of repercussions among Christians in Sudan, the Middle East and Indonesia."

So the real reason the Dutch Protestant Church decries the film not because it thinks Wilders is wrong, but because its leaders believe that Wilders is absolutely right. It's just that unlike Wilders, who has placed his life in danger to express his views, they are too cowardly to defend themselves, and so, they travel to Cairo to genuflect to religious leaders who daily oversee the preaching of hate and Islamic supremacy in Egyptian mosques. They go on bended knee to coo before those

who coerced the institutionalization of Egypt's religious persecution of its Christian Coptic minority and its silencing of liberal critics of the Mubarak regime and the Muslim Brotherhood.

And that is the rub. By squelching debate - out of loathing for their non-leftist political opponents and out of fear of jihadists and the regimes that promote them -- the West as a whole undermines not only its own values and foundational creeds. It also undermines the non-jihadists of the Islamic world, who, if ever empowered, would work to promote a form of Islam that does not respond to challenge with violence but rather with the discourse of reason and mutual respect for differences of opinion.