**3. ULUSLARARASI ORTA DOĞU KONGRESİ**

**3RD INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE EAST CONGRESS**

6-8 Mayıs May, 2015

"Mezhepler, Etnisite ve Çatışma Çözümü"
"Sects, Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution"

www.hatay.gov.tr

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti
KÜLTÜR ve TURİZM BAKANLIĞI
www.kultur.gov.tr

DOĞAKA
www.dogaka.org.tr

MARMARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ 1883
ORTADOĞU ARAŞTIRMALARI ENSTİTÜSÜ
www.oae.marmara.edu.tr

MUSTAFA KEMAL ÜNİVERSİTESİ HATAY - 1992
www.mku.edu.tr

TASAM
TÜRK ASYA STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
TURKISH ASIAN CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES
www.tasam.org

# 3RD INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE EAST CONGRESS

## "Sects, Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution"

### ( 07-08 May 2015, Hatay - Turkey )

Conflict is defined as; behaviors that are adopted by two or more parties when needs, perceptions and feelings about their interests differ from each other. It is suggested that human nature is indecisive about conflict. Many political philosophers, notably Thomas Hobbes argue that conflict is innate to human nature (homo homini lupus) although no one wants to live in an environment where there is conflict. On the other hand parties that are involved in conflict mostly argue that they are in a dispute or negotiation. They at least try to deny that they are in a conflict and hide it from the outside world so that they can escape from its consequences. Even though it would be unrealistic to imagine a world without conflicts, managing the conflict process and reducing the damages of it is in the hands of involving parties. Humanity has the will to live in peace and harmony without conflicts.

From a thousand years old historical perspective; except short term conquests, domestic tensions and disputes, most of the political conflicts in Middle East are between outside and local factions; long term conflicts after the Mongol invasion and Crusades are the most prominent examples. Afterwards; Middle East had entered a period of peace and stability for centuries until Western powers which gave the name "Middle East" to the region, colonized it.

Middle East had been witnessed to conflicts and wars between colonial powers or its representatives and local elements in colonial era where there is chaos in the region. After the First World War Middle East was either divided based on sectarian and ethnic lines or it was divided without considering various sects and ethnic groups. The only goal in these divisions was whether they were convenient for Western powers' interest. Conflicts and wars between local elements in the region basically served the interest of colonial powers. The most prominent tools that were used by external powers to divide the region according to their interest have been exploitation of ethnic, religious and sectarian identities. Today with the fall of Saddam Hussein and disintegration of Iraq according to U.S interests is the most prominent example of exploitation of ethnic and sectarian identities by external powers.

Unfortunately local elements which do not realize the perils of this situation and stuck in their shallow perception of interests easily become the instrument of external powers. Middle East due to its natural resources and global strategic position is vulnerable against external interventions. In the upcoming days; it is highly possible that all great powers will try to exploit ethnic and sectarian tensions which are the soft belly of many Middle Eastern countries. In order to prevent this, it is necessary to build local and intellectual consciousness in the region.

Today removal of either ethnic or religious identities is not possible and inhumane. Especially with modernity; particularly in Western World identities and interests have began to be determined based on ethnicity. Nation and state building processes have been carried out based on ethnicity and European powers rose based upon national identities. "Nationalism" had become the main ideology in the world. Countries outside of Europe; especially Islamic countries have almost never adopted a nationalism that is based on mere ethnic identity. The main reason of this situation is that a similar struggle between Catholic Church and Bourgeoisie in Europe had never occurred in Islamic world. Although European countries which based their interests upon ethnic nationalism rather than patriotism had gained power in the world arena for some time; ethnic nationalism had become the sole reason of First and Second World Wars.

Second World War showed the destructive power of ethnic nationalism. Implacable adversaries of two world wars; France and Germany, both made concessions with regards to their ethnic nationalism and started the European Union project. In fact; European Union is the most prominent example where eternal adversaries put aside their national ideologies to create an identity based on more broad geographical and cultural values and show the world how ethnic tensions can be transformed into diverse cultural richness.

Disagreements over; government-opposition relations, sharing public authorities, attitude towards government with regards to share of interests, determination of national identities in Middle East caused various dissents from the beginning of the history of Islam. Therefore due to sociological necessities, there have been disagreements and divisions in Islamic World. But as the words of Prophet Mohammed: "Diversity of my people (Ummah) is a blessing from God" explains that this diversity can only be sustained with unity, mutual tolerance and dialogue. As historical facts show that, Islamic World had stability, peace and wealth when this type of understanding dominates political and social sphere. But when religious, sectarian and political identities were used to secure the interests of certain groups; this strengthen the divisions and Islamic World had experienced most horrible incidents of its history. For instance; through history Sunni-Shia conflict based on faith and ideology, actually is a result of collision of political interests. On the other hand when Shia and Sunni Muslims had been in solidarity; there had been peace and stability in Middle East. In a similar way, provocation of certain ethnic groups by external powers in a specific region causes disputes and conflicts.

Today's political, sociological and technological opportunities and difficulties force people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds to live together unlike traditional periods of the past. Also advancement in modern transportation, communication tools and trade not only bind different religious and ethnic groups in a country but also affect all countries in a region. Therefore ending disputes, tensions and conflicts between different groups and prevalence of peaceful co-existence at individual, territorial and international level are necessary. Conflict resolution is a complicated and multiple processes. Although causes of a conflict may be political or economical, ethnic and religious identities can be transformed as the main elements of the conflict. In order to resolve the conflicts, sufficient research and analysis techniques are necessary. The main reason of a conflict might be political or strategic; so it would be insufficient to take measures that are identity based. Each reason of the conflict should be analyzed separately and they should be eliminated according to their nature.

Most of the time; conflict resolution is required analytic thinking, revision of approaches that are related to the conflict and elimination of stereotypes. This is a difficult process and therefore confidence building measures should be taken into consideration. Conflicts emerge due to perceptual, emotional and behavioral reasons. A conflict may get complicated from time to time and develop into different directions. The perceptual and emotional reasons of the conflicts in Middle East are based on history and culture. However; main elements of a conflict can be managed and in modern times conflicts have been manipulated by external powers in the region. Therefore underlying elements of a conflict such as; perceptual, emotional and behavioral should be managed by regional actors rather than external power. Otherwise; external powers would shape the conflict in accordance with their interests and destabilize the region.

Identities of actors in a conflict determine the characteristics of their perceptions and emotions about who is friend or foe. The changes in perceptual, emotional and behavioral dimensions in a conflict affect other dimensions. Therefore managing and shaping the image of a conflict is important as managing the perceptual, emotional and behavioral elements of a conflict. If these elements are to be manipulated by external actors; parties involving in the conflict cannot create their own identities or interests. Therefore Middle Eastern countries should shape their behavior in accordance with creating a broad Middle Eastern identity.

The main reasons of conflicts are lack of lack of communication and dialogue. If parties do not communicate about their needs and interests or communicate on behalf of outside actors' needs and interests; the conflict cannot be resolved. The resolution of a conflict can only be provided with dialogue based on sincere feelings, openness of communication channels and limited intervention of second parties (Although they might be sincere). Human nature has a tendency to trust misperceptions or misunderstandings. At this point; the interactions and experiences of the past has a huge effect. Besides many people try to resolve conflicts without fully understanding them and when conflicts intensify rational thinking begins to disappear. In any case; the resolution of the conflicts become easy when there is open communication channels.

Although the continuity of a historical conflict today makes no sense; the Sunni-Shia conflict which still continues in Middle East nowadays means that parties involving in this conflict have not taken any lessons from history. Conflicts through history have emerged as consequences of disputes and divisions that occurred in the past. In Modern and post-modern times; there have been important changes in politics, sociology and economics. First of all; modern state model makes it necessary for people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds to live together with mutual respect.

The Middle East is strategically, economically and culturally important to regional and global powers and each day the need for conflict resolution in this region is increasing. There is a high possibility of exploitation of ethnic and sectarian identities by external powers in Middle East. The main aim of the **3rd International Middle Eastern Congress** is to create an intellectual consciousness and communication channels to resolve conflicts in the name of protecting the rights of Middle Eastern countries and its people. Inspired by the practice of life, the initiative based in Hatay and Turkey continues by strengthening / institutionalizing as in the previous Congresses.

**Main Theme**

**"Sects and Ethnicity in Middle East: Conflict Resolution"**

**Subthemes**

Historical Background and Economical, Cultural, Psychological Factors

Sects and Ethnicity: Management Dynamics of Extraterritorial Powers

Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and other countries; Proactive Recommendations

Sects and Ethnicity: Management with Regional References

The Difficulties in Policy Making in Multi-Dimensional World System

The Impact of Ideological and Theological Backgrounds

The Examples to Modern Conflict Resolution: Successful Experiences

Systematic/Structural Problems, Opportunities, Cooperation and Conflict Resolution

www.hatay.gov.tr

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti
KÜLTÜR ve TURIZM BAKANLIĞI
www.kultur.gov.tr

www.dogaka.org.tr

ORTADOĞU ARAŞTIRMALARI
ENSTİTÜSÜ
www.oae.marmara.edu.tr

www.mku.edu.tr

TASAM
TÜRK ASYA STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
TURKISH ASIAN CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES
www.tasam.org