



A blot on Israeli democracy

By Arik Carmon

The voices heard from circles of Israel's extreme right on the matter of ejecting Arab communities from Israel to Palestine have been joined recently by Dr. Uzi Arad (The New Republic, November 28). These perverse voices are calling for "exchanges of populated territories," so that a large proportion of the Israeli Arab public will leave the areas under Israeli sovereignty. These voices are rising from the margins in a sporadic way, and it is fitting that they be answered by those who strive to ensure the firm foundation of a Jewish and democratic state on the ideological infrastructure of Zionism.

Arad's arguments are racist in nature, damaging to human rights - and of course to the foundations of democracy - stand in contradiction to international norms and are unrealizable. His smooth-tongued justification for the mechanisms of territorial exchange is that they will "increase ethnic homogeneity." The meaning of this is moving the border between Israel and a future Palestinian state so that the locales of Umm al-Fahm, Arara, Barta'a, Kalansua, Taibeh, Tira and Kfar Qassem will be thrust out of Israeli sovereignty.

Setting the goal of "increasing ethnic homogeneity" is repugnant and disgusting. It means the establishment of a clearly racist goal for seekers of democracy, who in the age of globalization are realizing the principles of multiculturalism. In addition to any other justification, "increasing ethnic homogeneity" is likely to continue with the creation of closed communities of Mizrahim (Jews with origins in the Muslim countries), Russians, ultra-Orthodox and everyone else.

The call to eject Israeli Arabs from the realm of Israeli sovereignty, accompanied by innumerable rationalizations, mainly demographic, is often also defined as a "proposal for exchanges of populated territories." However, it must be clear that denying the citizenship of anyone who does not want to be denied it is an infringement of a citizen's basic rights.

The correct name, then, should be a "proposal to confiscate the citizenship of Arab Israelis." The termination of an individual's citizenship, according to international law, cannot occur unless he relinquishes it by agreement. This fact makes it possible to say that all talk of confiscating the citizenship of citizens of this country by drawing a border that will leave their locale on the non-Israeli side of that line, is futile and baseless. That is, beyond the basic infringement of civil rights, the very fact of suggesting this idea in the reality of the 21st century - in which the norms of democracy are a focus of struggle on the part of the free world - is a blot on those who propose it and on the country from which they come.

Finally, the utter rejection of this proposal should be rooted in the Zionist foundations of the Jewish and democratic state of Israel. All varieties of Zionists have dealt with the issue of the Arab who dwells here. It can be argued, even in a general way, that the various versions of the thinkers and the doers stem from and return to the rational, democratic foundations of the attitude toward the minority.

In recent years unprecedented efforts have been invested in the attempt to establish a written constitution for the State of Israel. Leading this effort is the Knesset, which has completed, under the leadership of the chairman of its Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, MK Michael Eitan (Likud), the first stage in the process of creating the constitution. The principle guiding this effort is agreement, from the school of the Israel Democracy Institute (or "a constitution with broad agreement"). The vast majority of the partners to this effort has spared no effort to involve representatives of the Arab public in the process.

The Jewish and democratic State of Israel will not establish a constitution worthy of the name unless it grants full equality to all of its citizens and strives for a stable civil society. The talk of expelling Arab locales from the area of Israeli sovereignty is the main enemy of the constitutional effort and of the desire to establish a stable civil society. In the processes of establishing them lies the answer to the demographic issue.

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