The Shehabism or the limits of an experience in political modernisation in Lebanon

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I- The Research Objectives:

The scientific interest of our research lies in the identification and the analysis of the Shehabist limits that are a necessary source of inspiration for any project of future political modernization, while avoiding past mistakes. In fact, Antoine Messara believes that "the Shehabist questions are those of the Lebanese consociative political system".

In addition, in the political literature dealing with Shehabism, there are no analyses or studies that focus in particular on the reasons behind the failure of Shehabism as an attempt at modernization and construction of a State that can achieve modernity.

The current Lebanese State took form with Shehabism and reached institutional and state maturity. Shehabism attempted to build a modern State having effective and democratic political and administrative institutions. The essence of Shehabism is the will to organize and mobilize the State apparatus around an economic development seen as the first corollary of social justice and national conscience.

The Shehabist experience is a unique and special attempt to modernize the Lebanese political system, and remains the most realistic and the most committed modernization attempt. In fact, building a strong central State that exercises a regulatory hierarchic power is a necessary step towards building a State that can achieve modernity.

II- My Research Methodology

In order to define our analytic thread, we found it relevant to recourse to the virtues of systemism and its comprehensive approach, which is crucial for understanding complex political phenomena.

Thus, our analysis is based on considering the studied object, which is the Lebanese political system, as a whole unit with linked and interdependent constituent elements. A political system is defined as "the form of authoritarian allocation of resources in society" or, to quote David Easton, "the series of interactions through which objects of value are distributed by means of authority in society". The political system is then formed, not only of the constitutional structure of public powers, but also, and mainly, of the processes that manage political participation, turning expectations into requirements, and action projects or programs into decisions.

In the light of this perspective, we can depict the Lebanese political system as enclosed in a black box, receiving inputs and producing outputs; the whole being plunged in a conflictual environment and stimulating retroactions.

Here is a more precise identification of each systemic component of our reflection:

- "The modernizing inputs": among the variables that may favor the building of a modern State, we mention the Shehabist reforms.

- "The outputs": consequently, "these inputs" promoted an administrative and social modernization process, without kicking off a political modernization.

- "The conflictual environment": it is to be distinguished between the internal environment and the external environment. The internal conflictual environment is favored, on one side, by the unresolved structures that sharpen inter-communal struggles and foreign interference in the country's affairs, and on the other side, by the external environment (Jewish settlement in Palestine – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – Arab conflicts – Foreign ambitions in the Middle East) that has incontestable repercussions on the Lebanese arena.

- "The retroaction": we believe that the systemic analysis is most effective at this stage since it enables us to identify the variables that may have reined in a "modernizing political retroaction". The output retroactions would have encouraged inputs influencing the political system, putting it on the road to modernization. In fact, the development-induced mutations in economic and social structures imply, if not a concomitant mutation, then at least a readaptation of political structures and institutions.

III- Research Summary

Shehabism attempted to build a rule of law and to modernize the political system according to a strategy based on three main pillars:

1- Circumventing traditional political powers, without disturbing the normal course of political life, by calling for new administration and army figures.

2- Starting an unprecedented and successful wide reform in the public administration.

3- Elaborating a prevailing political doctrine that struggles for social justice without discarding the dogma of economic liberalism and political confessionalism.

The problematic: the main concern is to understand if Shehabism failed due to its own underestimations and mistakes, or due to objective forces that go beyond Shehabism and even beyond Lebanon. On the same note, were the Taef Accords not neutralized for the same reasons, reflecting a flaw inherent in the Lebanese political system's evolution?

In order to analyze the failure and the political limits of the Shehabist experience in Lebanon, we began by analyzing the Lebanese consociative system obstacles and then the failure of Shehabism as a modernization project.

This study is formed of two main parts, each one divided into two sections. The first part, entitled "Shehabism: a modernization experience", begins by following the main stages in the history of Lebanon, which determined the nature of its political system: from the Ottoman heritage to the declaration of the Great Lebanon and the 1926 Constitution leading to the Independence and the 1943 National Pact. The second section, entitled "Shehabism or the building of the Independence State" presents the birth of Shehabism, principles and philosophy revolving around the policy of non-

alignment and positive neutrality on the external level, and stabilization and economic and administrative reforms on the internal level.

As for the second part, it is entitled "A modernization experience: reasons of a failure", and analyzes, in the light of the first part, the limits of the Shehabist modernizing experience. First we explore the obstacles that impede the transition from an equilibrium policy to a decision policy, through the limits of modernization and of the Lebanese political system. We show that modernization and political development have a dialectical and delicate relation, that there is an incompatibility between modernization and communal guaranties, a consolidation of traditional powers, and an authority crisis in the Lebanese consociative political system.

Secondly, we identify the limits of Shehabism as a modernization attempt while focusing on the presidential solitude in the face of the leaders' class, on the limits of a democratic revolution and the tyranny of time, on the ineffectiveness of development management, on the resistance of economic and financial monopoles, on the rejection of cooperation by the private sector, and finally on Nasser's disappearance and the Palestinian resistance emergence.

In the second section, we try to identify the Shehabist spirit in the Taef Accords and to show that this spirit was disregarded in the lame and incomplete implementation of these Accords.

Our research outcomes reveal that Shehabism failed in its efforts to rectify the flaws of the Lebanese political system due to the Shehabist missteps, to reasons unfamiliar to Lebanon, and to the vices introduced in its political system.

In fact, the failure of Shehabism is imputed to subjective reasons on the one hand, and to objective reasons on the other.

The 1967 defeat weakened Nasserism, a strong ally of Shehabism. The understanding reached with Nasser granted Shehabism a basis of social and political stabilization.

Along with the weakening of Nasser, the Middle East witnessed the rise of the Palestinian Resistance. Due to these two factors, the political situation in Lebanon began to show signs of destabilization.

Christians felt threatened by the rise of Palestinian Resistance and believed that Lebanon would pay the price of a war in which they did not participate and which the Arabs had lost. Following the changing stance of the Christian public opinion, Pierre El Gemayel sided with the two Christian archenemies of Shehabism, Raymond Eddeh and Camille Shamoun. Together, they formed the Tripartite Alliance.

As for Kamal Jumblatt, who had largely benefited from Shehabism, he abandoned his strong alliance with the Shehabists and sided with the Palestinian Resistance. Thus, Shehabism lost two strong allies who had granted it a ten-year confessional, political and social stability.

The Second Bureau, whose unity and power were guaranteed by Fouad Shehab and by the political stability, lost its confessional and political protection and cover. In fact, the Second Bureau officers did not take on their own protection. They were for the most part protected by the army and the Shehabist politicians and, eventually, found

themselves trapped in their own violations and authoritarian deviations.

The Soviet Union exerted pressure on Kamal Jumblatt to keep the Shehabist candidate from winning the presidential elections, deeming that the election of Elias Sarkis would be a driving force for the Second Bureau and the army that would ultimately control the Palestinian Resistance and the leftist parties, the left being the "catalyst of the Arab Revolution".

These shifts in the regional situation and in the alliances between the Lebanese political powers that changed the Shehabist survival space and conditions, added to the Shehabism's own limits:

- President Shehab abandoned his project in the middle of the road, refusing to continue what he himself had begun. After all, he was a conflict mediator capable of resolving political crises and bringing politicians to cooperate together and with him, not a resolute revolutionary who would take the necessary risks.

- Shehabism considered the balanced development, the economic growth, the redistribution of national wealth, and social justice enough to embark on a political modernization and lead to a national conscience. However, this democratic Coup d'Etat could not be undertaken but through a new election law, which would break the monopole of the Lebanese plutocracy that was opposed to the real measures of modernization.

- No measure was taken to absorb and introduce the new political powers in the political system with a view to encourage and bring about political development. It seemed easier to bring about change instead of absorbing and containing it.

- The difference between words and actions is easily perceived since few of what could have been done was accomplished.

- The Shehabists could not and did not want to form a well structured political party. Thus, Shehabism was doomed to failure for not benefiting from a structured political movement and a constitutional reform that would have allowed it to go beyond the National Pact.

- The majority of Lebanese politicians and Shehabist leaders, with the exception of president Shehab, did not understand nor know how to achieve the Shehabist program. In fact, Shehabists were not Shehabists to the very end.

- Time was not enough to introduce real changes in the Lebanese political system and to allow the Shehabist project to reach maturity.

- The administrative apparatus was not capable of assuming its new missions.

- Shehabists lost control of the presidence of the Republic, necessary for the survival of Shehabism.

These gaps in the implementation of Shehabism were accompanied by the flaws of the Lebanese political system, which institutionalizes schisms, encourages and is fostered by favoritism, is suffering from an authority crisis, is led by a plutocracy and is in a state of inertia that might break it each time there is an attempt to develop it. In addition to these flaws, the implementation of the Taef Accords reforms would face a rupture of the centrality of power and authority, which are the sources and driving forces of any modernization project.

In fact, modernization in Lebanon is the victim of an unlimited crisis. Decisions related to the desired modernization are in the hands of those who do not have an interest in

seeing Lebanon catching the train of modernity. This modernization is akin to a political suicide for the leading plutocracy which monopolizes power and, consequently, modernization. As for civil society, it is already largely divided and weak. These components are clearly occupied and preoccupied with different stakes that explain the absence of perspective.