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Jan Top Christensen

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End of Ta'ef



violations

pending

implemented

The end of Ta'ef

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The Francophone Games: USD 125 million, no sports and Condi the savior



Citizen Zero was not surprised by the Lebanese public's indifference to the annual Francophone games, which were organized primarily to demonstrate the link between Francophone countries, including Lebanon, and, as always, between them and France.

The Lebanese played the perfect hosts on the opening day, with the attendance of most of their zu'ama and representatives, applauding Lebanese singer Majida Al Roumi as she sang "Beirut, Lady of the World", a poem actually written by Damascene poet Nizar Qabbani – an irony lost to the leaders of the 'Cedar Revolution'. They also failed to notice that the Beirut Sports City was built by Syrian laborers and that the chairs they sat on were cleaned by those same laborers.

The audience, of course, relished the fireworks that have always intoxicated the Lebanese, which, perhaps, serve as a good alternative to the bullets that we normally fire in jubilation or at funerals. They also ignore the fact that importers only declare USD 1 million worth of fireworks a year to avoid customs, even though the Lebanese go through that much in a few events. What is important is that the Lebanese are unconcerned with the Francophone Games, not because they oppose France, to whom Lebanon owes its birth, and not because they oppose Senegal, or the Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dou, who performed a duet with Majida Al Roumi, and whose countrymen fought Youssef Al A'azmi in Mayssaloun in 1920 under the command of General Gouraud. The cause of their apathy is threefold: money, food and spite. We participate in elections, festivals or celebrations for money, food or to spite a cousin, a neighbor or someone.

It seems that Sarkozy's France no longer recalls what Clemenceau's France did in Lebanon. First they gave us soldiers from the Senegal to 'liberate us', then they stood aside as we cursed them because they were Senegalese, then they sketched a Lebanese flag with the colors of the French flag and placed a cedar in the middle to spite Britain.

Indeed, if you wanted maximum attendance you should have declared that France was holding the Francophone Games out of spite for the Commonwealth Games, you should have distributed flags from both sides and then you would have had results!

We did not go to the squares of the Bourj or Riad Solh without being ushered by buses, sandwiches and money. So then why should we go to the Francophone Games for free? We did not cast our ballots for free, why attend the games for free?

We do not have sports clubs. We have a Maronite basketball club and Shia'a and Sunni soccer clubs. How then can you expect us to attend games that do not have a confessional tilt? Tell us that they are Catholic and then see the results!

We are not with or against anyone. We are not against the Francophones or the Anglo-Saxons. Give us Haifa Wehbeh, Nancy Ajram and Star Academy any day, offer us a meal, money and fireworks, and then you will swim in an endless human sea.

As for the sports cities – on which we spent around USD 125 million to construct – they have fallen victim to dust and rats. Truth be told, we built them according to the confessional balance from Trablous, to Sour, to Ba'albeck, to the Matn coast:

Beirut :79.2, Saida: 16.7, Trablous:16.4, Matn-Ba'albeck (others):12.8

Total: USD 125.1 million only



The cost of maintenance, meanwhile, is LBP 500 million for the Camille Chamoun Sports City Stadium (Beirut) and LBP 375 million for each sports city in Saida and Trablous, in addition to annual salaries –estimated at LBP 810 million– for employees in Beirut. As such, the cost of maintaining these sports cities is estimated at USD1.3 million a year, excluding municipality expenditures.

The organizers of the Francophone Games should have known that our minds are preoccupied, that if they wanted a cheering audience they should have hosted games for the Saudi, Egyptian, Syrian and Iranian soccer teams. They should also have invited Walid Jumblat to tell us that "we are no longer alone" and that "Palestine is no more". They should have invited friends of the Syrian regime to thank Syria for the excellent performance of its intelligence officers planted around Lebanon. The interim prime minister and the organizers of the Francophone Games should have asked Condoleezza Rice to be a commentator –something she adores more than the kisses of Saniora on her cheeks; then you would have had hundreds of thousands of attendees.

As for France, she should be satisfied with the rituals of her annual mass in Bkirki!

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