



PRE ELECTORAL ANALYSIS 1: Candidates Acceptance Process February 10th 2008

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Iranian 8th legislature will be voted on March 14th. These elections are decisive for the aspiration of president Ahmadineyad to be reelected, and for the desire of the reformists to regain their force among their electorate for 2009 presidential.

There are not political parties in Iran, candidacies are proposed individually and vote is uninominal. Each voter has to write with his own hand the names of the candidates he is voting for his electoral circumscription on the ballot paper. However, the several religious-political associations and factions present their own lists of candidates around the main personalities. In the last Experts Assembly and municipal elections of December 2006 there were only three lists for the whole country: "reformists", "pragmatics" and "fundamentalists". But this year the different groups haven't reached an agreement in many electoral circumscriptions and have presented separated lists, specially the fundamentalists. Two general lists will be conformed at the end, the "United Fundamentalist Front" and the "Reformist Coalition". The latter will include the supporters of Rafsanjani, head of the Discernment Council and of the Experts Assembly; of Mehdi Karrubi, presidential ex candidate and reformist leader of Mosharekat; and several ex ministers of president's Khatami period.

The definitive list of candidates approved by the Guardians Council, and with a lot of reformists out of the electoral process, we'll have to wait to see who are going to be the principal candidates of each list for presiding the Parliament. It's supposed that Ali Larijani, Teheran head runner of the fundamentalists, would have enough support for leaving aside Hadad Adel, Ahmadineyad's allied. This would be quite an important victory after having been relegated from the General Secretariat of the National Security Council. Nevertheless, Hadad Adel and Larijani are both in the same fundamentalist list. The most significant absences in this process are the ones of Mohamed Khatami and Mohamed Bagher Qalibaf (current Mayor of Teheran), which are the ones that could remove Mahmud Ahmadinejad from being reelected in 2009.

Khatami is keeping his promises of not being active in politics, despite his meetings with Karrubi and Rafsanjani for consolidate an united front of

pragmatics and reformists is seen by many analysts as a mean for maintaining his influence on reformism in view of 2009. The reformist groups like Mosharekat and E'temad Melli are trying to convince Khatami of his necessary participation in the next presidential, with the argument that the natural candidate for fighting Ahmadinejad should be a charismatic personality who could defeat him in the first round. Khatami obtained 21 millions votes in 2001, Rafsanjani only 6 millions in 2005 (and 15,5 and 10,5 in 1989 and 1993 respectively), and 17 millions Ahmadinejad in the second round of 2005 (only 7,7 in the first one)(1).

In words of some Iranian analysts, the recent tour initiated by Khatami around Iran, leading "Baran" Foundation – created by himself -, could be the beginning of his electoral pre campaign for the presidential, as it happened in 1997 before his first victory(2). Khatami's appearance in the media as the main critic of the candidacies vetoing will reinforce his role as speaker of the reformist-pragmatic coalition. Bagher Qalibaf stated his disapproval of the existent lists as a reason for not running in the electoral process (3). Qalibaf would be supported by Rafsanjani if he aspired to the presidency and this augurs a harsh dispute for defining the definitive candidates for 2009.

To take up again the current process of approval and vetoing the pre candidates for the legislative, the greatest controversy has been aroused by the massive veto of the reformist candidates, which has been extremely criticized by Khatami, Karrubi and other members of the political groups "National Confidence" and "Iran Islamic Participation Front", both members of the "Reformist Coalition". These will not count on the strong candidates for the legislatures, after the veto of their most renowned candidates Morteza Haji (Minister of Education with Khatami), Elias Hazrati (ex deputy and director of the reformist newspaper Etemad), Behzad Nabavi (Minister of Industry with Khatami and vice president of the 6th Majles), Abdollah Naseri (Chief of IRNA news agency with Khatami and current speaker of the Reformist Coalition), Kasra Nouri (ex director of the newspaper Iran) and Ali Eshraqi (grandson of Khomeini)(4).

It's worth to emphasize that among the rejected at first candidates 80 are currently deputies and these participated in 2004 protest in the Majles' lobby, because of the massive veto occurred during that legislative election. Ex vice president during Khatami's period, Mohammad-Reza Aref, withdrawal from the electoral race should be added to the former vetoes, despite the participation of his group, "National Confidence" in the elections (5).

Nonetheless, FUF victory will not be guaranteed yet. Firstly, it should be considered that there are still two instances to be observed in which candidate's approvals and vetoes could be revised. One will take place on February 22nd and the other on March 8th, less than one week before the elections. Therefore its expected that many rejected pre candidates could

1 See complete details in www.uam.es/TEIM/observatorio/Iran/resultados_elecciones_presidenciales_Iran.htm

2 Karami, Sirin: "Lobbying for Khatami's Return", in Rooz on line, 14/11/2007, www.roozonline.com.

3 Iran News Daily, 5/01/2008 & Fars News Agency, 4/01/2008.

4 Iran News Daily, 7/02/2008.

5 Mehr News Agency, 08/02/2008.

finally participate in the elections. The hard critics to the electoral authorities, even from personalities with religious legitimacy (Khomeini's grandson or the Great Ayatollahs Nassr Makarem Shirazi and Assadollah Bayat Zanjani, for example), brings to consider the possibility of a revision of the massive vetoes which will equal the electoral conditions of both large political lists. On the other hand, the yearned unity of the Fundamentalist Front is not guaranteed either because Ahmadineyad's group and Hadad Adel, "Service Pleasure", don't accept an unique list with Ali Larijani, finally presented in Qom and not in Teheran, as its leader.

Another desertion from the unitary fundamentalist list is women "Zeinab Association", which decided not to be part of UFF given that it doesn't include any of its candidates at the head of the list.