



Religion and Politics in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia

Date: 27th May 2014

Venue: Wyndham Duisburger Hof Hotel, Duisburg Germany

Abstract

In the wake of the successful social movement which ousted from power Tunisian dictator Ben Ali, the elections of October 2011 gave a majority within the Constituent Assembly to the Islamic political party "Ennahda", which could therefore play a leading role in the drafting of the new constitution and controlled the executive from December 2011 to January 2014 (Hamadi Jebali and Ali Larayedh governments). During this period, Ennahda has been repeatedly accused of seeking to "islamize" the society as well as of monopolizing the main positions of power in the state apparatus via the appointment of trusted people in the administration, in the judiciary or in the media. These attempts have been met with fierce criticism from secular political opponents, resulting in a deep societal split regarding the desirable articulation between religious and political spheres. This split was eventually overcome in the framework of the National Dialogue and led to the formation of a technocratic government under Mehdi Jomaa a few days after the adoption of the new constitution (January 2014).

At the very heart of these developments lies the debate on the respective role of religion and of secularization in democratization processes. This debate is itself organized around two main bones of contention. The first issue is the extent to which secularization is a necessary condition for successful transition processes. Indeed, democratization and modernization were largely achieved in Western Europe in a process whereby religious forces were progressively pushed out of the public sphere, a development which is epitomized in the French law on the Separation of the Churches and the State (1905) and in Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's reforms of the 1924 Constitution in Turkey. The second issue is the role of religious political parties as lawful actors within the political arena. Indeed, Islamic political parties such as the Ennahda often draw the comparison between their political platforms and that of Christian-Democrats in Western Europe, arguing that European fears of a purported "Islamization agenda" are either misguided or are the product of a climate of suspicion targeting Islam in particular. The validity of this comparison is strongly criticized by secular parties which underline the incompatibility between parts of the electoral platform of Islamic parties and fundamental democratic principles such as the equality between men and women, the secular character of the state and the freedom of expression (in particular, the right to question "the sacredness of Islam").

The main purpose of this Käte Hamburger Dialogue and of the ensuing InHouse author's workshop is to reflect critically on these issues based on current developments in Tunisia, especially the negotiation and adoption of a new constitutional text by the Constituent Assembly. In doing so, participants will ask whether the Western experience of democratization via secularization reflects universally applicable patterns or, alternatively, whether original, non-Western forms of democracy may emerge in the absence of prior secularization.



Programme

- 16:30-18:00 **Käte Hamburger Dialogue**
"Religion and Politics in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia"
- 16:30 **Welcome Remark**
Prof. Tobias Debiel
Director, Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global Cooperation Research
- 16:35 **Introductory Remarks**
"Religion and Politics in the MENA region since the Arab Spring"
- 16:50-17:30 **Käte Hamburger Dialogue**
"Religion and Politics in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia"
- Panelists: Dr. Radwan A. Masmoudi
President, Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID)
- Asma Nouria
Research Professor in Political Science and Secretary General of
«l'observatoire tunisien de la transition démocratique» (the
Tunisian Observatory of the Democratic Transition)
- Dr. Markus Böckenförde, LL.M.
Executive Director, Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global
Cooperation Research
- Moderator: Dr. Nicole Renvert
Postdoc Fellow, Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global
Cooperation Research
- 17:30-18:00 **Plenary Discussion**
- 18:00-19:00 Light Snack
- 19:00-21:15 **Film Screening and Discussion**
- 19:10-20:20 "Laïcité inch'allah"
- 20:20-21:15 **Discussion with Film Director Nadia El-Fani**
- Moderator: Dr. Mathieu Rousselin
Postdoc Fellow, Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global
Cooperation Research