Governing Islam and Religious Pluralism in New Democracies

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Experiences of democratization, especially those outside core Western democracies, have seen the explosion of different forms of religious expressions in public and political life. After all, democratization is about opening the socio-political sphere, and creating an equal play field for participation of various contenders and alternatives of 'good life'. At the same time, religious movements are usually among the best-organized contenders to articulate and pursue powerful visions of good life. That inherited legacies of nation-state formation, and the resulting 'traditions' of each specific country, are often at odds with the egalitarian-universal principles underlying democratic inclusion of different contenders, however, complicates the application of values of religious freedom and equality. That religious alternatives themselves consist of 'comprehensive' and often exclusionary narratives, moreover, makes them a difficult, even if unavoidable, companion of democratic openings. Hence, democratizing polities have to walk a very fine line between accommodation and restriction of religion in order for citizens from different walks of life to perceive the state as a shared home for everyone. Such dilemmas of inclusion and exclusion hinge on broader institutional choices, which concern fundamental questions about who is to be included and excluded, under what arrangements, and with what results.

This collection of papers explores the emerging institutional solutions to govern Islam and religious plurality in democratizing polities in the Balkans. The cases under analysis – Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria and Turkey – all feature diverse religious groups, which include Muslims,

Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, as well as atheists and agnostics. All our cases also encompass substantial Muslim populations, which constitute either the majority or sizeable minorities in each country. In all cases under scrutiny, and different from many religiously diverse European societies, Muslims are also 'endogenous' populations that share fundamental historical experiences and legacies with other religious groups and fellow countrymen. Hence, they are not only a part of the complex ethno-religious configuration, but also a long-term feature in how this configuration merged together in terms of a common sense of 'we-ness', aspirations for conformity, historical traditions and legacies of state-church relations. In this context, the evolving institutional choices to manage Islam and religious diversity involve both democratic aspirations of freedom and equality and historical concerns and solutions to what was often considered a troublesome plural reality. This issue highlights the role of such old and new dilemmas in shaping institutional arrangements for governing Islam and religious diversity in different cases. The empirical analysis revolves around a set of common questions: What are the institutional compromises that characterize new models for governing Islam in different cases? How do the historical 'traditions' factor in? What is the supervisory role of the state? And ultimately, how do different models balance demands for freedom and equality with collective concerns, such as national unity, the role of the majority, and non-negotiable common goals of democracy, public order and security?

Arolda Elbasani's article sets the stage for discussion by introducing the topic, outlining the conceptual framework and locating the cases within a comparative perspective. Accordingly, the modality of separation between state and church, and the accommodation of religion, depends on socio-political contingencies of time and place. It is country-specific conditions that lead to home-grown solutions regarding the role of religion, who is included and excluded, under what terms and with what results. The article posits that in democratic societies, the specific arrangements for governing religion, vacillate between three institutional dimensions: (1) religious rights; (2) state neutrality and (3) the weight of historical traditions. The extension of democratic values of freedom and equality might, however, clash with legacies and biases that reflect historical development of nation-states. In the case of the Balkans in particular, historical legacies and traditions that underline a 'thick' religious justification of the national self and the 'other', work to hollow out the expansion of religious freedom for all.

Ahmet Alibašić and Nedim Begović's article discusses the vicissitudes related to the introduction of new standards of religious freedom and equality in the context of deep animosities that exist among various ethno-religious communities in post-war Bosnia. Given the supervision of international actors, the country has formalized an impressive legal framework, which ensures the highest internationally-recognized standards of religious freedom and equality for all the constituent communities. The organization of the Muslim community under the auspices of a centralized nation-wide organization, vested with exclusive authority in governing the community, contributes to effective management and a system of collaboration between the state and religious hierarchy. The implementation of the new standards, however, have not always been easy or smooth. Still, even when the new standards have not always worked as intended, they are reinforced by the courts, re-negotiated between relevant political and religious actors and re-settled through existing mechanisms.

In the following article Evgenia Ivanova provides a similar account of the clash between new democratic freedoms and old attitudes towards the Muslim community in the case of Bulgaria. The obligatory change of Muslim names to Bulgarian ones is probably the most striking example of the 'forceful' modes of integration that best characterized the state's historical search for homogenous and uniform Bulgarian citizens. The post-Communist democratic regime restored the previous Muslim names and institutionalized a new regime of religious freedom and equality, but collective memories continue to nurture pejorative stereotypes and fears of the Muslim 'other'. Muslims themselves tend to stick to ethno-religious forms of belonging –be it through practice of religious rituals, voting for 'their' party or holding to separate identities and claims. Muslims are still commonly viewed as 'not of our own'; Meanwhile, they also view the others as 'not of our own'.

Arolda Elbasani and Artan Puto discuss the evolution of the Albanian brand of laïcité, which in practical terms extends the French model to serve country's specific socio-political contingences. The analysis suggests that post-Communist management of religious diversity and Islam in particular, capitalize on the so-called traditional model, a range of solutions that proved successful in accommodating Islam, religious plurality and European statehood during the founding period of post-Ottoman state-building. Similar to the past, post-Communist choices

involve safeguarding a traditional reformist version of Islam, which provides backing for the country's general political goals – national unity and European anchorage. Accordingly, the state and the Muslim community enjoy mutual independence, but still collaborate in order to advance a plural understanding of the 'common good'. That the model commands the consensus of a powerful coalition of political actors – including mainstream intellectuals, political elites and the centralized Sunni hierarchy – legitimizes and perpetuates Albanian-specific choices of laïcité, and indeed, a model of close state supervision.

Ertuğ Tombuş and Berfu Aygenc's analysis of Turkey goes back to the founding model of secularism to explain the difficulty in addressing demands for equal treatment of diverse ethno-religious groups in Turkey. The rooted conflict between the secular establishment and the competing religious claims has become a critical problem for Turkish democracy. The AKP, a Muslim-rooted party, won elections with the promise to address the claims of the 'oppressed' religious strata of the society. The analysis shows that after over a decade in power, the AKP has insteas appropriated the same exclusive state institutions that it inherited from the previous regime, this time to consolidate the Sunni-axis and, of course, its own power at the expense of other sectors of Turkey's plural society. The persistent promotion of Sunni-majoritarian bias via public education and a state-funded religious directorate show that specific secular arrangements can indeed serve to appropriate religion, in the service of national homogeneity and ultimately political power.

The conclusion attempts to connect the cases to broader comparative issues regarding types of institutional arrangements to govern Muslim communities in plural societies, the role of historical traditions, case-specific models of secularism, and the role of the state in instigating specific relations with their Muslim groups. Quite often, these questions are grounded in the assumption of secularism as a strict separation between state and church. Instead, the conclusion shows that there is no 'best' model, and even less so, a strict form of separation between state and churches. Various states opt for context-specific and home-grown solutions to manage their respective religious communities, including Islam. Despite different models, the state maintains an important role in supervising and organizing religious alternatives of good life. Balkan states, and more recently also all Western European countries, have increasingly pushed for the

establishment of state-recognized representative Islamic structures, which collaborate with state organs to bring religion into the institutional fold of the state. Here, history is not always a pool of exclusionary influences. It can also offer useful experiences, which facilitate integration of Islam in politics and society.

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Notes on Contributors

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