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FRIDAY

Patterns of Interaction between Islam and Liberalism: The Case of the Gülen Movement

by *Ramazan Kilinc*

Panel:
The Gülen Movement,
Secularism and Democracy

Venue:
Lecture Theatre,
Brunei Gallery, SOAS

26.10.07 Panels	Parallel Session 1	Parallel Session 2
9:30-11:30		
13:00-15:00	Presentation 07	
15:10-17:00		

The unprecedented resurgence of religious organisations in the public sphere in recent years has given particular urgency to the old question of the compatibility of Islam and liberalism. Some scholars have argued that Islamic notions of social-political order are not hospitable to democracy and human rights. Others have argued that notions of democracy and human rights are firmly established in the Islamic political discourse but their expression depends on history, social structure and context.

Although this debate has proved fruitful in framing the role of Islam in the public sphere, both sides have generally focused on essential sources of Islam. The debate needs to be extended to the empirical realm through study of particular Islamic movements and their responses to liberalisation trends. Such study should take into account local context, the organisational capabilities of the movement, and the Islamic repertoire that it deploys in mobilising its followers.

This paper looks at the Gülen movement's response to liberalisation processes in Turkey in the 1990s and 2000s. Since liberalism has radically transformed the economic and political system of the country over the last two decades, Turkey is a good example for our purposes. Furthermore, the increased influence of the Gülen movement in Turkey provides rich empirical data of an Islamic movement engaging with liberalisation in civil society and politics. The paper concludes that, while the movement's discourse and practice are compatible with liberalism, its Islamic ethos means that at some points it must engage liberalism critically.

Ramazan Kilinc

r.kilinc@gulenconference.org.uk

Ramazan Kilinc: PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at Arizona State University. He earned his BA and MA degrees from Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey. He served as a research fellow at Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies, Ankara, Turkey (1999-2000); an editor of a foreign policy program at Turkish public television, TRT (2000-2001); and a lecturer at Fatih University, Istanbul Turkey (2001-2003). His research interests include religion and politics, institutional development and Islamic social and political movements. He is currently working on his dissertation, which analyses how and when domestic actors appropriate international norms in the processes of domestic institutional change. In this context, he compares state-religion relations in France and Turkey. His other works focus on Islamic social movements, religious political parties and democratisation in Turkey and the Middle East. He has authored a number of journal articles and book chapters on these topics.