

Building Civil Society in Ethno-Religiously Fractured Communities: the Case of the Gülen Movement in Turkey and Abroad

by Mehmet Kalyoncu

Civil society is generally associated with the presence of voluntary, non-governmental civic and social organisations, which are run by informed citizens and assume responsibility for monitoring state bodies and operations and mobilising available resources to maintain order and efficiency in the functioning of both state and society. Early civil society theorists argued the relevance of such voluntary associations to achieving a stable and functioning democracy. But what if the local conditions prevent the formation of such associations – if the social landscape is characterised by communal conflicts stemming from deeply entrenched ethno-religious differences? The reality of such conditions makes it imperative that strategies are re-formulated in ethno-religiously fractured societies, where what divides different segments of the population is more than what unites them.

This paper argues that it is possible to develop such strategies. The argument is based on field research in Mardin on the activities of the faith-based Gülen movement. This group has succeeded in forging policies and programmes that bring different ethno-religious communities together as a necessary first step towards civil society: common problems facing the different ethno-religious communities are identified, then solid services to address those problems are provided, requiring collaborative effort by the different ethno-religious communities. In this way the social potential of those communities is mobilised and channelled to achieve shared goals which enrich the society as a whole.

Panel:
Gülen Movement in Peace
Building and
Conflict Resolution

Venue:
D202,
Clement House, LSE

27.10.07 Panels	Parellel Session 1	Parellel Session 2
9:30-11:30		
13:00-15:00		Presentation: 05
15:10-17:00		

Mehmet Kalyoncu: (MS in Management & Administrative Sciences, University of Texas at Dallas; MA in Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies, Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh Schools of Foreign Service) political analyst and reporter for *Zaman US Daily*. He has published scholarly articles in academic journals, and op-ed pieces in newspapers and online publications. His writing has appeared in *Balkananalysis*, *Caspian Business News*, *Zaman US Daily*, *Today's Zaman*, *Zinda Magazine*, *PINR*, *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, *Journal of Central Asia and the Caucasus*, and *Centro Argentino de Estudios Internacionales*. Research interests: Turkish foreign policy; ethno-religious politics; civil society; social development in countries rich in natural resources.

**Mehmet
Kalyoncu**

m.kalyoncu@gulenconference.org.uk