

Beyond Oil and Radical Islam: From Classifications to Links of Economy and Religion in Central Asia

Tuesday, June 12th, 2012, 5 - 6.30 pm

Economy and Islamic Proselytism in Central Asia: A Comparison of the Fethullah Gülen Movement and Jam'at al Tabligh

Lecture by Bayram Balci

Since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, several foreign Islamic movements and organizations contributed to the Islamic revival in Central Asia. Two of them, because of their success, draw particular attention: the Turkish movement of Fethullah Gülen, better known as the « Fethullahci » who run an extended network of schools and businesses throughout the region, and the Indian-based Jam'at al Tabligh, whose presence and influence is more noticeable in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. This lecture has a threefold objective. First, give an assessment of these movements' achievements at home to identify their specific features and innermost strengths and assets. Second, carry a comparative study on their approach of economic matters, especially when related to their proselytism and international mission strategy. That is where the Tabligh, who has shown little interest to economic matters and focuses on its members' recruitment and mobility, differs very much from the Fethullahci movement, who has based its core activities in economy so as to finance its religious mission. The third and last objective is to assess how these movements are actually perceived in Central Asia, so as to measure their impact on the local communities.

Bayram Balci is a visiting scholar in Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC, where his research focuses on Turkey and Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. He is a senior researcher at CERI Science Po, in Paris, France. As a research fellow at the French Institute for Anatolian Studies (IFEA) in Istanbul, Turkey, Balci established the Institute's office in Baku, Azerbaijan. During his four-year mission, he studied the features and interactions of Shia and Sunni Islam in Azerbaijan and its relations with Iran. From 2006 to 2010, he was the director of the French Institute for Central Asian Studies (IFEAC) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. During his time in the region, his research examined Islamic revival in Central Asia. Among his main publications are: *China and India in Central Asia: A New "Great Game"?* (With Marlène Laruelle, Sébastien Peyrouse and Jean-François Hucet, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and *Missionnaires de l'Islam en Asie centrale: Les écoles turques de Fethullah Gülen* (Maisonneuve & Larose, 2003).

This lecture series is a cooperation between the Zentrum Moderner Orient (www.zmo.de), the Querschnittsbereich Islam in den Gesellschaften Asiens und Afrikas, Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (iaaw.hu-berlin.de/islam) and the Competence Network Crossroads Asia (www.crossroads-asia.de).

During the Soviet era, religion and economy were conceived as distinct, even mutually opposed spheres with their own rationales (such as 'rational actors' on the one hand and 'irrational' 'otherworldly' motivations on the other). A focus on the impact of religious ideas and practices on economic processes - and vice versa - serves to question the common perception of Central Asia as a region determined by either dangerous religious movements or lucrative oil and gas reserves. The lecture series interrogates how 'religion' and 'economy' are shaped and negotiated through everyday strategies and practices. How are separations, links, cross-overs and mutual constitutions of 'religion' and 'economy' conceived and put into practice by Central Asian actors? The lecture series seeks to foreground Central Asian debates on the relationship between religious and economic domains in order to query these social, political and social science categories.

Venue:

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften

Invalidenstraße 118, Room 507
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