

2ND OBERGURGL
GOVERNANCE SYMPOSIUM



University of Innsbruck (Austria), 20-22 November 2008
Second Obergurgl Governance Symposium
"Governance and Religion"



David Lehmann, Emanuel Gutmann, Batia Siebzechner

In November 2008, the University of Innsbruck hosted an international symposium on "Governance and Religion". Sociologist, political scientists, theologians and public-administration-experts discussed issues of governance and religion with special regard to the situation of Muslims in Europe.

The Context

The aim of the OBERGURGL GOVERNANCE SYMPOSIA (the name refers to the location of the conference centre of Innsbruck University in the scenic Alpine resort of Obergurgl) is to advance contemporary debates about governance both theoretically and practically. Theoretical debates stood in the centre of the first conference, which took place in October 2007 and was dedicated to the topic "Governance: Multi-level or post-democratic". This year's symposium tackled a practical field of governance that has only recently moved into the horizon of social and political science debates: the relationship between politics and religion.

Governance The theme of governance is a central concern in contemporary political and social sciences. It refers to the study of political processes and actors in political systems that are characterized by multi-level national and international political structures rather than a centralized model of government. Not one centralized political entity is in the focus of the analysis, but various actors on local, regional, national and international level. **Religion** The return of religion into the politics and public sphere of European societies is a fact that scholars of social and political sciences, of theology and religious studies have been studying intensively over the last decade. **The Second Obergurgl Governance Symposium sought to bring these two debates together and examined the role and place of religion and religious groups in governance structures.**

The Conference

The conference was divided into four sections and tackled issues of governance, religion and integration, sovereignty, violence and (in)equality respectively. The session on integration was the most extensive and included a key-note speech and expert discussion.

Governance, religion and integration: The need for a comparative research agenda

The "return of religion" into the politics and public sphere of European societies is frequently associated with questions about the integration of Muslim immigrants. In public opinion and in the media, debates about governance and religion tend to crystallize around issues such as the wearing of the headscarf in public places or the building of mosques. What is at stake, however, is the much broader question of the correct understanding of the role of the liberal democratic state and his task to, one the one hand, guarantee individual liberties and, on the other hand, accommodate legitimate claims for religious and cultural self-determination. The speakers in this session tackled the interrelationship of governance, religion and integration both on the level of theoretical reflection as well as on the level of practical arrangements.

In her key-note lecture, *Valerie Amiraux* (University of Montreal) presented the audience with a succinct overview over the history of research on Muslims in Europe. In her view, this research has for almost too long a time been dominated by the disciplines of oriental studies and ethnography, leading to the somewhat paradoxical situation that Muslims in Europe have frequently been regarded as a "unique" case, as a singular object of sociological analysis and ethnographic study. Her suggestion, instead, is to address the integration of Muslims in Europe less as a social and security problem than as a legal issue. Reviewing EU-legislation and national legislation on the headscarf in France, the UK and Germany, Amiraux argued that the focus on legal rights and obligations of minorities is best addressed in a comparative perspective. The analysis of different legal arrangements, of the various ways in which different religious minorities respond to them, and of the challenges in harmonizing EU and national regulations – this is the research agenda which Amiraux outlined for the future.



Valerie Amiraux



Kristina Stöckl

A comparative perspective was, in fact, to be found in the paper presented by *Kristina Stöckl* (University of Innsbruck), who spoke about a research-project on the representation of Muslim and Christian Orthodox religious minorities in Austria and their collaboration with the federal government. In the opinion of the authors of this study (co-authored by *Sieglinde Rosenberger* and *Julia Mourão-Permoser*), the Austrian model of religious governance has considerable strong-points inasmuch as it promotes equal treatment and state-accommodation for recognized religious communities, but its potential for promoting adequate integration-policies remains limited.

The situation of Muslims in Austria also stood at the centre of the second part of this session. *Alexander Osman* (Spokesperson of the Muslim Youth of Austria) confronted the international audience with a personal account of the challenges that young Muslims face in Austrian society, highlighting the multi-faceted nature of Islam in Austria and the numerous prejudices and stereotypes with which Muslims are frequently confronted. His account of a decidedly modern and liberal European Islam was partly confirmed and partly differentiated by the presentation of *Philip Lewis* (University of Bradford), who gave an overview over the situation of Muslim communities in the United Kingdom. His assessment of the efforts which the government is making in order to foster integration was echoed by *Johann Gstir* (Spokesperson for Integration of the Government of the Tyrol), who

informed the audience about the situation of immigrants in the Tyrol and of the Muslim minority in particular. Reflecting on Austria's recent election campaign and the triumph of two right-wing parties, the political scientist *Reinhold Gärtner* (University of Innsbruck) showed serious concern about the emergence of media and political discourses in which immigrants are, disregarding their being religious or not, targeted by anti-Islamic and xenophobic slogans. Media discourses were also the topic of *Karin Bischof* and *Karin Stögner* (Institute of Conflict Research, Vienna), who analyzed orientalist discourses in the representation of Turkey in German-language and French print media.



Johann Gstir, Reinhold Gärtner

Governance, religion and sovereignty: religious pluralism and political norms

The debate about governance, religion and integration gained depth and complexity through the other three sections at the conference: sovereignty, violence and (in)equality. In her introduction, Kristina Stöckl reminded the audience that traditional conceptions of sovereignty tend to view the state as a continuation in secular form of the uniform values of religious communities. This idea of the state as an entity of uniform values is based on the "Westphalian presumption", namely on the idea that Europe is made up of religiously homogeneous and neatly separated territories. This idea was never an accurate description of Europe's political and religious history, but it is even less so today for secular European societies, in which the idea of a uniform political is put into question through the governance-discourse and in which the presumption of uniform religious communities is confronted with an increasing religious pluralism. The questions which the organizers of the conference wanted to ask when linking governance, religion and sovereignty were therefore the following: What determines today the value space of the sovereign political? Is it compatible with the emphasis upon pluralism central to contemporary governance discourse? And is it, most of all, compatible with *religious* pluralism? The speakers in this session addressed these questions from different angles: *Tine Stein* (University of Bremen) spoke about biblical resources for political norms and sparked a debate about the specifically Christian nature of the modern secular political order. *Michael Kirwan* (Heythrop University) spoke from the position of a "political theologian" about extra-legal sources of political legitimacy. We encounter such sources in religion, on the one hand, and in theories about the state of emergency (Schmitt, Agamben) on the other hand. Along the same lines, on the question of sources for political legitimacy, *Allan Janik* (University of Innsbruck) presented some ideas for a public philosophy of Europe. He argued that European citizens and politicians should abandon the search for substantive commonality in favour of a constitutive consensus that would lie in the agreement to disagree about essentially contested concepts. In the same section, *Alan Hunter* (University of Coventry) gave a report about the situation of religion in post-Olympic China, surprising the audience with the pluralism and relative freedom of exercise of religions in China today.



Michael Kirwan

Governance, religion and violence: Politics as response to violence and violence as response to politics

The topic of violence has a special place in the agenda of one co-organizer of this conference, the research-platform *World Order – Religion – Violence*. Based on strong expertise in the work of the philosopher and anthropologist René Girard, theologians and philosophers at Innsbruck University treat violence as anthropological reality to which a viable political order may try to find a response. Along the lines of this debate, the three contributions in this section offered a challenging re-reading of



Harald Wydra

Girard's theory about violence from the angle of political philosophy and international relations. *Arpad Szakolczai* (University of Cork) challenged the widely accepted argument that monotheistic religions are likely causes for violence with the help of Girard's theory about the overcoming of sacrificial violence. Religious violence, he argued, disregards revelation and is a sign of regression into archaic forms of societal self-understanding. *Harald Wydra* (University of Cambridge) also made reference to Girard in his analysis of new types of justifications for warfare that have come into the world with the emergence of religious terrorism. In his view, Girard's analysis of the overcoming of the scapegoat-mechanism can become a model for breaking the logic of negative reciprocity in which both sides of a conflict depict the adversary as cosmic enemy. In the same section, *Roberto Farneti* (University of Bolzano) described three major cleavage-lines in global politics – East and West, Left and Right, Earth and Heaven – in terms of "empty receptacles" that each period fills with new content. Religion, he argued, is not a polarizing factor per se, but it can be used to construct political cleavage-lines.

Governance, Religion and (In)Equality: Secular and Religious Identities

Under the heading "(in)equality", the conference programme included a discussion of ways in which politics accommodate religious and secular identities. The example of Israel was particularly to the point in this context. *David Lehmann* (University of Cambridge) and *Batia Siebzehner* (Hebrew University) presented a sociological study of marriage arrangements in ultra-orthodox Jewish communities. They posed the question how a state may or may not intervene on issues of religious identity. That the state of Israel is a particularly interesting case in this regard became clear from the intervention of *Emanuel Gutmann* (Hebrew University), who pointed out that one of the major peculiarities of the relations between state and religion in Israel is the legally enforced conception that as far as its majority Jewish population is concerned its ethno-national and religious identities are inseparable, and some will say even undistinguishable, with all the collective and private consequences deriving therefrom. Governance of women's and children's rights was the topic of *Jürgen Nautz* (University of Vienna), who analyzed the role of religious associations in the fight against women trafficking in nineteenth-century Europe and their impact on the formulation of international legal instruments for the protection of women and children.



Jürgen Nautz

Results

The Obergurgl Governance Symposium "Governance and Religion" brought together a wide range of topics related to politics and religion. It connected, in fact, political philosophical debates about religion and the political with discussions about practical issues in the political management of religious pluralism. The linking of such diverse debates, which implied bringing together political scientists and theorists, sociologists and theologians, led to intense discussions and new insights. What was especially worthwhile was the fact that the speakers addressed religion in the plural, including Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Orthodox Christian, and Protestant perspectives. The call for a comparative research agenda, voiced by the key-note lecturer Valerie Amiraux, therefore already found a response in the design of this conference. The speakers at this conference did not share a methodology, but they shared a research-interest in questions of religion, politics and theory. The symposium was precisely not meant to narrow down the discourse about governance and religion, but rather to spell out the entire range of its implications.

All the papers given at the conference will be made available online as pod-casts on <http://www.uibk.ac.at/wuv/podcasts.html>

A publication is planned which will bring together the papers dedicated to the issue of governance, religion and integration.

The Organizers

The conference was organized by an interdisciplinary team of sociologists, political scientists and theologians at the University of Innsbruck. The series of Obergurgl Governance Symposia was initiated by Alan Scott, professor of at the Department of Sociology and his research-team on "European governance" and by the standing group on "Science and Responsibility". This year's conference saw the collaboration of the interdepartmental research-platform "World Order – Religion – Violence", represented by Wolfgang Palaver, professor of theology and head of the research platform, and Kristina Stöckl, political scientist and platform-coordinator.

The Sponsors

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