



Workshop 05

Re-examining Federalism and Consociationalism as Constitutional and Political Arrangements for Community Conflicts in Post- Ottoman Lands

directed by

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Workshop abstract

The search for political stability and democracy in the former Ottoman territories has focused on political and constitutional arrangements based on federal and consociational models. Indeed, the common historical past, namely the politico-constitutional structure of the Ottoman *millet* system affected both the current internal divisions and the political-constitutional models proposed as remedies to the persistent instability in ex- Ottoman lands. Since cultural autonomy was the essence of the *millet* system it may be possible to argue that its principles appear to be the political antecedent of federal and consociational models utilized in state-(re)building/democratization processes in the Balkans and the Middle East. Most studies relating to the Ottoman *millet* system identified ‘cultural autonomy’ as a major factor that helped to foster distinct cultural identities in the region. This workshop aims to focus on the theoretical and empirical relationship between the *millet* system and the major mechanisms of conflict resolution – namely federalism and consociationalism in order to extend and refine our understanding on this subject.

Workshop description

1. Background

During at least the last two decades the former Ottoman territories in the Middle East and the Balkans have appeared to be the regions with ethno-national politicization and nationalism that generated acute conflicts. It is not an exaggeration to argue that nationalism, regionalism and demands for human rights and political participation on the basis of ethnic/religious/linguistic group membership and reactions to these demands have generated problems for political stability in these regions. The complex and unstable political structures which emerged in the Balkans after the break-up of federal-socialist Yugoslavia, the escalating Kurdish mobilization in the last three decades, the continual ethnic-religious divisions and political instability in Cyprus and Lebanon, and the Palestinian problem, are only a number of reasons encouraging the re-examination of the Ottoman legacy. The problematic nature of the political systems in the region also includes the demands for minority rights and political participation.

The search for political stability and democracy in the former Ottoman territories has focused on political and constitutional arrangements based on federal and consociational models. In Bosnia and Herzegovina ethno-cultural diversity has been institutionalized through federal and consociational arrangements (Bieber 2002; Deets 2005). The political model which aims to accommodate the internal divisions in the newly independent Kosovo is not less reminiscent of major principles of consociationalism. Not only in the Balkans but also in the Middle Eastern territories of the Ottoman Empire, federalism and /or consociationalism have become attractive ideas. The regional Kurdish entity established in Northern Iraq seems to be an incipient model towards federal arrangements in the Middle East. It is possible to say that the official Turkish reaction to Kurdish nationalism constitutes the opposite alternative, focusing on a rigid resistance against cultural autonomy (Yeğen 2007; Canefe 2002, p. 149).

In all cases under consideration the debates on the most appropriate model of federalism (civic or ethnic) and consociationalism to be adopted seem to affect state-(re)building process. Not only in the Balkans but also in other parts of the former Ottoman territories the various models for the relationship between the cultural entity (the nation) and the political entity (the state) seem to increase its importance. In Cyprus, for example, different interpretations of the proposed federalism have begun to constitute new sources of division and dispute among the political actors (Vural and Peristianis 2008). In Lebanon, although 'power-sharing arrangements tend to fail in the long run' to produce political stability (Engström 2002), it still appears to be the most suitable model among the other alternatives, for overcoming the difficulties derived from the deep segmental divisions present since Ottoman times.

2. Relationship to the Existing Literature

It is well known that, the *millet* system functioned in such a way as to facilitate effective political control by the Ottoman rulers in the peripheries. There are numerous works that inform us of the crucial connection between today's ethno-national divisions in these regions and the Ottoman *millet* system (Yilmaz and Yosmaoglu 2008, Hajdarpasic 2008; Zink 2008; Aslan 2007; Karpat 1973). Various studies have pointed at numerous causes for today's ethnic politicizations and nationalisms observed in these regions. The role of nationalism as a mobilizing factor that resulted in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire has been well identified. It also has been argued that the cultural autonomy obtained by religious elites in the Ottoman peripheries, created particular dynamics towards maintaining regional identities on the basis of religion and religious beliefs. However, in most accounts there is no adequate and systematic focus on the theoretical and empirical relationship between the *millet* system and the major mechanisms of conflict resolution – namely federalism and consociationalism. Bieber, stressed the importance of cultural autonomy to religious groups under the *millet* system, which was maintained in the socialist period in former Yugoslavia, and pointed out that the 'abandonment of group-specific rights' and the creation of "ethnically blind constitutional and institutional structures" is always an attempt laden with many risks (Bieber, 2006: 26). Although a supporter of ethnic federalism as the 'most appropriate model for accommodating the Georgian and Abkhaz nationalist claims', Coppieters admits the problematic character of ethno-federalism (Coppieters 2001:71).

Ethno-nationalist divisions in the Middle East and the Balkans, and the increasing importance of the principles of federalism and consociationalism as methods of conflict resolution, are factors demonstrating the need for revisiting the politico-administrative legacy of Ottoman Empire – the *millet* system. Since cultural autonomy was the essence of the *millet* system it may be possible to argue that the Ottoman legacy of the *millet* system appears to be the political antecedent of federalism and consociationalism in state-(re)building/democratization processes in the Balkans and the Middle East. Many scholars have concentrated on the importance and effects of federalism and/or consociationalism as appropriate political mechanisms to accommodate conflicts in deeply divided societies (Bieber 2006; Coppieters 2001; Andeweg 2000; Requejo 2001; O'Neill 2000; Meadwell 1993; Lijphart 1977). The Workshop proposes to make the link between the two (the Ottoman legacy and federal or consociational models), more visible in order to aid reflection, and to extend and refine the related analyses.

3. Objectives of the Workshop

As the previous sections imply the speakers are expected to concentrate on the issues listed below, either using a comparative perspective or exploring a specific national case:

- To explore the relationship between the present communal conflicts in various parts of the ex Ottoman lands and the Ottoman *millet* system,
- To study both the empirical and theoretical connections between the *millet* system and federalism and /or consociationalism,
- To study both the ideological use and the empirical aspects of the *millet* system by identifying its historical role in state-(re)building processes.
- To study the existing achievements or failures of federalism and consociationalism in these regions (the Balkans and the Middle East),
- To develop normative models of federalism and consociationalism for ethno-cultural accommodation in the region.

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