Believe It or Not
The New Face of Religion in International Affairs: A case study of Sant'Egidio

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Abstract

In this dissertation I seek to contribute to our understanding of the recasting of religion in the global order. I approach this by conducting a case study of a prominent practitioner of religious diplomacy: the Italian Catholic Community of Sant'Egidio. I suggest that faith-based mediation is an important arena in which the meaning and role of religion in international politics and diplomacy is (re)negotiated, and seek to develop our understanding of two lacunae in the academic research on faith-based mediation: the operational dynamics of faith-based mediation and its links and contact points with international politics. With a view to developing a comprehensive and contextualized study of the Sant'Egidio community, I draw upon practice theory and mediation theory and propose a three-layered research design focusing on: the internal religious practices of the community; its conflict mediation practices; and, finally, its role and impact as a global entrepreneur of religion and politics. I show that faith-based mediation — when performed by a transnational, professionalized religious network such as Sant'Egidio—is likely to take on some distinctive characteristics that do not necessarily resonate with the findings established in the academic literature on faith-based mediation and religious peacemaking. I further argue that the Sant'Egidio community—through its status and role as a leading practitioner of religious diplomacy—is entrenched in a broader transformative process affecting both dominant ways of "thinking" religion in the current global order as well as traditional modes of conducting international diplomacy and politics.
Jury: Jennifer Welsh (EUI), Jenny Holmsen (Ph.D. candidate), Ole Jacob Sending (NUPI, Norway), Olivier Roy (EUI/RSCAS) (Supervisor) and Marc Gopin (George Mason University) participated over skype.

Bio tba

Jenny Holmsen is a PhD candidate at the European University Institute, Department of Social and Political Sciences. Her research interests include religion and politics, international conflict resolution and diplomacy, North-African and the Middle Eastern politics. She currently works at the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, as advisor to the Section for Civil Society, Democracy and Human Rights, and holds a guest researcher position at the University of Oslo.