

Launch of Research Program “Asia and Europe: Encounters and Exchanges”

possible selection biases in roll call votes. The theoretical and empirical models developed in this context will allow the researchers to assess what the roll call records can tell us about parliaments that only sporadically resort to roll call votes. An interesting case in point is the European parliament, where political parties only call for recorded votes in situations where they want to make sure that members of parliament vote in consistence with the party line. This has led some observers to conclude that the loyalty of European MPs first and foremost rests with their party rather with their country of origin – in other words, that ideology overrides nationality. However, Hug suspects that the highly selective roll call votes in the European parliament may give a skewed picture, and that national differences may still be played out in European parliamentary debates but simply do not show up in the record.

With this ambitious research agenda, Hug's new professorship is adding to the already impressive body of research produced at CIS. Researchers and students at CIS will benefit greatly from the new professorship in political methodology, as solid training in the field is becoming increasingly important for young and aspiring academics in political science.

By *Elham Manea*

The 21st century may well become the “Asian Century” if the current demographic and economic trends persist. Hence, there is an increased interest among Western scholars and the general public to know more about Asian politics, economics, culture, and learning. In line with the region's growing importance, the University of Zurich, with the generous support of the GEBERT RÜF STIFTUNG, has launched a research program titled “Asia und Europe: Encounters and Exchanges.”

As its title suggests, the research program focuses on the manifold types of interactions that have taken, and continue to take, place between Europe and Asia – be they in the areas of culture, religion, and law. It also explores the cultural characteristics that set the two continents apart. The research project tries to look at Asia in an all-comprehensive way. Besides the countries of East and Southeast Asia, it also covers the whole area of the Middle East.

Taking Issue with the Public Discourse

An interesting aspect of the project is its attempt to reach out to the public and address issues about Asia and the Middle East that are widely debated – though not always well understood – in Europe. A case in point is the question of women's political rights in the Middle East. CIS-research fellow Dr. Elham Manea, a member of Prof. Dieter Ruloff's group, is currently working on this very topic as part of the Asia and Europe research project.

Today, women occupy only 3.5% of all seats in the parliaments of Arab countries. In many countries of the Middle East, women suffer from unequal citizenship and lack certain legal entitlements and political rights. Moreover, one in every two Arab women can neither read nor write. Indeed, the first UN Arab Human Development Report, released in 2002, mentioned the

lack of women empowerment as one of the three main causes for the Middle East's continuing development deficit.

Yet, not very many people in the West are aware of the fact that the status of women in Arab societies has become a hotly debated topic in the countries of the Middle East – especially since the Bush administration has designated women's empowerment in the Middle East as a key U.S. foreign policy objective in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

Obviously, there is a need for improving the situation of women in the Middle East. The main question, however, is why the situation of women is so difficult to improve in these societies. In her study titled “Secularism versus Shari'a: Women in Politics in Arabic States: A Comparison between Yemen, Kuwait and Syria,” Manea tries to shed light on this question.

Manea's study will examine women's political rights in three different Arab states: Yemen – a semi-pluralistic republic with a history of conflict and war; Kuwait – a nominal constitutional monarchy; and Syria – an authoritarian secular republic. The study, which will require field visits to all three countries, will address two key questions: Does the application of Shari'a law hinder the advancement of women's political rights? And does the application of secularism in a society guarantee political rights for women?

In answering these questions, Manea will pay close attention to the political, social, and religious roots that have led to the subordinate status of women in Middle Eastern societies. Furthermore, she seeks to explore how Islamic countries today try to reconcile Islamic principles with their modern need to advance women's political rights – for the sake of their own economic and political development, as well as to improve their country's image and standing abroad.

Europe and the Middle East

Promoting Interdisciplinary Cooperation

Another feature of the Asia and Europe research project is its emphasis on interdisciplinary cooperation. The project thus draws upon methods and research questions from a variety of academic disciplines including Ethnology, Geography, History, Indology, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Political Science, Law, Religious Sciences, Sinology, and Theology.

Finally, the project seeks to promote a new generation of researchers drawn from all of the above-mentioned disciplines. It provides full funding for eleven doctoral and post-doctoral researchers and partial funding for another five. The studies funded by the project cover a wide range of topics including colonialism, identity construction in Thai and Chinese Films, the reception of European Philosophy in Asian countries, a comparison between European and Asian legal systems, Chinese economy, law, and society, drug discourse in Iran, and gender roles and relations in the Middle East. After the project's initial period of three years, the University of Zurich will take over full funding of the project in 2009 as part of its commitment to the University's research focus "Asia and Europe."

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Defining an effective strategy on the Middle East is one of the most urgent and most complex foreign policy challenges facing the EU. Although Europe has manifest interests in this area, it has had great difficulties so far in actively safeguarding them and becoming a credible and acknowledged actor in the search for peace and stability. The issue of Europe's role in the Middle East is subject of a new research project by the Center for Security Studies (CSS), which is part of CIS. Two topics are in the foreground of attention. On the one hand, the project assesses the regional approach of the EU towards the Middle East, especially the EU's efforts at building cooperative security and encouraging democratic reform. On the other hand, it takes a look at European-US relations and the Middle East, which is a particularly sensitive aspect of the EU's quest for an enhanced regional profile.

The Middle East constitutes the epicenter of the major strategic questions of the early 21st century. Key challenges to European security, such as international terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, and state failures are intimately linked with developments in this region. The nexus between stability in the Middle East and security in Europe has become markedly stronger in the wake of 9/11. Moreover, the Middle East (together with Russia) accounts for the biggest supply of energy to the EU. Although Europe's dependency on oil and gas from these countries has decreased over the past decades, it will not disappear altogether in the foreseeable future. As events in the Gulf are strongly influencing the price of oil on the global market, Europe's prosperity depends to a considerable extent on developments in this region.

Nevertheless, Europe is struggling with the task of defining a common policy on the Middle East. Because of different historical experiences and diverging national policy preferences, the EU member states

frequently find it undesirable or impossible to speak with one voice in this region. Also, the "post-modern" nature of the EU corresponds poorly with the Hobbesian world of the Middle East, where war remains a policy option, inter-state relations are highly militarized, and few states are happy with the geopolitical status quo. Finally, the fact that the Middle East has become a primary theater of US security policy raises particular problems for the EU in developing its own distinct position.

The first part of the project examines how the EU has approached the Middle East so far and analyzes why the effectiveness of its policy has remained limited. In the mid-1990s, the EU launched the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to structure its relations with its southern neighbors. This so-called Barcelona Process was inspired to a considerable extent by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), with the EU seeking to both promote cooperative security and region-building in the Mediterranean and encourage the non-EU partners to respect human rights and take up political and economic reforms. When the Europeans in 2004 recognized the need to go beyond the Mediterranean and came up with the concept of a "strategic partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East," the notions of cooperative security and democracy promotion figured prominently again. As the EU is now in the process of defining a specific policy for the Gulf region (encompassing Iran, Iraq, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and Yemen), the question arises what lessons it could learn from its experience in the Mediterranean and what kind of approach it should apply in the area "East of Jordan."

In a first study on this issue, written during a research period at the EU Institute for Security Studies (a new research partner of the CSS), Daniel Möckli discusses the difficulties the EU has encountered in advancing cooperative security and its reform agenda in the Mediterranean. He then explores why the CSCE approach of linking the two objectives in one multi-basket framework has not