Keynote Lectures 2020

Monday, 23 November (18.45-20.15): Northern Ireland (Preiss)
Friday, 27 November (08.30-10.00): ‘New’ Minorities (Palermo)
Monday, 30 November (18.45-20.15): Austria’s Islam Act (Wonisch)
Monday, 23 November 2020 (18.45-20.15)

We shall overcome: Local conflict in Northern Ireland
in light of the pandemic, Brexit and disruptive power-sharing

Dr. Bert Preiss, University of Vienna

The Belfast Peace Agreement on Good Friday 1998 marked the official end to three decades of armed conflict between the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist and Catholic/Republican/ Nationalist communities in Northern Ireland.

However, the efforts to local conflict transformation have born only limited fruit so far. In Belfast and other urban areas, sectarian tensions and violence still flare between deprived working-class interface communities, who remain divided by numerous ‘peace walls’.

In light of Brexit, the Irish border issue and disruptive power-sharing in Northern Ireland the progress in local peacebuilding seems to have stalled. This might even jeopardize the overall peace process.

Within this context, causes and possible solutions will be elaborated. In addition, the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent power-sharing agreements will be explained and civil society initiatives to promote local peacebuilding and reconciliation will be briefly presented.

Moreover, an attempt is made to provide an outlook for peace in Northern Ireland, which includes recent developments related to the pandemic crisis and recent Brexit negotiations.
The question of the possible extension of minority rights and policies to immigrants has been and is being debated for quite some time in Europe and beyond. The predominant attitude, especially in the political discourse, is that national minorities and immigrants are completely different categories with completely different needs. This is of course true in some perspective. However, digging below the surface the issue is more nuanced and less clear-cut, including from a legal perspective, i.e. looking at the available instruments.

Readings:
Advisory Committee to the FCNM, Thematic Commentary no. 4 (2016)
Monday, 30 November 2020 (18.45-20.15)
The Austrian Islamgesetz (Islam Act): A century of legal accommodation of Islam in Austria
Dr. Kerstin Wonisch, University of Graz and Eurac Research

With the remarkably early enactment of the Islam Law Act in 1912, Austria legally recognized Islam as an official religion and placed Muslims de jure equal to the followers of other officially recognized religious communities. This law act was an early attempt to accommodate Muslim minority communities and their religious needs in a historically Roman-Catholic dominated country.

However, already the drafting process of a new legal basis was turbulent. Hence, it is not surprising that the content of the Act on External Legal Relationships of Islamic Religious Societies (IslamG 2015) was and still is regarded as discriminatory. As a result, the long history of acceptance of, and cooperation is profoundly shaken. Recent legal initiatives and policies such as the hijab ban in kindergarten and primary school, or the attempt to close certain mosques target Muslims in particular and jeopardize the long-established political culture of consensus and corporation.

The presentation sets out to elaborate on the Austrian framework for religion in public life, in particular on the IslamG 2015. Current challenges related to the changing legal and political climate with regard to the accommodation of Islamic pluralism in Austria will be addressed.