Introduction and Overview
Religion in Conflict Transformation in a Nutshell

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Aim, Background, and Structure

The aim of the following issue of Politorbis is to help policy-makers and practitioners deal with the religious dimensions of conflict and its non-violent transformation. While religion has always played a role in politics, and sometimes in conflict and the non-violent transformation of conflict, insufficient attention has been given to this theme until quite recently. In Western politics, for a long time, secularism seemed to be the answer, where religion was delegated to the private sphere and politics was "freed" from religion. In certain academic spheres, such as political science, modernization theories argued that the role of religion was in the demise as people became more educated and economically developed. Nevertheless, a more careful analysis would have shown that religion was always a factor in politics, in some conflicts and in peace promotion. It was with us all along, it is still with us, and will be with us also in the future. The use of religious discourse by actors such as Osama bin Laden, legitimizing the violent acts of 11 September 2001, or George W. Bush's proclamation of the so-called "Global War on Terror" have helped bring the theme of religion back to the surface for policy-makers, academics, and conflict transformation practitioners.

Ten years after 9/11, it is timely to take a closer look at the relationship between religion, conflict, and peace in this issue of Politorbis. This issue does not pretend to provide a comprehensive coverage of this vast topic, yet it is intended as a useful contribution to the discussion that highlights some of the policy dilemmas, gives insights into some of the competing academic perspectives, and then, above all, gives concrete inspiration for practitioners. This is done by presenting innovative conflict transformation methods and illustrating some of these in specific case studies.

The four questions that make up the four parts of this issue of Politorbis are therefore:

Part A – Policy Relevance: Why is it important to focus on the role of religion in political conflicts?

Part B – Conceptualizations: What are some of the academic perspectives on the role of religion in conflict, and how far are these useful if the aim is to minimize violence?

Part C – Methods: What methods of conflict transformation and mediation can be used to deal with conflicts with religious dimensions?

Part D – Case Studies: How are conflicts with religious dimensions actually dealt with in the real world; what can we learn from concrete cases?

Policy Relevance

In the first part on policy relevance, the speeches of Peter Maurer, State Secretary of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), and of Jorge Fernando Branco de Sampaio, UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, are succinct wake-up calls to take the topic of religion and politics seriously. These speeches were held on 14 October 2010 at the annual conference of the Human Security Division of the Swiss FDFA, entitled "When Religion and Worldviews Meet". A central policy challenge comes about as globalization leads to people from different cultural backgrounds meeting and more closely interacting with each other. Living in a world that has become a village has benefits, but also involves dilemmas as to how to adequately deal with the increased diversity of value systems, worldviews, and religions. The increased popularity of many far-right, anti-immigration parties in various elections in European countries is indicative

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of how existing policy responses have failed. The way forward is through dialog, seeking to find mutually acceptable solutions to the practical aspects of living together. The terms "worldview" and "belief" are useful in this dialog process, as they avoid pitting one truth against another. The question of absolute truth becomes void when looking at various systems of belief and worldviews, as absolute truths cannot be proven, yet diversity of beliefs and worldviews can be accepted, thus paving the path for constructive dialog over practical questions of co-existence.

Conceptualizing the Role of Religion in Conflict Transformation

The second part on the conceptualization of the role of religion in conflict highlights the lack of consensus in academia on this topic, as values also shape academic "objectivity" much more than we would like. There is no value-free academic discourse. The way we view and conceptualize the world is shaped by our values, whether in academia, in the media, or in small talk with our neighbour. Furthermore, and of greater practical importance, the way we conceptualize the role of religion in conflict often has practical implications. We need to become more aware of how our concepts affect our actions and those of others, if we are to find ways for different cultural and religious groups to co-exist. Sabina A Stein introduces three political science perspectives: primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism. Of the three, constructivism does not contain pre-determined solutions to conflict, and thus seems the most useful and flexible from a conflict transformation perspective. In the larger constructivist family of approaches, Jean-Nicolas Bitter introduces us to the cultural-linguistic approach, which seems particularly useful for dealing with conflicts with religious dimensions. It seeks to understand each specific religious framework on its own terms, according to the religious framework's own internal "grammar" as a firm and flexible matrix, rather than measuring all religious frameworks according to some universal measuring stick. This frame of reading religions allows for the creative development of practical solutions.

Methods for Dealing with Conflicts with Religious Dimensions

The third part of this issue of Politorbis is the heart of the entire publication. If we accept that religion is of great policy relevance (part A), and if we become increasingly aware that the way we conceptualize reality shapes the way we approach it (part B), what can we then do in concrete terms when we engage in conflict transformation processes? Most mediation, conflict resolution, or conflict transformation practitioners have a rich set of skills and techniques for dealing with conflict. Are these methods sufficient, however, to deal with conflicts with cultural and religious dimensions, or do we need to enrich our skill-set? The third part argues that we do need to enrich our skill-set. To contribute to this enrichment, we present various methods as sources of inspiration:

Anne Isabel Kraus develops a model for designing dialog and negotiation processes in a culturally sensitive manner. As our norms also affect how we shape a process, we cannot argue that the classical mediation dictum of separating content and process is sufficient when dealing with intercultural conflicts. The model she develops entails three steps: Starting with a presupposing hypothesis, eliciting and integrating feedback during the process, and periodically engaging in retrospective legitimization. She thereby provides a meta-framework for all the other methods that follow in this issue, helping mediation and facilitation practitioners navigate uncharted waters, yet without imposing any rigid normative framework. Abbas Aroua grapples with the challenge of how religious and political goals, interests, and positions are intermixed. By mapping the possible interactions and arguing that they must be decoded and recoded in the mediation process, he provides an innovative approach on how to deal with religious-political conflicts. Sometimes the language and symbols used in a conflict are religious, but the goals and interests are very political.

Michelle LeBaron's contribution on arts-based approaches indicates that oral dialog is often not enough to create understanding and trust between actors with different worldviews. She shows how the arts can help actors go beyond the rational and analytical. Conflicts with strong religious or cultural dimensions are often intractable due to the depth of emotions, intuitions, and myths at play. If we ignore them, we do so at our own peril. Arts-based approaches do not happen in a vacuum,

but have their own structure, and this can be used in adapted forms even in more classical, formal mediation processes. Further exploring how to shift dialog beyond the oral, Lissi Rasmussen and Jean-Nicolas Bitter introduce us to diapraxis, short for "dialog through practice". Mutually agreed upon action carried out jointly by the involved actors is often more powerful than oral dialog, following the intuitive experience that "I trust what you do more than what you say". In some cases, this can focus on the individual and move participants towards a joint understanding of citizenship, while in other cases, diapraxis can be used to test co-existence between social groups from different worlds. Many of the case studies presented in the last section of this issue use the diapraxis approach, highlighting its flexible and wide-ranging applicability.

Moving on from the focus on process – be it oral, arts-based, or practical – to the question of who mediates or facilitates a process, Simon Mason and Sabrin Kassam argue that in some cases, culturally balanced co-mediation is a useful set-up for combining cultural proximity to the parties, with impartiality across the co-mediation team. In all of the processes explored in the case study section of this issue, facilitators from different cultural backgrounds worked together, illustrating the idea of culturally balanced co-mediation.

These methods are not mutually exclusive, nor are they incompatible with other already existing mediation and conflict transformation approaches. No serious practitioners will let themselves become slaves to only one method. Training, personality, and experience are essential for applying, adapting, and mixing methods in the way that is most appropriate to the conflict at hand.

Case Studies
In the fourth part of this issue, we move to the real world. What can we learn from case studies where policy relevance, concepts, methods, and the reality on the ground all interact? In this section, we highlight the personal experience and insights of the conflict transformation practitioner. Bob Roberts, evangelical pastor from Texas, shows how he became engaged in collaborating with conservative Muslims in numerous social projects. The idea is not to give up speaking about one's values and beliefs, but primacy is given to shaping a new

type of relationship that puts the "building of the world of God" center stage. Once relationships and trust are formed through joint action, discussions over religion can occur, often leading to a deepening of one's own faith.

Jean-Nicolas Bitter and Dieter von Blarer then elaborate on the experience of the Swiss FDFA's support of dialog in Tajikistan between Islamic actors and the post-Soviet secular government. This shows what diapraxis can look like in concrete terms. The focus is less on the classical sequence of pre-negotiation, negotiation, and implementation, and rather on an incremental approach where trust is built through step-by-step implementation while the negotiation process is still ongoing. Corinne Henchoz Pignani then examines how the Swiss FDFA supported dialog between an Egyptian Islamic NGO and a Swiss Protestant NGO using the diapraxis method. Clarifying and testing how they wanted to interact with each other helped both NGOs in their interactions with other actors. The two cases illustrate how the aim of diapraxis is to start working together on practical issues of concern to both sides of a conflict.

The final case study presents a unique jewel in this issue: the experiences of an Islamic center in the UK after 9/11. It highlights the characteristics of a constructive dialog between the state and Islamic communities in Europe. If non-violent co-existence is the goal, it is vital for European states to respect and give space to these communities, rather than infiltrating, over-regulating, and suppressing them. Abdulfatah Said Mohamed's compelling argument is that communities defeat terrorism, but counterterrorism defeats communities, so counterterrorism may lead to more terrorism. The rich lessons from this case are pertinent for all European states seeking to find ways to engage constructively with Muslim communities in Europe.

In a Nutshell
This issue of Politorbis shows the importance of looking at the role of religion in conflict and its peaceful transformation. Beyond highlighting the policy relevance of the topic, it provides conceptual and practical suggestions on how to deal with such conflicts. Concepts of the role of religion in conflict are useful to the degree that they do not pre-determine our response, but provide us more with a "neutral" map to move in unknown

territory. There are numerous mediation and conflict transformation methods that have been developed and adapted to working on conflicts with religious and cultural dimensions. The primary challenge is how to shape this in a cultural sensitive manner and how to work with the often hidden links between political and religious goals and positions. Arts-based approaches and diapraxis shift our focus away from only using oral dialog approaches. Besides the nature of the process, who shapes the process is also pivotal. Culturally balanced co-mediation provides some ideas on responding to this challenge. Case studies show us that in real life, things are often more messy than when articulated in concepts and methods. At the same time, however, the case studies are carriers of credible good news: Conflicts where values and worldviews meet are not necessarily intractable; actors of very diverse religious backgrounds can learn to co-exist in peace.

Thanks