

A word from the editor

RELIGION AND POLITICS

The last years have seen an impressive rise of the role of religion in many countries. Free elections seem increasingly to be used by religious political groups to advance their political agenda, which seems a rule opposed to the separation of State and Church practiced in the Western liberal democracies. The Danish Mahomet cartoons and the reaction they encountered in many Muslim countries have brought to forefront fresh issues of the role of religion in global politics. What has caused this unprecedented wave of identity politics? Is radical Islamism turning into a new anti-Western ideology as Marxism-Leninism was? What is instrumental, and what is primordial in the drive towards religion as a political factor? What explains the appeal of this new ideology? What role should institutions, such as secular political parties and established Churches play in this debate? Is the secular model of state under threat?

Traditionally, there different approaches were used to discuss this topic in social science. The first is the developmental perspective, practiced by classic authors such as Max Weber and S.M. Lipset. The second is the normative perspective of political theory. The debate in political theory evolves around four principles:

- a. the libertarian principle of tolerance, meaning that the state should not intervene in religion, seen as part of the private sphere
- b. the impartiality principle, stating that all churches are equal in front of the state
- c. the neutrality principle, which states the political equality of religious and the non-religious and finally
- d. the secular rationale principle, claiming that similar to the way the government refrains from intervening in the religious sphere, the church should not intervene in political affairs. Finally, a third

approach belongs to political culture, and can be seen in recent work, such as Ronald Inglehart's and Pippa Norris.

The papers in this issue are mostly confined to the European area. Even in Europe, the heartland of secularism, the rise of political Islam and of nationalist Orthodoxy in postcommunist countries challenges the classic secular model. The picture that emerges from these papers is still blurred and ambiguous, but so is the reality at the present crossroads.