

Reference

For the PhD thesis of Mr. Faraj Wahab Karim

“The "Arab Spring" as a factor of institution of state’s transformation by the example of the Republic of Tunisia, the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Syrian Arab Republic: Comparative analysis”

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The PhD thesis of Mr. Faraj Wahab Karim consists of 270 pages, divided in Abstract, Introduction, 4 chapters, Conclusions and Bibliography.

The bibliography consists of 291 sources mainly in English, Arabic and Russian. I am impressed by the number and quality of sources used. Although it is usually said that science does not have nationality, it should be recognized that Western, Arab and Russian points of view sometimes differ. It seem to me that the plurality of points of view, represented in this dissertation, is one of the main achievements of the candidate.

The publications made are enough for the public defense of the thesis.

The content of the abstract (автореферат) correctly reflects the content of the work.

The language is analytical, clear and professional and creates the impression that the candidate is familiar with the main positions in the academic debate in the field.

The topic chosen is more than important – the so-called Arab Spring is still underdeveloped issue, and the institutional transformation in very rare cases is a subject of academic debate. Since this point of view, it could be said that Mr. Karim has found “his” theme and allows him to make some specific contributions.

In the Introduction, the methodology of the research is exposed. The PhD candidate has correctly explained the relevance of the topic, the choice of the countries to be investigated - the Republic of Tunisia, the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Syrian Arab Republic and the gap his research would fill. I find the choice convenient as fa as all the countries experienced the Arabic

Spring, but the outcomes of this experience strongly differ. Moreover, - and here I completely agree with the opinion of the candidate, Arab Spring is ongoing, not finished process.

The purpose and objectives of the study are clearly stated: “to analyze the state and main trends of the formation and transition of political institutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria in a result of the Arab Spring events; defining of the common and distinctive features of the political institutions in these countries; ascertaining the correct use of the model "political institution" and "political system", developed on the basis of analysis of the development of democratic (mostly European and American) countries on the political life of the Republic of Tunisia, the Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria Arab Republic.” In this way, since the very beginning, the author identifies his research field – comparative politics – and as a result offers to the audience an interesting and challenging text.

The already fixed goals and objectives are detailed in 6 tasks, which follow the logic of the research - from theory to methodology to empirics.

Main research question is how Arab spring had affected political institutes of Tunisia, Egypt and Syria in their transition to democracy. Clearly stated and well formulated, it opens the door for the next step – the wording of the hypothesis which is as follows: “Arab spring doesn’t have solely positive affect and revolutionary changes might have caused both positive and negative consequences of political institutes’ transition.” Taking into account the main research question and hypothesis, I highly appreciate the intent of Mr. Karim to keep unbiased which is not ease due to the polarized academic positions.

In this dissertation, the next research methods have been used: comparative political analysis, country-studies, binary analysis, behavioral method, deduction and induction, analysis and synthesis, method of extrapolation, and a systemic method. The methods chosen are appropriate for such a research and contribute to the achievement of the goals and objectives fixed.

Th first chapter offers an exhaustive identification of the state of art. If Western and Russian concepts are well known, a few people are familiar with the views of the scholars from “within”, i.e., with the views of Arab analysts. For me, it was one f the most interested asepts of the dissertation. It seems that the idea of Algerian politician A. Taleb Ibrahimy that: "It is a

mistake to believe that progress can be achieved by a combination of modern technology and traditional values. Since technology cannot be more than a shell. We must avoid false alternatives: either to "cut" our past or to give up social progressing ... There can be no revolution without cultural transformations in the economy and politics" is one of the guiding principles in the research of Mr. Karim. It make us to think once again that the terms and notions of the modern comparative politics have eventually been formulated on the basis of Western experience and that other political realities, as for example Middle East, require the construction of other categories and approaches. The successful intent to do so in one of the most significant contribution of the candidate. It's my opinion that just as him, when analyzing such realities and institutions, we will most and most often allocate them in between secularity and religion, culture and politics, tradition and modernity.

Due to my interests and inquiries, I have red quite a lot of analysis of the preconditions of Arab spring; but for first time I see such a clear separation between economic, demographic, social, factors of corruption, historical, religious and political preconditions and the role of the media and social networks.

At the same time, external influences are also presented: the interest of geopolitical centers of power, geopolitical specifics, etc.

As a result, the conclusion of the author are as follows: the Arab Spring is a response of Tunisian, Egyptian and Syrian nations to the range of existing external (influence of the world centers of power and regional actors) and internal factors, such as social, demographic, religious, historical, political, information and other preconditions.

I find it highly valuable the fact that in the first chapter the author gives description of concrete circumstances of the beginning of the revolutions, but also their institutional and constitutional impact. In a comparative plan, it can help a lot to understand the real nature of these transformations.

The next three chapters are dedicated of the impact of Arab Spring on the constitutions and institutions in the relevant countries. They follow almost the same plan, with different last points on dependence of the results of Arab spring in the specific conditions of the three states.

The three chapters start with analysis of the pre-revolutionary situation, assessed by the next parameters: Head of State, Executive power, Supreme legislative body, Local public authorities, Political parties – despite the fact I would prefer to see the term political systems instead of political parties. They continued with changes during revolutionary period and institutional transformation afterward, and finish with the identification, analysis and assessment in the post-revolutionary epoch.

The most characteristic positives of the texts here are: bright institutional analysis; excellent analysis of the consequences – transformation or lack of transformation of the institutions; interesting conclusions on the Arab spring as transit process in Middle East, in which “a mixed transit model was implemented (namely, there were a number of transitory ones, in particular, evolution, partially or late democratization “from above”, revolutionary uprisings, the use of external influence).”

Despite of different consequences to which Arab spring led, “the selected states have a number of characteristics that allow us to position them as similar. In particular, this is a form of government (all are the republics); we observe their affiliation with Ummah (all states are declared to have a Muslim majority population of different directions); commonality of the colonial past; geopolitical position of the selected states for studying; their resource potential (human, tourist, energy); domination of traditions over civil laws, etc.”

One of the most original views of the author, formulated after the analysis of the process in all the relevant countries, is that “even constitutional changes and the adoption of a number of important laws have not transformed the patriarchy of the institutional component of the political systems of the countries researched”. This is a really important detail as far as it shows the deep difference between developed and developing world and the complexity of the task in the later: the dilemma there is not just democracy versus non democracy, but – and probably most important – patriarchy versus modern social order.

Mr. Karim shown that even when constitutional change take place, institutional transformations can or cannot experience transformation. The deeply rooted postulates of patriarchal political culture in several times are the most decisive factor of the change.

Speaking about political culture, I would not hide that I expected more explicit analysis of the relationships between political cultures and institutions. This is not because institutions eventually are those forms that in some way fix what has already been established as a norm of political culture, but because it helps to better understand answer of the question: to what the transformations lead? To democratization? To stability? To secularization ? in my opinion, this is the big question to which the researchers will have to answer.

Mr. Karim' s dissertation is a stat of such a big discussion. While being innovative with its institutional emphasis which deepens our understanding of non-Western societies, with the identification and analysis of common features between the political institutes - the dominating role of head of state, the problem of continuity of power, the existence of advisory bodies, the activities of terrorist groups and contrasting ones - the role and weight of the parliament, government and political parties, the role of religious bodies, the varying degrees of independence of the public sector and the media, the breadth of the ethnic -political and religious-confessional diversity, etc., its also shows the future directions in which the future researchers should go.

I believe that this dissertation, in which the author has been working with inspiration and enthusiasm, will mark a new stage in his personal and professional development. I wish him success and do not doubt that he will have several new academic achievements.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned, I strongly recommend the candidate to be awarded the title PhD in political science, code.....

28th May, 2020, Sofia

Prof. doctor habil. Tatyana Dronzina

