**Panel 8**

**Lebanon facing the Arab uprisings.**

**Between internal challenges and external constraints**

*Panel chairs:*

Rosita Di Peri, University of Torino (Rosita.diperi@unito.it)

Daniel Meier, University of Geneva (daniel.meier@graduateinstitute.ch)

Panel languages: French and English

*Panel rationale*

This panel aims to provide an overview of recent developments in Lebanon in the light of the regional uprisings in several Arab countries considering both their domestic and external dimensions. Lebanon, by many described as an example of quasi-democracy, seems not to have been directly affected by the winds of change in the region. These uprisings were apparently not an incentive to push this country towards a process of reforms. However, over the last three years, it seems that Lebanon has been forced to face its structural and geographical limits, going through a complex political and economic period.

At the domestic level, Lebanon is facing the effects of a long political and institutional crisis that is putting under pressure the consociational system. From the ‘2008 events’ on, Lebanon has been witnessing a polarization of the confessional positions at the political level that is preventing the necessary reforms to make the system work better. This has been accompanied by a transformation (and crisis) of those communities that, more than others, had contributed to the building of the modern Lebanese State, namely the Maronite Christian community and the Muslim Sunni one. The former went through a marginalization process from the Taif agreements (1989 onward, and the Sunni community gradually lost its centrality in the Lebanese political (and social) spectrum, especially after the Hariri assassination (2005). This loss of power has resulted, among other things, in a radicalization of the fringes of the Sunnis society and the emergence of radical Sunni figures and groups that have polarized the political spectrum as well as transformed Lebanon’s northern borderland. In the context of the Syrian uprising mainly, some political forces have not hesitated to manipulate the Sunnis for electoral purposes. The discovery of this new self-image and the perception of their own weakness by many Sunni constituents is hardly bearable and acceptable for most of them. It is undoubtedly one element that explains radical mobilizations and that could contribute to change the consociational landscape. These elements, along with a renewed militarization of the Lebanese society have also gradually led to a resurgence of violence on the ground and to the emergence of new actors on the Lebanese scene.

At the regional level the transformation of inter-Arab relations is having a major impact on Lebanon, where, among others, the spillover effects of the Syrian crisis are the most visible and the Iranian-Saudi rivalries are deeply impacting the Lebanese state. Another element that should be considered is related to the relationships between Lebanon and the Israeli State and the role that Hizbullah plays in these dynamics, between a political pragmatism on domestic policy and the anti-system posture at the international level. Finally, one should mention the transnational dimension of the problem of Syrian refugees and its specific implications in the Lebanese territory.

*Welcome papers*

What were the consequences of the Arab uprisings on the Lebanese sectarian system, on its civil society and on its economy? What are the repercussions of the massive influx of Syrian refugees? How does this regional change impact the relationships between Lebanon and its neighbours? Is Lebanon able to stand in a neutral posture or will it be dragged into a larger regional conflict?

These are just some of the questions that the panel would like to raise. As a result, the panel accepts contributions that, starting from such questions, address these issues from different theoretical and disciplinary perspectives. The aim is to launch a broad discussion on the current situation in Lebanon keeping in mind both the internal transformations and those at regional and international levels.

We encourage contributions from young researchers who are gaining experience in the field and who wish to expose and discuss their own research.

The directors of the panel are planning to give visibility to the results of the discussion through a publication of international impact level.