**Panel 9**

**What Economic Changes? Theoretical Debates and Actors at stake in the MENA Region**

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The panel focuses on the economic dimension of the changes the MENA region has undergone over the last three years, since the 2011 protests. It will attempt to map out what has happened in the economic field, highlighting the role of the different actors involved, their objectives and interests and their theoretical view. The aim is to contribute to investigate a topic that has not yet been exhaustively analyzed by scientific research.

The uprisings that have swept the MENA region in the last years have brought to the fore a number of social and economic issues to be urgently tackled. Protesters and demonstrators were not simply calling for the fall of authoritarian regimes in the name of freedom and democracy. They were also claiming the importance of social justice. Growing poverty, soaring costs of living, daunting unemployment – especially amongst youth – are in fact some of the main causes that fuelled social anger and lead people to take to the streets.

Three years after the first wave of massive demonstrations and the fall of some authoritarian regimes, very little progress has been achieved in this domain. Most of the attention is paid to the soundness of public budgets, but the socio-economic conditions of the whole MENA region have been further worsening in terms of standards of living and opportunities. The debate on possible changes of the economic paradigm is extremely marginal.

The panel focuses on the social and economic challenges that the region has been currently facing. Most of the state of art on the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa mainly focuses on the ongoing political transformations, we aim to contribute with a different approach that investigates the relation between ideology and political economy.

The main goal is to map out the main socio-economic changes undergone by the region, analyzing what has been done since 2011 in the field of social justice and, more specifically, to counteract poverty and promote employment. It is fundamental to understand what has been achieved so far and what kind of priorities have been added in the agendas of movements, parties and governments. A revolutionary process is supposed overturn the existing institutional structures and paradigms, this holds also for the domain of economy, the agents involved in it and the relations amongst them.

In addition to that, we will be trying to analyze what kind of economic proposals and strategies Political Islam has developed and implemented since 2011. Particular attention will be devoted to the relation between capitalism and Political Islam, concentrating on both the theoretical debate and the solutions suggested so far. We intend to cast light on the stances of the different actors involved with respect to capitalism, international organizations’ conditionalities (IMF’s above all) and the most important and urgent socio-economic problems to manage.