

The current situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank opens the opportunity for new elections in the Palestinian Territories as an opportunity to change the deteriorated situation. Independent of the use of the elections as a tool for change, a new round means preparation of campaigns.

How do you conduct an election campaign and more importantly-how do you win one? These questions were put to 15 young Palestinian activists in cooperation with the historian Dr. Andreas Helle, a political advisor to the Social Democratic Party in Europe. The workshop, a cooperative event between the FES Jerusalem and long time Palestinian Partner PASSIA (Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs) focused on the development process of a political party. Dr. Helle emphasized that even the best campaign strategies will do little to win an election if the party seems fractured or disorganized and cannot offer the electorate creative approaches and initiatives. Strength and weakness analysis can be a useful approach to self evaluation and serve to strengthen the party.



*Dr. Andreas Helle*

Reconciling Islam and Democracy was the central question of the workshop. Can a moderate Islamic force reconcile these two concepts that are perceived as incompatible without simultaneously betraying the principles of one or another? Dr. Helle commented that democracy is rather an instrument based on tolerance and should not be understood as an ideology. Therefore democracy does not stand in opposition to Islam even if the current situation in the Palestinian Territories puts this in doubt. The role of elections as a method of conflict resolution without violence was also discussed in the workshop. Subsequently, the participants used a role-play exercise to identify the values of democracy as well as Islam.

The participants in the workshop joined fictitious parties and worked together to develop a preliminary party platform. One resulting party represented national and populist interests and viewed Western values with skepticism. A second party fit the more social and liberal mold and reflected tolerance and pluralism as the founding principles. In spite of numerous differences such as in the realm of economic policy, the majority of participants agreed that cooperation was necessary.

The themes “Election Campaigns“ and “Modern Campaigning“ were also treated in April during the visit of Christian Kröning, the SPD-General Secretary in Schleswig-Holstein, Sven Zylla, Director of the Office of the Minister in the Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs in Schleswig-Holstein, Karsten Reimer, Chairman of the SPD-Caucus in the City Council of Schleswig, and Anne-Katrin Fischer, research assistant in the office of Member of Parliament Sönke Rix. These proved to be of great interest to Palestinian participants. Even the most dedicated smokers among them worked throughout the workshop without cigarettes and with focused concentration!

The Schleswig-Holstein state governmental campaign „Stark im Norden!“ served as an example for conducting a creative campaign and demonstrated how to implement ideas as concrete strategies. All visiting members of the delegation were active in the campaign

and therefore could offer the Palestinian participants a direct introduction to the issues and answer questions based on direct experience.

A result of the working visit was that there is a determined need for further seminars on the issue of campaigning. German experts also seem to have gained the trust of Palestinian participants in assisting in this difficult subject.