

MUSLIM MIGRANTS IN GERMANY AND THEIR VIEWS ON INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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The presence of Muslims can be documented since the 17th century. Since the 1920s, they live in Germany as a perceivable group whose way of life differs from that of the majority society. The dialogue of the Muslims with the majority society has different forms and changes accordant to actual demands. Particularly, there is in Germany a "Staatskirchenrecht", which enables Christian churches as a religious community to decide upon their fundamentals of belief. As Muslims are not organized in such a way, they are not accepted as a religious community. In questions of Islamic instruction in schools and the choice of teachers, they are not treated in the same way as Christians.

Keywords: Muslims in Germany; Muslim Organizations; Interreligious Dialogue

A presença de muçulmanos na Alemanha é documentada desde o século XVII. Desde a década de 1920, eles vivem na Alemanha como um grupo perceptível, cujo modo de vida difere daquele adotado pela maioria da sociedade. O diálogo dos muçulmanos com a parcela majoritária da população tem diferentes formas e mudanças, de acordo com as demandas existentes. Particularmente, existe na Alemanha um "Staatskirchenrecht", que autoriza as igrejas cristãs, como comunidades religiosas, a decidirem sobre suas crenças fundamentais. Como os muçulmanos não estão organizados dessa maneira, eles não são aceitos como comunidade religiosa. Nas questões da instrução islâmica nas escolas e da discricionariedade dos professores, eles não são tratados da mesma maneira que os cristãos.

Palavras-chave: Muçulmanos na Alemanha; Organizações Muçulmanas; Diálogo Interreligioso.

Muslims in Germany - History

The presence and participation of Muslims in Europe is a long story, which is connected to positive and negative experiences and memories.

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Already in the 8th century an ambivalent relation between Europe and the Orient existed: Charles the Great, King of the Franks used to keep in touch with the Islamic caliphate in Baghdad and, at the same time, waged war against Muslims in Spain. Before Muslims conquered and took over power in Spain, most of trade relations as well as friendly exchange of gifts, and circulation of envoys ensured the good relations between Europe and the Muslim world.

Medieval Spain shows a constructive coexistence of religions, which allowed creating, especially in the domains of science and humanities, a solid base for Europe's Age of Enlightenment and scientific developments that followed. The European Middle Ages knew and appreciated Muslim science to a great extent, and Europe does still benefit from them. Yet Europe hardly acknowledges Muslim participation in its development. The first official prayer room for Muslims, which was under the kings' protection, was created by orders of the King of Prussia Frederick Wilhelm. He was provided with twenty Turkish soldiers to render service in his army. He attached great importance to enable "his Mohammedans" (as he called them) to perform their religious duties. The statements of Friedrich II made in 1740 could be understood as a milestone concerning tolerance in terms of religious diversity: "All religions are equal and good, if the people professing them are honest people; and if Turks and Pagans come, we would build mosques and Churches for them".¹

This willingness to treat followers of other religions openly, and to create a place where they can feel comfortable and (pursue) practice their religion is desirable if it comes to the construction of mosques and the public practice of faith in Europe. In 1807, Prussian Muslims served as soldiers in campaigns of Frederick the Great. Prussian merchants, diplomats, researchers, writers and scientists of those times, who were in touch with Muslims, thought of themselves as a "Bridge between the West and the East".

In 1898, the German Emperor and King of Prussia William II announced in Damascus that the German Emperor would at all time be the friend of the sultan and the "Mohammedans". In 1914, he built a mosque for Muslim prisoners in Wunsdorf near Zossen (Brandenburg). It had a 23 metres high minaret and was about an hour away from a Muslim military cemetery. After WW II, this mosque served Muslims, living in Berlin, as their first place for religious practice. (It was closed and demolished in 1925/26 due to danger of collapsing). In 1922, an Indian imam, Maulana-Sadrudin, founded the first Islamic congregation in Berlin. Two years

¹ M. SALIM, Abdullah. "Und gab ihnen sein Königswort", Altenberge, 1987, p. 19.

later, the Berlin-Wilmersdorf congregation opened up a mosque, the first Muslim-built mosque in Germany, which was the center of Muslim life in Germany until 1945.² This Muslim institution did not cause a sensation, and it was not considered menacing as it sometimes happens nowadays, when a mosque is planned or a Muslim cemetery is to be established.

Since the late fifties, the number of Muslims living in Europe has multiplied. Europe underwent an immense change after WW II and reconstruction of the destroyed Europe required a large number of workers. The formal ending, by European powers, of modern colonization, particularly, France and Great Britain, has been a factor for these workers to come, essentially, from the former colonies, which were mainly Muslim countries.

Muslims came to France mainly from French colonies – mainly Morocco and Algeria – and to Great Britain they came from India and Pakistan. Muslims from (the) African colonies immigrated to Holland and Portugal. Muslims from these countries were familiar with the language and customs of their colonial rulers. They could integrate faster and shortly thought of themselves as “Englishmen” or “Frenchmen” etc. and their legal status corresponded to that. In Germany, we observe a different development: because Germany was not a colonial power, this type of migration did not exist there. In the early 20th century, 3000 Muslims lived in Germany; most of them were intellectuals, philosophers, scientists and merchants. 10% of them were of German origin (approx.300). In the domain of science and Philosophy, Muslims and others of different faith would meet. But, for most people, and as far as they were perceived, Muslims were exotics who were only known from *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*. Their mosques and organizations were something special and, thus, protected and promoted by the Emperor.

In the sixties, Germany recruited “Gastarbeiter” (literally “guest-workers”), who should promote the reconstruction of destroyed Germany and its industry. Besides Italy and Spain, foreign workers were also recruited in Turkey and they were, thus, Muslims. The term “Gastarbeiter”, which is still in use, although these people live in Germany for over forty years and are partly German citizens, defines their status: The “host” content to have workers to reconstruct destroyed Germany, did not perceive them as people who would be part of society permanently. The “guest” felt like someone who had to execute certain tasks to earn good money and to lead a better life in his country, later on.

² See publication of the Islam archive in Germany, concerning the issue “Muslime in Deutschland”, central institute.

This led to the fact that Germany did not see itself in the obligation to integrate these people, and the “Gastarbeiter” had no motivation to approach the society they were living in. This resulted in living in parallel rather than “living together”, without much interest in the way of life of the other. The Germans, at their best, noticed that Muslims ate no pork and that they didn’t drink alcohol. Some of them, who had more information, would know that they prayed five times a day and that they fasted for one month.

The Muslim “Gastarbeiter” were occupied to find something to eat that did not get in touch with alcohol or pork. After work, they would rest in their common lodgings so they would not be tempted to lose their traditional customs. The “Gastarbeiter” were predominantly men. In the beginning, they came without their families who were meant to follow later on. Their interest for their host country, its people and language was marginal. They could maintain and practice their traditions and ways of living without attracting attention. The employers did not see the necessity to provide better possibilities to integrate those workers, because these workers executed the desired tasks very well, and funding of integration programs did not seem necessary. So even a minimum of integration could not be attained: the acquisition of the German language.

The subsequent immigration of the workers’ families caused a need of facilities, which would allow collective spiritual and religious experiences. The “Gastarbeiter” tried, by means of prayer rooms in backyards, to transfer some of their culture to a foreign country. To these prayer rooms grocery stores, where familiar foodstuffs could be bought were added. And, for a long time, these facilities remained invisible to outsiders. For the majority, the mutual perception was limited to work encounters.

Today, approximately 3.2 millions Muslims live in Germany. 2/3 of them come originally from Turkey, and are influenced by Turkish culture, which itself is not consistent. Muslims living in Germany are – like every other human being – individuals who have different views because of their education, formation and their different countries of origin. One cannot speak of “the one Islam” or “the typical Muslim”, and to expect a homogeneous appearance among Muslims. Even while focusing Turkish Muslims, one encounters Muslims having a Kurdish background, secular Muslims, traditionally and religiously stern and modern religious Muslims or Cultural Muslims. The distinct young generation of Turkish Muslims, who practice their religion very consciously, which is organized and uses the opportunity to find a religious way of life exceeding the limits of traditional tendencies.

According to a survey by the German Federal Agency for Civil Education, Muslims living in Germany come from Eastern Europe, Arabic countries as well as Africa, Bosnia, Iran and Afghanistan. The number of Muslims of German origin is indicated as approximately 15,000. Hence, the "Muslim Community" is composed of very different cultural groups. All of them are indeed connected by the basics of their faith. However, they are not at all uniform concerning the practice and comprehension of the faith. They are a minority, which itself is not homogenous but divided in several groups influenced by a sense of belonging to their countries of origin as well as to different Islamic currents. Organizing this heterogeneous minority to represent the interests of all Muslims in Germany proved to be a difficult task for years. Furthermore, the perception of Islam is clouded by global political events.

The Perception of Islam since the Late Seventies

The revolution in Iran in the late seventies, and the images seen in the Medias, mostly depicting Islam as an intimidating and fanatic, imparted a new, political image of Islam and of Muslims. The media coverage and the generalization that every Muslim thinks and acts that way, in addition to the dissemination of the idea that Muslims would intend to turn the world into a theocracy, stoked up concerns and fears. These images and numerous publications, especially books of well known "Islam and eastern experts", strengthened these fears and have influenced our encounters and conversations till this day. The skepticism towards Muslims and Muslim organizations increased and, partially, caused them to be observed without direct communication. A latent fear of Muslims could be sensed, a fear that Muslims and the "fanatic Islam" could threaten democratic and legal standards in Germany. A fear that can only be understood if Islam is seen as a political movement seeking world domination.

The horrible events of the September 11, 2001 attacks and the aftermath reinforced the perception of Islam as a religion of violence, and practicing Muslims as being hostile forces hostile to freedom, democracy and the modern world.

The increase of Muslim organizations and prayer rooms in Germany, which is a consequence of the permanence and detachment of the "Gastarbeiter", is often perceived as a menace.

The politicization of Islam in modern times is a consequence of colonial dominance. 125 to 175 years of Colonialism and in the aftermath the different forms of paternal governments have spawned great changing in Muslim countries. Radical westernization, their economically and socially

poor situation was, amongst others, reasons for people from these societies to search for their own distinct identity. The reflection on religious values united many people. This reflection, aimed at the abolishment of foreign rule, had a political aim and, thus, turned out to have a religious political design. Even if this development did not happen on European soil, it is still connected to the West and influences the life of Muslims who came to the Western world as immigrants. Muslims living in the West can be classified into the following groups; there are certain characteristics in each group that are vital for their lives and which can potentially cause problems, if one does not live in a Muslim country:³

1. Traditionally, faithful and imitating Muslims, who arrange their lives by means of traditions that have existed for centuries, and are transmitted by their families and communities. They are convinced that their pattern of life corresponds exactly to the “authentic Islamic” way of life. Any deviance and any questioning are interpreted as blasphemy. They are opposed to any form of self-orientation and finding their own ways. Only scholars and imams are authorized to occupy themselves with the content of Islam and to utter their opinion on it. Hence, they are the only ones to tell the others how to lead an “Islamic” life. Time and society does not play any role for them. They transfer their way of life without restriction to the country they live in. They feel strongly connected to their countries of origin and events over there do influence and determine their lives here. To avoid influences of their surroundings, they keep away from the society, and do not seek contact with others and, thus, create a “safe zone area” for themselves and their families. This safe zone area does separate them from the reality of their surroundings. They can stay in this zone as long as their community can satisfy their needs, and no one of their society does have an interest in a different way of life. Children and adolescents deriving from such families live in two opposed worlds, under a bilateral pressure. They are allowed to participate marginally in the society, but they are still subject to the families and to the community’s will. However, because of school, apprenticeship or work they are in touch with society in which the individual freedom is the priority and ethnics and moral have a totally different meaning. Hence, it is often the young generation that has to bear the disastrous consequences of this “living-in-two-worlds”. Within society the young frequently act in a strange manner and are thus marginalized, which causes new problems. The number of this group of Muslims is very small.

³ This classification does rely on the authors long lasting experience with Muslims in Germany, it is not a scientific analysis but an observation

2. Muslims who are conscious of tradition adapt the transmitted way of life consciously and critically. They do not assume a contradiction in religious living and modern achievements. They are visible in society and participate in every domain as long as they are accepted. Their children enjoy liberties that are permitted by a symbiosis of their own religious pattern of life and German culture and traditions. The Muslims of this group have fewer problems and are mostly well integrated. Problems can arise if, due to their appearance, their religious life is displayed in public. This affects mostly women whose appearance is still not regarded as being normal. The majority of Muslims living in Germany belongs to this group.

3. Muslims who grew up in Muslim families, who follow the minimum requirements but oppose visible aspects, and do not occupy themselves with Islam. This group mostly does not have problems concerning the majority of society, but with their own family and community who expect a greater solidarity with their own tradition, religion and participation in their community-life.

4. The group of the so-called secular Muslims, who think themselves as Muslims as a consequence of their origin. They do neither follow their religious duties nor show a notable interest in Islam. They adapt the values and habits of the majority of the society and detach themselves from tradition and self-concept of family and community. This can cause conflicts with the family and the community, which can lead to a permanent rupture. For minorities, family and community are of great importance and such ruptures may cause enormous psychological stress.

5. Finally, there are Muslims who deny their identity and affiliations to achieve a better acceptance from society.

Muslim Congregations and Organizations in Germany

Muslim congregations and organizations are still strongly influenced by the rites and languages of their countries of origin. The congregations are mainly to classify rites and languages such as Turkish, Arabic, Persian and Bosnian (rites and languages). Smaller groups of Muslims, like African Muslims, (do) rarely have their own prayer rooms; they attend those congregations that are closest to them.

Some congregations have tried to preach Friday Prayer in German for several years already. This choice is, on one hand, embedded in the reality of young Muslims who understand German better than their parents or grandparents' language; and, on the other hand, the collective language of Muslims living in Germany is German, and there is also the will to communicate and articulate religious issues in this language.

There is a “Staatskirchenrecht” (a section of German legislation that contains legal norms concerning religious and other communities that follow certain philosophies of life, and their relation to the state) in Germany, which allows Christian churches, as religious communities, to define the base of their faith themselves. Priest and religion teachers and the definition of the contents of religious instruction is their responsibility. This responsibility cannot be assumed until the religious community is officially recognized. Since Islam does not know church-like organizations and is not organized this way, Muslims do not have legal possibilities to act autonomously in this domain. Efforts to find a type of organization that considers the diversity of Muslims living in Germany and, at the same time, speaking as (utters statements of) one voice has not been satisfactorily accomplished until now.

In Germany, small Muslim organizations exist along with some bigger ones, which partly try to achieve a union regarding cooperation and coordination. The “Islamrat” is an organization whose major motive was to establish a coordinating authority that should help active associations and organizations, in Germany, to achieve a certain legal status, and to be recognized as a contact for German political institutions responsible in terms of Islamic instruction introduction and teaching. Among members of the “Islamrat” is “Milli Görüs”, an association under the “Bundesamt für den Verfassungsschutz” (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution) surveillance. Because of this, the “Islamrat” is controversial. The “Islamrat” is not an extremist organization but is considered to be a conservative representative of Islam.

Besides the “Islamrat”, there is the “Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland e.V.” (Central Muslims Council of Germany). Both organizations have the same ambitions. The “Zentralrat” tries to be acknowledged as a contact in every Islamic issue. According to the preamble, the “Zentralrat” is meant to “serve the Islamic communities in Germany, to cultivate the interreligious dialogue and to secure a constructive cooperation to the benefit of the Islamic community and the society as a whole”⁴. The bases of the “Zentralrat” are the Qur’an and the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (Sunnah) within the requirements of the German Basic Law (the constitution). This Council is an umbrella organization that represents approximately 1-2% of all Muslims living in Germany, which is about 10% of the organized Muslims.

Another big Muslim organization is the DITIB, the Turkish Islamic Union for Religious Affairs. It is a Turkish organization that exists since

⁴ KÖHLER, Ayyub A. “Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland e.V. (ZMD)”, in: *Muslimische Gemeinschaften im deutschen Recht*, Frankfurt am Main, 2003, s. 75.

1984 and has ties to the Presidency of religious Affairs, an institution of the Turkish government. The DITIB represents the official governmental Turkish Islam. Turkish government employs the imams, who are generally sent to Germany for a four years period. In the majority of cases, their knowledge of the German language is not sufficient to allow participation in a conversation without an interpreter, what makes it difficult for them to play the role of an equal dialogue partner.

Finally, there is to be mentioned VIKZ, an association established in 1973 with a mystical trend. This association has its origins in activities of Turkish “Gastarbeiter”, who cultivated their own cultural identity and values and who wanted to transmit their beliefs to the younger generation.⁵

The members first thought that their stay in Germany would be temporary. At first, Imams from Turkey, educated in private and public preaching schools, were in charge of the new congregations. Today, VIKZ congregations employ mainly Islamic scholars, who are members of the so-called second generation. They have not only been religiously educated but also socialized in Germany, what enables them to – particularly, as they speak effortlessly fluent German – face the challenges that are imposed on Islam in Germany. According to its own proclamation, the association does neither have any political party affiliation nor receives financial aid from other organizations. It is financed by their members with monthly fees. To create a contact at the Länder (the federal states) level, the Muslim associations created a national association (Shura-Association). Though they are not yet legally recognized as official contacts, they are involved in decisions concerning Muslims’ interests Muslims, and particularly they are consulted on decisions concerning educational policies.

Dialogue in Germany

This short account of Muslims and their Organizations in Germany is meant to point out at what level dialogue is possible and the way Muslims may participate in this dialogue.

In Germany, one can look back on a long tradition of dialogue, which did turn into social realities over the years. A dialogue of theologians, philosophers and intellectuals exists since long ago, but has not much relevance for the daily social life and interpersonal relations.

However this dialogue allowed getting to know the spiritual aspects of Islam and to appreciate them.

Great German poets like Goethe or Rückert greatly respected Islam and Islamic literature. People in Germany are hardly conscious of their

⁵ See self-presentation of the VIKZ at <http://www.vikz.de/index1.html> on April 17th 2006.

views and works on this. Hence, this dialogue remained on a theoretical level, which only certain people could access.

When the first “guest-workers” came to Germany, churches paid attention to and opened their doors for them. As long as they did not have any prayer rooms, they were allowed to pray and to have their religious celebrations in the parish halls. That way, a special relationship between Muslims and ecclesiastical institutions developed. It exists till this day and it has been subject to many changes, and it is tested today in a particular manner.

The Muslims were guests for a long time, they accepted the generous offer, but stayed mostly in their own little communities. A religious or theological dialogue between them and their hosts did not exist. Most of them were merely not able to create a dialogue considering their religious education and their language skills. Their concern was to perform their collective religious rites in a foreign country. Since the late seventies, a change in dialogue is identifiable. This is attributed to political events of these times. The revolution in Iran, the conflict of Israel and Palestine, and the whole situation in the Middle East changed the image of Islam, which caused concerns and fears. Since this time one can find a tendency to make Islam responsible for political problems. The partially extremist and fanatic movements of Muslims strengthened this perception. This was followed by changes in the discussions. Because of this, the emphasis of the dialogue of the eighties is placed on the relation of Islam and politics, and on the discussion to what extent Islam raises the claim to conquer the world. The discussions of these subjects (did) often happened without the participation of Muslims who had sufficient knowledge of language and expertise to give an authentic display of the Islamic doctrine or to give a theological answer to nowadays complex political questions.

The discussions were very exciting and strongly emotional that was accompanied by the fear of an extremist Islam for which the German Muslims were often seen as henchmen.

During this time, one registers an interreligious dialogue, which is strongly connected to political discussions. Under the influence of the Iranian revolution and the establishment of the Iranian Republic, discussions were taken to a different level. The images seen and the information given in the medias gave the impression of a political Islam, which aggressively strived for world domination. While public discussions were concerned with these questions, it existed also a parallel-dialogue in which people still tried to get to know better each other and to support the Muslim migrants in their daily concerns. From this time that many deep friendships between

Muslims and German families derive. In this case, one cannot speak of an interreligious dialogue but rather of a dialogue of actions. The increasing number of marriages of Muslim men and German women allowed a dialogue of hearts that involved questions in terms of family members with different religious backgrounds living together. One can speak of well functioning marriages if the subject of the education of the children is clear in advance or if the practice of religion does not play an important role. During the last years, especially after the September 11, 2001 attacks, a rather strained dialogue with Islam is taking place. It became clear that Islam, despite of being in dialogue with the German society for so many years, still remained an alien religion that, now, is perceived as a security threat. The dialogue has been more and more questioned. Due to the fact that, bishop Wolfgang Huber, chairman of the Protestant Church in Germany, used the term "Kuscheldialog" (literally, dialogue of cuddling and, respectively, snuggling) during an interview on (the occasion of) a Christmas party in 2004 this was appreciated by many opponents and skeptic of the dialogue who declared that the whole dialogue had failed. "Kuscheldialog" refers to a dialogue, which does concentrate on common aspects but does not consider differences. Some representatives of the church and politicians increasingly point out that there are substantial differences between Christianity and Islam, which are insurmountable. The representatives of the church refer to from their point of view insurmountable theological differences, while politicians do often use the subject for their strategic and political aims by stirring up the public, and at the same time offering themselves as a guardian. The dialogue in Germany is changing, which is, on one hand, related to the changed perception of Muslims and Islam and, on the other hand, it corresponds to the life situation of Muslims, to their language skills and their expertise concerning social and political subjects. Günther Orth writes in an essay: "I changed by means of dialogue, not just me. This has not been a spectacular turning point but a gradual and gentle change. I think it has to be this way. Who stays as before during a dialogue, did not really experience a dialogue. He did only deliver a monologue. He did only see things from his own point of view, not from the point of view of the partner."⁶ In the long run, a successful dialogue has to revise opinions and achieve constructive social changes.

The depiction in the media of Islam and of the radical movements that are related to it, still gives an impression that predominantly causes fear.

⁶ NEUSER, Bernd (Org.). *Dialog im Wandel- Der christlich-islamische Dialog. Anfänge, Krisen, neue Wege*, Neukirchen: Vluyn 2005, s. 69.

The media coverage mostly does not throw light on certain aspects but distort the political, religious and social realities in Muslim countries and reduce Islam to a concept of the enemy and cause of the problems par excellence. The information itself is not always wrong but represents only a small part of Islamic reality; that is to say, the extremist and violent-prone part. These images create a seemingly threatening Islam, and automatically present Muslims as a monolithic bloc that emanates danger. Surveys concerning this subject point out the collective suspiciousness towards Muslims and the negative opinions of Islam in public discussions. Increasingly, Muslims no longer feel accepted, a feeling that leads to frustration and withdrawal to familiar surroundings as well as to the emergence of parallel societies, in which Muslims organize their lives without contact with the larger society, which would be accompanied by difficulties and problems. However, events concerning global politics, security concerns and existing fears in terms of religious extremism do not mean the end of communication; it allows new ways of dialogue, which focus questions of religious education of children and participation of Muslims in society. This is a long process because Islam in Germany is not yet a legally recognized religious community.

The German “Staatskirchenrecht” (see above) concerns not only the Christian churches, but concentrates on organized religious communities. In terms of Islam, this law cannot be applied, because Islam is not an organized religious community. A religious community can only have legal relations if their legal capacity is acknowledged. Being furnished with a legal capacity allows a religious community to issue binding directives to regulate intra-community life, to define the base of faith themselves, and to be responsible for the teaching of religious education in terms of the content and the selection and training of the teachers.

As Islam does not have this type of legal status, and the goal of establishing the necessary legally accepted organization not being satisfyingly accomplished till this day, a religious training, in terms of article 7, paragraph 3 of the German Basic Law, cannot be conducted by Muslims. Article 7, paragraph 3 guarantees the right of co-determination of the religious community regarding the religious training, which is – also according to the Basic Law – part of the regular curriculum of German public schools: “Religious instruction shall form part of the regular curriculum in state schools, with the exception of non-denominational schools. Without prejudice to the state’s right of supervision, religious instruction shall be given in accordance with the tenets of the religious community concerned. Teachers may not be

obliged against their will to give religious instruction.”⁷ Muslims in Germany have strived for, approximately, twenty years to conduct an Islamic religious training in public schools. The federal states are autonomous concerning their educational policies, enabling every state to develop its own models. The necessity of an Islamic religious education supervised by the state and with participation of the Muslims in terms of the definition of the basics of the faith and an accordant curriculum is recognized in political circles. Hence, the federal states try to develop models, which furnish Muslims with codetermination despite the lack of legal status. The example of the state of Lower Saxony could serve as a standard for other states. In 2001, the premier of Lower Saxony announced that the establishment of an Islamic religious training in public schools was his political will and enabled the ministry of education to realize it. Hereupon, the ministry of education installed a round table consisting of different Muslim associations of Lower Saxony. For the time being, this round table substituted the legally recognized contact, which is in dialogue with the state, in this case represented by the ministry of education, concerning the establishment of an Islamic religious training. The round table did not have the authority of a recognized religious community. As it lacked the possibility to choose the teachers it was mainly involved in determining guidelines.

This religious education began in 2003, being as a pilot project limited to a period of four years. Teachers are employed by the German state who acted until now as Arabic or Turkish teachers. They undergo an advanced training to prepare them for the Islamic religious education. The language of instruction is German, which is considered as the collective language of Muslim children in Germany with different migration backgrounds. The instruction takes place during regular school hours and strives for a religious-ethical education, and takes Sunnite as well as Shiite views into account. Because of the existence of a tight relation between dogmatic theology and the Muslim way of life ethics, this education will emphasize ethical training as well, which is based on the guidelines given by the German constitution. Furthermore, this religious instruction is about being in dialogue to analogue subjects including the subject “ethic and norms” as well as the religious instruction of other religions. Hence, the children become acquainted with a substantiated dialogue, which is embedded in an extensive knowledge of their own faith. The instruction in German enables the children to articulate themselves in conversations about Islam. The development of a pedagogic concept of religious instruction in the West is the next step, and German universities do slowly open up concerning

⁷ Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, article 7, paragraph 3.

this issue. This development allows a new type of dialogue in which they are not just guests and obliged to answer questions but can actively engage in social and political discussions. An important step has been the Islam-conference initiated by Wolfgang Schäuble in September 2006. For the first time a dialogue between Muslims and state had been possible at such a level. The participants of this conference had been representatives of the state and of Muslim umbrella organizations as well as Muslim personalities and critics. The minister expressed that he would hope for practical solutions for the living together, in Germany, would be found in cooperation with Muslims, deriving from this conference. In workgroups, problems and concerns shall be discussed, analyzed and possible solutions developed. During a three years period, these workgroups will be concerned with the topics "German Social Order and Consensus on Values", "Religious Questions in the Context of the German Constitution" and "Economy and Media as a bridge". The findings of the workgroups are presented annually in a meeting with the minister of the interior.

This dialogue motivates Muslims to push the process of unifying their organizations to acquire the status of a religious community. Currently, the four big associations: the "Central Muslims Council of Germany", the "Islamrat", VIKZ and DITIB have confederated. To be recognized as a religious community still is a long way, which is made difficult because of the differences in the religious views within Islam and the ethnical origin of its members. Apart from the public perception of Muslims and their social problems, most Muslims think of Germany as their homeland, where they are, however, not always accepted. For many Muslims, who live in Germany, it is obvious that they have to reevaluate and newly discover their religion independently of traditions. Islam in Europe is en route to meet indispensable changes. The critical observation of traditions, which are declared as Islam, allows rediscovering Islamic values, which have been lost because of regional and cultural interpretations. For the majority of Muslims, a life apart from traditional bonds means to critically deal with their religion. For this purpose, chairs for Islamic theology that allow a scientific discourse are necessary. Educational institutions to educate the imams and religiously responsible people as well as the Muslim teachers are important subjects for the current and future dialogue in Germany.

Conclusion

Most Muslims are integrated in Germany or are in the process of integrating themselves. They consider Germany as their homeland, a homeland in which they are a minority. Integration can and must not

mean assimilation, and must, by no means, lead to the abandonment of personal identity. Concerning religious practice, which is also connected to certain visible characteristics (for instance, clothing), Muslims experience constrictions and rejection, which prevent them from actively participating in society. Germany needs to become aware of plurality as being enrichment rather than a menace. Seeing religious diversity as a chance is a considerable step to mutual appreciation and acceptance. And all people living together in a country are obliged to work on this.

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