

UNIT TITLE
Challenges and Opportunities: Muslims in Germany
Designing for Understanding Template for TOP

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Stage 1: Essential Understandings
The Unit Focus or Theme: Immigration is a major issue in contemporary Germany. There are currently 3.5 million Muslims living in Germany, and this provides unique challenges and opportunities for Germany.
Big Concepts: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Germany is not a homogenous country• Many different perspectives on immigrants exist in Germany
An Essential Understanding: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will understand the challenges and opportunities that Muslim immigration brings to Germany.• Students will understand that there are multiple views on immigration and assimilation in Germany.
Essential Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What factors encourage or discourage immigration?• Should immigrants assimilate or retain their unique cultural traditions?• What can be done to ensure productive and good relations between immigrant and native communities?

Stage Two: Individual Summative Assessment
Assessment Type: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Critical Analysis of contemporary newspaper articles on Muslims living in Germany
Short Scenario for the Individual Summative Assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will be separated into groups; each group of four students will have one newspaper article to read and analyze. After reading the article, the students will complete a retrieval chart to aid in analyzing the complex issues of immigration. Each group will choose one spokesperson to “report out” their findings on Muslim immigration in Germany. When students have gleaned information and perspectives from all the groups, they will compose a “white sheet” detailing specific steps the German government could take regarding immigration.

Directions/Criteria:

- Each student will complete a retrieval chart after reading the assigned article (see attachment)
- Each group will orally present information from their article to the class
- Each group will complete a “white sheet” detailing policies they would recommend to the German government regarding immigration

Directions for the “Go Beyond”:

- Students can research American policies on immigration and construct a Venn Diagram comparing American and German immigration.

Stage Three: Sequence of Lesson**Target Audience:**

- Secondary world history students
- College Preparatory (*option: for students with lower reading levels, consider just providing a one paragraph excerpt from each article*)

Time Frame:

- One block class (ninety minutes) or two fifty minute periods

Anticipatory Set:

Start by asking students about immigration in the United States. Elicit their opinions by asking, “What are the advantages?” (*responses might include larger labor force, new foods, different styles of music*) and “What are the challenges?” (*responses might include language barriers, health care, different values*). Continue the opening discussion by asking what the United States does (or does not do) to assimilate immigrants.

Background Information:

Continue the discussion by explaining that the United States is not alone in dealing with immigration. Explain that Germany has a large immigrant population; the largest group (70%) are Turkish and predominantly Muslim. The current estimate in Germany is about 3:5 million Muslims. Many Turks immigrated to Germany after World War II as “guest workers” to rebuild Germany in the face of a severe labor shortage. Very few Turks gained German citizenship due to the stringent regulations for naturalization, and most believed they would return to Turkey after working in Germany and accumulating wealth. In reality, very few did return as they grew accustomed to living in Germany. As a result, many large cities (Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg) have large communities of Muslims. Recent concerns include language acquisition (particularly for isolated women), low test scores among immigrant populations (as evidenced by the famous PISA study), and failure to assimilate into the larger German society.

Lesson Steps:

1. Tell the students that today they will be reading and analyzing various viewpoints towards immigration (and specifically Muslims) in Germany.
2. Split students into groups of four to five students and pass out the **Retrieval Chart**. Each student will fill out a chart based on the article they read. Be sure to make enough copies of each article; if you have a class of 24 students, split students into six groups and make

four copies of each article. If you wish to use different or more articles, a good source is www.islamawareness.net/Europe/Germany/

3. Once students are situated in their groups with their assigned article, have the students read and write their responses silently (about 15 minutes). They should then have a small group discussion in which they compare answers and discuss the gist of the article. Each group should appoint one or two spokespersons to “report out” their findings to the class.
4. Direct the students to the front of the room and have each group give a brief presentation. They should include what their article was about and what challenges or opportunities exist. You may want to ask about the perspective of the article; is the author German or Muslim? While the individual groups are presenting, the students should continue jotting down notes on their **Retrieval Chart**.
5. After the presentations, direct students back to working with their small groups. Pass out one **White Sheet** per group. For about ten minutes, have the group act as consultants who are making recommendations to the German government regarding immigration and assimilation policy. If students appear to be stuck, encourage them to think of naturalization procedures, education reforms, or workplace requirements. Encourage them to think beyond the perspective of their article—what is truly best for Germany?
6. End class with a large group discussion of possible recommendations. You can bring in policies currently in effect in Germany (the articles list some but not all of them.) For example, one successful program in Frankfurt and many other cities is “Mother Learns German,” a free language program to ensure that mothers (and then children) can speak German fluently. Since 2000, German-born foreign children are eligible for dual citizenship. Those not born in the country can be naturalized, but (much like the United States) it is a long process of at least seven years.
7. **Optional Independent Practice** - Have students create a Venn diagram of immigration issues facing the United States and Germany. What do they have in common? What are the differences?

Formative Evaluation:

- Each student should hand in a **Retrieval Chart** that can be graded based on effort and completion. Each group should also turn in a **White Sheet**. Part of the grade could be based on small and large group participation.
- Students can receive additional points for construction a Venn diagram.

Resources:

- Four to six copies of each article, depending on class and group size. *Note: some articles can be condensed due to time/reading level constraints.*
- One copy of the **Retrieval Chart** per student
- One copy of the **White Sheet** per group (total of six)

Student Expectations:

- The student should be able to better understand the ever-changing and diverse German society.
- The student should be able to understand various perspectives regarding immigration, particularly those of native Germans and the Muslim immigrant population.
- The student should be able to understand the benefits and challenges of immigration.

Challenges and Opportunities: Muslims in Germany Retrieval Chart

Title of Article:
Author & Nationality:
Newspaper:
What are the challenges you read about? Keep in mind they can be challenges for native Germans, Muslim-Germans, or Muslim immigrants. * *
What opportunities might be present in the article you read? Think about opportunities for different cultures to understand, tolerate, and accept one another. * *
The next two sections should be filled in when listening to other groups report out loud:
Additional Challenges: * * *
Additional Opportunities: * * *

Challenges and Opportunities: Muslims in Germany
White Sheet: Recommendations on Immigration

Names of students in group:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

Based on your article and the other student reports, list three logical recommendations that you would make to the German government regarding Muslims in Germany. *Be sure to include why, and be prepared to defend your answer.*

- 1)

Why?

- 2)

Why?

- 3)

Why?

Germany's Muslims between assimilation and confrontation

By Mohammad Daraghmeh

Thursday, September 16, 2004

During a recent conference held by the Goethe Institute, German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer received intellectuals, politicians and journalists from the Arab and Muslim world under the rubric of a new program entitled "A Dialogue between Islam and the West." German intellectuals and representatives seek to develop a special and equitable relationship between Germany and the Arab and Islamic world, in an attempt to distinguish themselves from other international players responsible for problematic relationships with the Middle East.

Another motive behind the program, which aims to promote mutual understanding, is Germany's continued anxiety over Islamic extremism and terrorism. This is partly due to recent attacks in Europe, especially those against Spanish trains in March that killed around 200 people. An official in the German Foreign Ministry revealed that there were 150-200 cases under investigation of terrorist attacks planned by Islamist organizations in Germany.

Germany has other reasons for wanting a strong relationship with the Arab and Muslim world: It is a great industrial nation, and the Arab world is one of the largest of global markets. There is also the presence of a 3 million-strong Muslim community in Germany, including 2 million people of Turkish origin.

Muslim activists in Germany say the gap between their community and German society as a whole has been widening. This has been especially true since September 11, 2001. Community leaders say that some German families have been contacting the police asking whether it is safe for their children to play outside in areas where there are mosques or large concentrations of Muslims.

What causes anxiety about religious education, for German Muslims and non-Muslims alike, is that some teachers do not have the appropriate credentials and are transforming religious education into a series of fatwas, or Islamic legal decisions, prohibiting various activities in society. This has led Muslim students to withdraw from German society, which is portrayed by the teachers as unbelieving and immoral, and from the educational system and cultural life.

Many Islamist activists sought refuge in Europe because of pressures from their governments at home. They are now replicating such antagonistic relationships with their new governments in Europe. Activists in Arab and Turkish cultural centers in Germany say that the ideas of self-proclaimed religious teachers are often characterized by fanaticism. The teachers call on their students to distance themselves from the modern city and its characteristics, and to reject dialogue with other cultures.

A woman volunteer in an Iraqi cultural center in Berlin observed that most of those applying to be religious teachers did not have a high level of religious education and depended on old and dubious texts. She said they urged students to create a relationship of confrontation with German society. This behavior was picked up by German intelligence, and the woman thought it was one reason why many Iraqis who had come to Germany in recent years were no longer welcome.

A Turkish youth who manages an Internet and communications store in Berlin lamented what he called the hatred of Germans toward Turks. He said, "Life here is no longer bearable. Germans do not like us. We feel very estranged from this society. I must return to my country after I make enough money." However, the opportunity he and others have to make much money from their work is slim, given Germany's economic problems, the fact that 4 million people are unemployed and the increase in the cost of living.

Generally, Muslims in Germany face the same problems that immigrants face everywhere, including questions of identity. Some believe the solution is to assimilate into German society, while most are

determined to be distinguished as a group. This is why they establish cultural centers in which they can gather and through which they can preserve their culture and traditions. Assimilation has its price in subverting personality and identity; but distinction also has its price. Many Muslim families in Germany speak of a crisis in raising their sons and especially daughters in an open European society.

For example, German schools offer mixed swimming classes or field trips in which students sleep away from home for a few nights. Muslims face a dilemma in such a situation. By prohibiting their daughters from participating in these programs, they know it will merely increase their isolation; but if they are allowed to participate, it will create a crisis in the Muslim family.

Perhaps because Germany has a long history of reform, German leaders have supported efforts to improve their relationship with Muslim communities. One intellectual was hopeful about improving relations, partly because Germany's history in the Arab world is different than that of other Western countries.

The secretary of a clerical conference in Germany also admitted to optimism about the relationship between the state and its Muslims.

He said, "Germany is a country of reform, the land of Martin Luther, the country that witnessed a religious war between Catholics and Protestants that lasted 30 years ... but these battles led to the separation of church and state. Today we have more than 3 million Muslims, and we have to live together and make religion a personal matter. This is officially the situation, but it needs to be achieved on the ground."

Mohammad Daraghmeh is an Arab journalist. This commentary is published in collaboration with the Common Ground News Service (CGNews)

German Greens Propose Muslims Shura Council

By Khaled Schmitt, IOL Correspondent

BONN, July 21 (IslamOnline.net) – The German Green Party has drafted an initiative regulating the relation between the legislative and executive authorities in Rheinland-Pfalz state and Muslims through the creation of a unified Muslim Shura Council, a proposal welcomed by the Muslim community.

The Green's parliamentary bloc has worded a six-point proposal outlining an official policy to deal with Muslims and issues of concern for them, the party said in a statement, a copy of which was obtained by IslamOnline.net on Wednesday, July 21.

The initiative calls on the state's government to set up an official body and invite mosques and Islamic institutions in the state to voluntarily register with the body.

It asks registered mosques and organizations to pledge to abide by the German constitution and all of the country's laws, especially the penal code.

Mosques and Islamic organizations should, according to the blueprint, elect representatives to a proposed Muslim Shura Council of the sizable one million community in the state, through secret ballots.

The council will pick its board members from those representatives, who will, in turn, elect a board chairman.

According to the Green Party's initiative, the elected chairman of the Muslim Shura Council will be the legitimate representative of Muslims in the state and deal on their behalf with the administrative, legislative and legal authorities.

Once the Shura Council is formed and its chairman elected, the state should apply the minority protection law on Muslims, granting them the highest possible protection as a religious minority.

Standing Policy

The Green Party said their initiative would guarantee a long-standing official policy towards Islam in the state that would not be subject to changes according to circumstances.

Another objective, added the part, is to have a democratically-elected representative of the Muslim community to cooperate with the local government and its bodies to run affairs of community members.

The Greens expect positive results from their initiative, including obliging state schools to teach Islam to Muslim students with Muslims being allowed to participate in outlining the curriculum.

The party had repeatedly criticized the local government in the past years for failing to launch dialogue with the million Muslim residents, including 200,000 who have the German nationality.

It noted that issues such as hijab, sheep sacrifice, Islamic cemetery as well as religious and sex education are now taking center stage in parliament session and even in court.



"This is an evidence the Green Party deal with Muslim and integration issues more seriously than others," said Elias

The Green Party also criticized Muslim organizations for failing to agree on common stances and elect a representative to speak on their behalf with the state authorities.

Welcomed

The two largest Muslim groups in the country welcomed the initiative, but had some reservations.

"This is evidence the Green Party deals with Muslim and integration issues more seriously than others," Nadim Elias, the head of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, told IOL.

The initiative contains many positive aspects Muslims could benefit from in putting their house in order, but there are still broad ideas that require extensive discussions, he noted.

The German Islamic Council also welcomed the initiative.

The Green Party has invited representatives from the government, parliament, other parties, Islamic centers and churches for an extraordinary conference on October 8 to give their viewpoints on the initiative.

The government's integration commissioner and other experts are expected to turn up at the gathering.

There are some 3.4 million Muslims in Germany, including 220,000 in Berlin alone.

An estimated two thirds of them are of Turkish origin.

On January 7, officials of Baden-Württemberg state decided to introduce Turkish as an optional language in all schools.

The issue of the Muslim women's right to wear hijab has proven controversial in the country.

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder voiced on December 21 his opposition to public servants wearing hijab, but said he was not against students wearing them in schools.

Seven German states have backed a legislation barring hijab at a recent meeting of 16 regional ministers for culture, education and religious affairs in the western German city of Darmstadt while eight opposed such laws.

In September, Germany's highest court ruled that the government of Baden-Wuerttemberg was wrong to forbid a Muslim female teacher from wearing her hijab in the classroom.

Culture & Lifestyle | 07.06.2003

Study Shows What Germans Think About Islam



Großansicht des Bildes mit der Bildunterschrift: Muslims pray in the Mevlana mosque in Berlin's Kreuzberg neighborhood.

A new survey probing German attitudes towards Islam has thrown up surprising results -- many Germans are tolerant towards the religion, but wish Muslims living in the country would reciprocate the feeling.

A survey commissioned by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Germany to study how people here perceive Islam is set to shake the foundations of the widespread view that western societies are uncomfortable with the religion.

Called "What do the Germans Think about Islam?" the study, which involved 1,000 western Germans and just as many eastern Germans, found that almost two-thirds of those questioned believed Muslims living in Germany should be allowed to practice their religion without any restrictions.

Most of the 2,000 surveyed also showed themselves to be largely free of prejudice. Ninety-one percent said they believed all people were equal before God and more than two-thirds rejected the notion that Christianity was superior to Islam.

Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, who carried out the survey for the respected foundation which maintains close ties to Germany's conservative opposition Christian Democratic Union (CDU), called the results "surprising."

Even Emine Demirbüken, who has worked as a commissioner for foreigner affairs in Berlin for 15 years and oversaw the poll, told Deutsche Welle the results were unexpected. "It surprised me positively because in the overall societal atmosphere, something different is shown. That is, the Germans are against Islam, that they have nothing to do with it and that Muslims living here are obliged to adapt and aren't allowed to visibly practice their religion," she said.

Deep doubts about Islam, too

But the survey also uncovered some less comfortable findings.

Almost half of those questioned doubted that Islam was a tolerant religion, and 46 percent said they didn't believe that Islam and Christianity represented the same values. Two-thirds opined that Muslims living in Germany should be more considerate towards Germans while practicing their religion.

Wilamowitz-Möllendorff said tolerance towards Islam was most conspicuous among the educated classes and among those Germans who have contacts to fellow Muslims. Germans from formerly communist eastern Germany also showed more reservations than their counterparts in the west.

Demirbüken said what's needed is more intensive dialogue between Muslims and Germans. "We urgently need a strong discussion, we need to deal with the topic Islam more thoroughly. But not as a political movement, rather Islam as a religious tenet."

Cordial relations

With close to 4 million Muslims living in Germany, Islam is the third most commonly practiced religious faith in the country -- after the Protestantism and Catholicism.

Though relations between Germans and Muslims have been largely peaceful, tensions have arisen in the past in the form of local resistance to the construction of mosques or disagreements over whether Muslims may use loudspeakers in residential neighborhoods to call the faithful to prayer.

Relations between the two communities faced additional strains after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, in the U.S. and the subsequent discovery of the Hamburg terror cell, where a handful of the perpetrators lived. There have also been instances where German constitutional law has conflicted with Islamic practices or raised issues of religious freedom, such as the recent case where a Muslim teacher in the state of Baden-Württemberg was forbidden from working because she refused to teach without a headscarf. She has now taken her plea to the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe, Germany's highest court.

"I find it very regrettable that the headscarf debate is being hustled into legal paragraphs and courts. I also find it almost unbearable that it's being touted as a symbolic act," Demirbüken said.

Bridging the divide

Demirbüken thought that one way of bridging the gap would be for the German states to officially recognize and support Islam studies the same way they endorse Christian religious lessons.

Currently Islam religious lessons in schools, which are offered in some places in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, are the prerogative of Islamic organizations. Demirbüken said that's precisely what makes Islam a special case and hinders people from getting correctly informed about it.

"It would be ideal if one perceived and accepted the customs of this society (the Muslims), which includes the wearing of a headscarf, as normal. But naturally that needs education, which first has to be rooted in schools, where someone wearing a headscarf would simply be accepted as a teacher and not as a person wearing a headscarf," she said.

Germans argue over integration



By Ray Furlong
BBC News, Berlin

Decades of consensus about a multicultural society have been thrown into question recently as leading German politicians suggest that minorities living in the country need to do more to fit in.

"The notion of multiculturalism has fallen apart," said opposition conservative leader Angela Merkel in a recent interview.

"Anyone coming here must respect our constitution and tolerate our Western and Christian roots."

It was just one of a chorus of voices, from left and right, among politicians and the media.

The debate centres largely around the three million-strong Muslim community - mostly Turkish, with Bosnians making up the next largest group, followed by people of Arab origin.

It was sparked by the killing of Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh, and subsequent attacks in the Netherlands on Muslim and Christian sites.

Fears that something similar could happen in Germany were fanned by a TV broadcast in which a secret recording caught an imam telling worshippers that Germans would "burn in hell" because they were unbelievers.

This has been followed by a raft of new proposals for better integration of the Muslim community, against a backdrop of fears that Muslims in Germany inhabit a "parallel society" centred around mosques infiltrated by "hate preachers".

"A democracy cannot tolerate lawless zones or parallel societies," declared Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder. "Immigrants must respect our laws and acknowledge our democratic ways of doing things."

Another politician suggested it should be compulsory for imams to preach in German, and sections of the media have judged that the debate marks the end of multiculturalism.

"It's a quite frank debate on what we Germans expect of those people coming to us as immigrants," says Nikolaus Blome, commentator with Die Welt newspaper.

"If multiculturalism means that it's OK for 30,000 Turks to live in a certain quarter of Berlin, and never leave, and live like they're still in deepest Turkey, then the term is now discredited."

Mood Shift

The debate shows a marked swing in the atmosphere in Germany.



Many Turks found work during Germany's economic miracle

“ If multiculturalism means that it's OK for 30,000 Turks to live in a certain quarter of Berlin, and never leave, and live like they're still in deepest Turkey, then the term is now discredited ”

- Nikolaus Blome
Die Welt newspaper

Four years ago, a conservative politician was attacked from all sides for suggesting the country has a Leitkultur or "leading culture".

As this previously unacceptable term resurfaced, former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt caused further furore by suggesting that the decision to invite "guest workers" to Germany in the 1960s had been a mistake.

Poor command of the German language among Muslims has been singled out for particular criticism.

When tens of thousands of Muslims took part in a protest against terrorism in Cologne recently, the German politicians who addressed the crowd gave them a blunt message: "Learn German."

A new immigration law which takes force from 1 January contains compulsory language and civic lessons for new arrivals, but critics point out there is nothing for people from ethnic minorities who are already here.

No Help

Erol Ozkaraca lives in the Berlin district of Reinickendorf, where the population is a mix of Germans, Turks and people from the former Soviet Union.

Switching off the Turkish TV channel broadcasting into his living room, and taking a contemplative drag on his cigarette, he declares: "Germany has never been a multicultural society. The concept of multi-culturalism was never given a chance here."

Mr Ozkaraca, a lawyer by profession, was born in Hamburg. His father came to Germany as a student in 1949, long before the "guest workers".

"These politicians say: They don't speak German, they don't want to be part of German society, and they have their own structures. But I ask: Where are the courses where we can learn German? Where is the help to integrate us, to show - you are welcome and we want you here?"

Islam's influence in Germany grows *By Geraldine Schwarz in Berlin*

Friday, 05 December, 2003, 11:14 [<http://sify.com/news/fullstory.php?id=13326514>]

Berlin: The unmistakable twin minarets, the domed roof and the marble staircase towards a heavy door, behind which the faithful kneel in midday prayers under the vaulted ceiling.

It could be Cairo, or Beirut or Damascus, or one of a thousand other cities and towns dotted across the Middle East and around the world. It isn't. This is Berlin, where the German capital's first mosque has just opened and there are plans for a dozen more.

The city already boasts more than 70 places of prayer for Muslims, but not until the Pehitlik opened on Columbiadamm, a non-descript street in southern Berlin, has it had a mosque.

"It's good to have a representative place," said Recep Turkogu, a member of the Turkish-Islamic Union for the Office of Religion (DITIB) which supervises 600 of the 2,200 Muslim prayer centres in Germany.

There are some 3.4 million Muslims in Germany, including 220,000 in Berlin. An estimated two thirds are of Turkish origin. Countrywide the Muslim community has 77 mosques. In Berlin, up to now, the prayers have been organised in apartments, halls and courtyards.

"We chose to stay in Germany," said Recep, who moved here 34 years ago, "so we want convenient places to pray. We will show extremists the door." Old habits die hard for some, though.

"Normally we pray in a flat," said three Turks arriving for midday prayers at the Pehitlik mosque. "Praying here is a chance to socialise, but we prefer to pray at our homes." The building on the Columbiadamm has excited little controversy, apart from a dispute over the size of the minarets.

However, news of a dozen similar plans to build mosques or Islamic centres in Berlin, notably in the Turkish-dominated areas of Kreuzberg and Neukoelln, have raised concerns. "Generally, people think that, Islam being embedded in this districts, it's legitimate that there are representative buildings," said Guenther Piening, a Berlin city official responsible for matters of racial integration.

"But they fear mosques will encourage a radicalisation that would threaten the liberal atmosphere of those districts." Another concern since the September 11, 2001 attacks is that some mosques could serve as de facto recruiting centres for Islamic extremists.

Neukoelln's conservative mayor Heinz Buschkowsky said the best way to ease concerns was to ensure transparency, notably on how a project is financed, as well as ensuring the building fitted into the local environment. Buschkowsky is battling against a plan by a little-known group, Inssan.

It was set up two years ago and has only 40 members, yet has submitted proposals for what would be one of the biggest Islamic centres in Germany, complete with cafe, creche and library as well as a prayer room. The mayor is concerned about Inssan's credibility and source of funds, and says it was a mistake to grant it provisional planning permission.

But neither Piening nor Buschkowsky sees the spate of projects as a sign of any "re-awakening" of Islam, more a consequence of its growing naturalisation into German life, fuelled by competition between rival Islamic groups.

To oppose that trend, as some worried residents are doing in places such as Kassel, central Germany, is "idiotic," Buschkowsky said, "as if people wanted to go on a Christian crusade again."

Making Islam Part of Germany

An interview with Saudi gynecologist, Dr. Nadeem Elyas, who has lived in Germany since 1964.



Dr Nadeem Elyas is a doctor of gynecology and cytology originally from Mecca, Saudi-Arabia. Dr. Elyas is married and has four children. He came to Germany in 1964 to complete his medical degree and has always been active in Muslim organizations in Germany. He heads the Central Council for Muslims in Germany, which was founded as an umbrella organization uniting 19 Muslim organizations with approximately 700 mosque-communities. It embraces Muslims of different nationalities - Turks, Albanians, Bosnians, Germans and Arabs - in their respective organizations. Germany has a population of about 82 million, and Muslims make up about 2.8 million. In this interview, Dr. Elyas speaks to Islam Online's Juliane Hammer on the situation of the country's Muslims.

Q: How would you evaluate the general situation of Muslims in Germany?

A: From a legal perspective, we Muslims have a good starting position because of the guaranteed right in the Basic Law (German constitution). What makes a Muslim a Muslim - an Islamic way of life - is guaranteed and protected by the Basic Law. But we have to say that of the approximate 2.8 million Muslims who live in Germany today - many of whom are second- and third-generation - many have a hard time benefiting from these rights. These rights are abandoned on many levels, in municipalities, on the community and town level, not to speak of discrimination in daily life. It sums up and spurs the impression that Muslims are without rights in Germany. We do not accept that, but think that there are vacant spaces where the law should be applied. We try to solve these disputes with discussion and argument, but also in legal ways if necessary.

Q: Would you say that there is progress in the acceptance of Muslim religious practice?

A: In the last 10 to 15 years there has definitely been progress, which is based on the new self-understanding of Muslims, namely the realization that most of them will stay in Germany for good. Especially the third generation, but also many in the first and second generations accept that now as well. That leads to new attempts to arrange ourselves within society, to shape their own institutions differently, and to adjust the programs of the Muslim organizations according to that. It is an opening process, a search for dialogue, and it involves the election of people to higher positions in order to work for these new goals. And these are often members of the third generation who were born here, went through the school system here, speak German as their mother tongue and understand the society better than their parents or grandparents.

That brings a new approach of dealing with the society, the media and the authorities. Muslims demand other forms of spatial representation. Unlike the backyard mosques we used

to have, we now need mosques and community centers as places where people can meet to pray, participate in community life, learn and discuss topics of their interest.

There is a new self-confidence and self-awareness that express themselves in the way guaranteed rights are asked to be implemented. The problem with building permits is often a problem with local authorities, who either create problems or genuinely see them and make the permission process to build a new mosque or Islamic center long and complicated. A special problem is permission for "adhan," which usually leads to protests from the neighbors. Politicians, and especially priests, think that they have to protect society from "adhan." Many problems are based on prejudice and a lack of knowledge.

We usually try to solve these problems through dialogue, communication and only as a last resort, legal action. It is as much a challenge from society as it is one from within the Muslim community. The progress we see here is based on the understanding that it is wrong and dangerous to ignore the problems of a community as big as the Muslim one in Germany, because those problems will reflect on society as a whole.

Q: Do you consider integration of Muslims in German society possible?

A: Integration is difficult, but not impossible, because the laws are already there and because Germany already is a multi-cultural and multi-religious country. It is an immigrant's country despite the denial of that fact by German politicians. Different religions and worldviews have been present for a long time, so it is not the foundations we have to lay. But co-existence has to be transformed into one state of togetherness with each other.

First, Muslims have to be willing to be integrated and secondly, society has to be willing to help this integration with legal action, through projects, changes in local restrictions and so on. The planned anti-discrimination law could be a step in the right direction. We don't want Germany to be a uniform society where the individual member has to lose his identity; that would not be beneficial for either the individual or Germany. We want to keep our identity as Muslims in Germany, as German Muslims. We want to be able to be different, stay in the framework of German society, but keep our religious values and lifestyle.

Society does not have the right to decide for us what parts of Islam are acceptable and what are not. This step has to come from us and we also have to be willing to use the flexibility of Muslim rules and regulations in the future to develop something you can call an Islam with German character. This is not a new invention. If you look around in the world you find many different faces of Islam in different regions of the world where Muslim communities adjusted to the country they live in and nevertheless kept their character as a Muslim community.

Q: Is there a theological debate about how to adjust regulations to the situation in Germany, even more so now that Muslims decided to stay here for good?

A: There are discussions about that, not only in Germany, but more generally in Europe. There is the notion of "Fiqh al-Mughtarab," the Islamic Law Outside the Muslim World. It produces new interpretations of Islamic rules. Many prominent Muslim thinkers and members of the Muslim communities participate in these discussions and try to find solutions. There are problems, such as the traveling of women without male company, life of a single woman with a family, Islamic slaughtering, and others that are discussed and they lead to reasonable solutions that are at the same time Islamic and timely.

Q: Which role do young Muslims play in your organizations? What part of your work deals with the specific problems of young Muslims who were born and raised in Germany?

A: We have a working group on family and social problems and they also deal with problems of the young Muslims. It is a group of sociologists, psychologists, teachers and other specialist who discuss all the questions concerning this important group of our community. Not so long ago, we had a hearing about problems of young people in German society, in their families and in the schools. We looked at whether or not Islamic activities offered by Muslim youth organizations grant sufficient programs to young people. This meeting will be transformed into an action program with recommendations for how to tackle some of the raised issues.

Another group deals with questions in schools, such as headscarves, swim training, class excursions and sexual education in school. We try to collect further information to suggest realistic solutions. But on another level, it seems important to me to mention that many third-generation Muslims are present in the leaderships of different Muslim organizations. We don't have a number and they don't function as a quota, but are an integral part of our organizations.

Q: How many children of Muslim families in Germany are becoming practicing Muslims themselves? A recent estimate in the US said that about 10 percent of these children call themselves practicing Muslims. What are the numbers in Germany?

A: I don't know about the numbers and I already find the term "practicing" irritating. If a person prays and fasts regularly, things are clear. But what about all the people who go to the mosque once a week, which is sufficient if they go for Friday prayer? A young person who prays occasionally at home is not so different from many Muslims in the Muslim world. We have to be aware that fasting in Ramadan is often also a social occasion or a traditional one, less a religious one. But all these are expressions of faith and that I would call a success because it is a confession to Islam. I would call a person non-practicing who does not perform either prayer or fast and also doesn't consider these things important.

Q: Can you tell us a little more about your personal experience as a Muslim in Germany?

A: During my studies I started to be active in Muslim organizations. After I finished my studies, I was so involved in Muslim activities that I thought it was irresponsible to just leave. From that time on, I did professional and Islamic work hand in hand and it never happened that finishing a professional goal coincided with a good time to hand over Muslim responsibilities to others. During that time, I also married and our children were born. We wanted to give our children a chance to get a school degree so that they could take the next steps without disadvantages. So we always found a reason to stay here. I am convinced that I am solving my task in life better as an active member of the Muslim community in Germany than as a doctor somewhere in Saudi Arabia or the Arab world. That doesn't mean that I decided to stay here forever, but I still see my stay in Germany as justified and useful for the community and so I stay.

Q: How do you see your connection to the Ummah?

A: We define ourselves as Muslims in Germany or German Muslims. We are a part of the Ummah, but an independent part. We reject dependency and demand that the Muslims in Germany show loyalty for Germany, they should make Germany the focus of their life and activities. We do work for cooperation with the Muslim world, but don't want to be patronized

by anyone in the Muslim world. At the same time, we criticize every event in the Islamic world or Germany that hurts Islamic principles or human rights. The Ummah is for us a frame of reference, but we are an independent member of it. Many regimes and organizations try to use the Muslim Diaspora in Europe and America for their own purposes, but they have understood that Muslims in the West are grown up and that it is not in favor of any side to abuse them for any purpose.

We have our own bodies. As a few examples, we have the Islamic expert council, where we attempt to make our own legal decisions. We also have a diwan that is trying to establish our own decisions about lunar movements, to decide about Ramadan and the feasts, independent of decisions in the regions of the Islamic world.

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