

# ISLAM AND CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE IN GERMANY

## Problems, Progress, Prospects

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Islam in Germany is a reality since centuries, but the perception and discussion of Islam as a remaining part of the German society is actually a phenomenon since a few years, especially since 9/11. The following information and considerations are a short insight into some aspects of the current situation about Islam and Christian-Muslim dialogue in Germany, its stages, progressions, problems and prospects. Of course, it cannot be a complete survey.

### 1. Islam and Muslims in Germany

#### 1.1 Origin and organization of Islam in Germany<sup>1</sup>

In Germany the number of Muslims is estimated to be 3.5 million at present. They account for nearly 4% of the total population in comparison with 32% catholic, 32% protestant and 1.1% orthodox Christians. Most of them are living in the big cities of western Germany and in Berlin. Nearly 2 thirds of the Muslims in Germany are of Turkish origin respectively with Turkish migration background. As a result of the recruiting agreement between Germany and Turkey in 1962 members of the different ethnic and religious groups immigrated to Germany as foreign workers; in 1973 relatives were allowed to follow their families. Thus Islam in Germany is mainly characterized by Muslims with a Turkish background, but one should not neglect the diverse ethnic and cultural character of Muslims in Germany (190.000 Bosnians account for the second largest group; besides there are about 120.000 Iranians). Even Turkish Islam is not homogeneous in Germany due to two aspects: firstly the religious variety of Islam in Turkey is reflected in Germany<sup>2</sup>, secondly the special situation of diaspora has led to further splitting-up of Turkish Muslims in organizational and ideological respect.

Due to a relatively high number of Alevite Muslims from Turkey the number of Sunnis in Germany is a bit smaller than the average number worldwide (i.e. that is about 75%), the Shites account for about 4-5%. The Alevites in Germany are estimated to be 15-20% (about 500–700.000)<sup>3</sup> and there are also about 2.2% Ahmadis (60.000).

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Thomas Lemmen, *Muslimen in Deutschland. Eine Herausforderung für Kirche und Gesellschaft*, Baden-Baden 2001; Ursula Spuler-Stegemann, *Muslimen in Deutschland. Informationen und Klärungen*, Freiburg/Basel/Wien 2002; Faruk Şen/Hayrettin Aydin, *Islam in Deutschland*, München 2002; Wolfgang Rödl, *Islam in Deutschland. Zahlen, Organisationsformen, Konfliktfelder*, in: Rainer Isak/Hansjörg Schmid (Hg.), *Christen und Muslimen in Deutschland. Religion – Gesellschaft – säkularer Staat*, Freiburg 2003, 65-79; Christian W. Troll, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Germany. A Critical Survey*, in: *Islamochristiana* 29 (2003), 165-202.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Zentrum für Türkeistudien, *Das religiöse und ethnische Mosaik der Türkei und seine Reflexionen auf Deutschland*, Münster 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ismail Kaplan, *Das Alevitentum. Eine Glaubens- und Lebensgemeinschaft*, Köln 2004.

In the 60s Muslim migrants were rarely organized, because in the beginning they intended not to stay for a long time. It was not until the 70s that they organized themselves in registered associations (“eingetragene Vereine”, e.V.) according to their linguistic, ethnic and religious sense of belonging with different objectives. The majority of Muslims living in Germany today have prepared to settle permanently in Germany, which is reflected in the increasing number of construction of mosques and legal demands against state and society.

At present there is a multitude of Islamic associations and parent organizations in Germany which differ more or less with regard to religion, politics, ethnic background and compete with each other for members and influence. The number of local Islamic communities in Germany is estimated to be about 2600 at present with an average membership of 50–200. Only about 150 of these communities have mosques as typical dome buildings with minaret, whereas the majority have simple rooms for prayer, so-called backyard-mosques. In most of these prayer rooms and mosques “Christians are welcome visitors.”<sup>4</sup>

The degree of organization of Muslims in Germany is relatively low: only 20–30 % are estimated to be formally organized. The majority of Muslims in Germany are not organized mainly due to the fact that this kind of institutionalization of religious life has been unknown to Islam. But many Muslims think they are not adequately represented in the existing organizations or they do not feel at home there. In the following I would like to introduce the most important parent organizations in Germany:

- The largest and most important Islamic association in Germany is the “Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion e.V.”, called DITIB, which depends on the Ankara Office for Religious Affairs (Diyamet). DITIB in Germany was founded in 1984 and has today about 800 local associations with 150.000 members. It represents the state Islam of Turkey with Sunni character. Their aim is to keep the religious and national identity of Turkish people while living in diaspora in order to enable reintegration of those returning to Turkey. Furthermore they want to contain the influence of marginal and fundamentalist organizations among Muslims in Germany and other countries to avoid repercussions on Turkey. The imams of DITIB are educated in Turkey and paid by the Turkish state. They rarely speak German and return to Turkey after four years, so that they hardly become integrated into German society. Nevertheless DITIB is the most important partner for dialogue and cooperation by now, as it is considered to represent a kind of moderate Islam.

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<sup>4</sup> Christian W. Troll, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Germany*, 176.

- The second largest association in Germany is Milli Görüş e.V. (IGMG). It has 500 mosque communities with about 27.000 members and is closely connected with the Islamistic “Party of Happiness” in Turkey in personal, ideological and financial respect. The party is led by the former Turkish prime minister Necmettin Erbakan. There is also the reproach that there are connections of Milli Görüş to the fundamentalist movement of the Muslim brothers. Milli Görüş is observed by German secret services and is regarded as being extremist, but surely this applies not to all members. (According to a current study about 10-12 of Muslims in Germany tend to extremist religious attitudes.)<sup>5</sup>

- The third largest Islamic association in Germany is the “Verein Islamischer Kulturzentren e.V.” (VIKZ).<sup>6</sup> It has 300 local associations, an imam school of its own and about 20.000 members. It represents the German organization or branch of the Süleymançı movement (supporters of the preacher Süleyman Effendi Tunahan, 1888-1959) which developed in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a reaction to the laicism in Turkey and comes from the mystic order of the Naqshbandi.

- There are further associations in Germany which come from religious movements of renewal in Turkey, as for example the Nurçuluk movement (founder Said Nursi) and the Fetullahçı (founder Fetullah Gülen)<sup>7</sup> which both must be seen also as Naqshbandi movements. They are very engaged in interreligious dialogue in Germany.

- The Alevites are organized in an association of its own, the Federation of Alevites communities in Europe with about 130 associations in Germany.<sup>8</sup>

- Apart from the mentioned Turkish organizations there are also associations of Arabic, Iranian, Bosnian, Albanian Muslims and those of German origin. Many Islamic associations in Germany apart from DITIB and VIKZ are also organized in two umbrella organizations which comprise all nationalities. Their aim is to represent Muslims in the state (but in fact they can only speak for a small minority of Muslims in Germany): firstly the Islamic Council

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Katrin Brettfeld/Peter Wetzels, *Muslimen in Deutschland. Integration, Integrationsbarrieren, Religion sowie Einstellungen zu Demokratie, Rechtsstaat und politisch-religiös motivierter Gewalt. Ergebnisse von Befragungen im Rahmen einer multizentrischen Studie in städtischen Lebensräumen*, Paderborn 2007, 494.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Gerdien Jonker, *Eine Wellenlänge zu Gott. Der „Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren“ in Europa*, Bielefeld 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bekim Agai, *Zwischen Netzwerk und Diskurs. Das Bildungsnetzwerk um Fetullah Gülen (geb. 1938): Die flexible Umsetzung modernen islamischen Gedankenguts*, Hamburg 2004

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ismail Kaplan, *Das Alevitentum. Eine Glaubens- und Lebensgemeinschaft*, Köln 2004.

of the Federal Republic of Germany (“Islamrat in Deutschland e.V.”), which is dominated by Milli Görüş, secondly the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (“Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland e.V.”), which caused sensation in Germany in 2002 when it publicized its “Basic Declaration about the relationship of Muslims towards the German state and society” (called “Islamic Charta”)<sup>9</sup>. In April 2007 a “Coordination Council of Muslims in Germany” (Koordinierungsrat der Muslime, KMR) was founded which represents the big parent associations DITIB, Islamic Council, Central Council and VIKZ. But even this new council represents maximum 20-30% of Muslims in Germany.

### *Conclusion*<sup>10</sup>

- 1) In contrast to the Christian Churches, which the German state church law is geared to, the Sunni Islam is hardly organized and hasn't got an official hierarchy. This fact makes the institutional integration in Germany more difficult for Muslims, because consequently it is difficult for them to put up representatives against administrations.
- 2) Only a small part (at most 20–30%) of Muslims in Germany is organized in associations, so that again and again the question about the legitimate representative and the representativity of the association arises.
- 3) One can observe a strong relationship (institutional, ideological, financial, personal) of most Islamic organizations in Germany with their mother countries and because of that a relatively high splitting-up of Muslims in religious, political and ethnical respect.
- 4) The lack of Imam education in Germany and therewith the permanent “import” of imams from Islamic mother countries is an impediment for integration and dialogue.

### 1.2. Religiousness of Muslims in Germany

In general religiousness plays a big role for the first as well as the second generation of migrants from Turkey. It is an essential part of the way they see themselves (significantly more important than compared with Christians in Germany). The range of variation of religious attitudes and religious practice is wide: according to a study of the Centre of Turkish Studies published in 2005 28.1 % of German Muslims of Turkish origin claim to be very religious, 55.2% to be rather religious, 11% rather not to be religious, 5.8 not to be religious at all.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. [www.zentralrat.de/3035.php](http://www.zentralrat.de/3035.php)

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Andreas Renz/Stephan Leimgruber, Christen und Muslime. Was sie verbindet – was sie unterscheidet, München 2005<sup>2</sup>, 30.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Leibold/Kühnel/Heitmeyer, Abschottung von Muslimen durch generalisierte Islamkritik?, in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 1-2/2006, 3-10, 8.

Thus the subjective degree of religiousness of this group has clearly increased compared with 2000 respectively a stronger polarization between the very religious and not religious at all has taken place (reasons are surely again 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq). The degree of religiousness also rises the older the people are and the longer they stay in Germany. Furthermore education, professional occupation and income play an important role: the higher these values the less people claim to be religious. Apart from this the subjective degree of religiousness doesn't correspond with real religious practice: a fifth of the questioned say that they never or nearly never go to a mosque, 7% on religious holidays. All generations attach very much importance to the religious education of the children. In this respect the family represents the first and most important institution for religious socialization.

Also the second generation strongly refer to the Turkish Islamic religious culture, but they tend to turn away from national Islam to high Islamic forms: that is to say cognitive and therewith more individual aspects of understanding Islam are gaining importance; a universal understanding of "true Islam" is more important than religious traditions which are characterized by cultures. People of this second generation devote themselves more cognitively to Islam than their parents and increasingly make use of modern media as the internet. This way Islam is used by individuals of modern society as a way of finding sense and identity.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.3. The legal and social situation of Muslims in Germany<sup>13</sup>

In legal terms the above mentioned Islamic associations and organisations are so-called "registered associations" (e.V.). In contrast to the big Christian Churches or the Jewish denomination Islam or an Islamic organization has not yet been recognized by the German state as a so-called "corporation of public Law" and thus does not have the same rights and advantages as the Christian Churches or the Jewish Community (e.g. raising of taxes through agencies of the state). The reasons for this deficit of being recognized as a corporation are the splitting-up of Islamic associations and their lack of constancy in the last decades. Of course, regarding religious freedom every Muslim as an individual has full rights.

The majority of Muslims still has not yet acquired German nationality, but since the new Law of Naturalization was introduced the number of naturalizations has significantly been rising (at the moment about 1.000.000 Muslims have got a German passport). Sociological surveys reveal that Muslims of German nationality are clearly socially better integrated than those

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Nikola Tietze, *Islamische Identitäten. Formen muslimischer Identität junger Männer in Deutschland und Frankreich*, Hamburg 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Mathias Rohe, *Der Islam – Alltagskonflikte und Lösungen. Rechtliche Perspektiven*, Freiburg i.Br. 2001; Andreas Renz/Stephan Leimgruber, *Christen und Muslime. Was sie verbindet – was sie unterscheidet*, München 2005<sup>2</sup>, 31-33.

who are not of German nationality. Therewith it is controversial whether naturalization is rather the reason or rather the consequence of a successful integration. At any rate about three fourth of Muslims with migration background in Germany are considered to be relatively well integrated in regard to their way of life, social and economic integration.<sup>14</sup>

But there is a risk of increasing disintegration for about one third: especially for members of the first generation of immigrants who are now unemployed or have retired and speak German on a relatively insufficient level and are badly trained. Also concerned are partly members of the second and third generations who are badly educated at school and have difficulties to find a job. Islam in Germany was originally characterized as Islam of migrant workers, that is to say nearly completely characterized by low education classes. The German school and educational system of the last decades has led to a continuation of this problem.

An important aspect of recognition and integration is teaching Islam as an ordinary subject in state schools: this couldn't be achieved for a long time because of the lack of homogeneous representation of Muslims as well as lack of Education of Islamic theologians and religious teachers. For some years now experiments have been carried out in some federal states of Germany which are promising: Islamic teaching in German language by Muslim teachers educated in Germany with a curriculum licensed by the federal state.<sup>15</sup> There have also been created chairs for Islamic Religion at some state universities (Münster, Erlangen-Nürnberg, Osnabrück) to educate Islamic teachers and, hopefully, in the future imams as well.

Although no Islamic organization in Germany is a corporation of public Law, the construction of mosques in Germany is allowed. But very often people oppose it vehemently (fear of foreign infiltration), so that construction plans sometimes take many years. Usually Muslims renounce the public call of the Muezzin.

It is striking that about 90-95% of Muslims in Germany still transport their deceased back to their country of origin. Reasons are legal problems, because in Germany there is the obligation of coffin and temporally limited time of rest which is both against Islamic tradition. But since a few years there are more and more separate cemeteries or graveyards especially for Muslims.

Another legal problem is regarding the question of ritual slaughter: 2002 the highest Court of Germany "ruled that upon request Muslims have to be granted special permission to slaughter without previous stunning".<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Dirk Halm/Martina Sauer, *Parallelgesellschaft und ethnische Schichtung*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 1-2/2006, 18-24, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Hansjörg Schmid, *Neue Phase des Zusammenlebens. Schritte auf dem Weg zum Islamischen Religionsunterricht*, in: *Herderkorrespondenz* 59 (2005), 239-244.

<sup>16</sup> Christian W. Troll, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Germany*, 180.

In connection with female Muslim teachers there has taken place an argument which has been discussed very controversially in legal, social and political terms recently: female Muslim teachers at state schools and other state administration aren't allowed to wear a scarf since a few years in most federal states of Germany.

## **2. Structures of Dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Germany<sup>17</sup>**

Since 9/11 in 2001 initiatives for dialogues at different levels and by different initiators have increased and so has partly criticism on the former and present dialogue. There are still many asymmetries and obstacles regarding Christian-Muslim dialogue in Germany due to social, legal, psychological, cultural and theological factors.<sup>18</sup>

Important participants on the part of the Christians are the special ecclesiastical representatives and consultants for interreligious dialogue (many Catholic dioceses and Protestant churches employ official representatives and consultants) and ecclesiastical institutions like academies and educational institutions. The catholic CIBEDO (Christlich-Islamische Begegnungs- und Dokumentationsstelle) in Frankfurt ([www.cibedo.de](http://www.cibedo.de)), founded in 1978, „offers the services of a library and documentation about Islam in general, the presence of Muslims in Germany and Christian-Muslim encounter. It has been active in the training and formation of ‘multipliers’ in the fields of educational and pastoral care and functioned as a centre of contact between representatives of the Churches and of the Mosque associations and organisations.”<sup>19</sup> On the part of the Muslims many of the above mentioned associations are interested and actively engaged in dialogue, as well as individual persons.

As a rule these meetings for dialogue are in the first place meetings for information, in which the participants discuss basic theological, ethical or socio-political questions and both sides explain their position. In some cases these meetings are rather “show-events” than a real dialogue. Therefore this kind of “dialogue production” with mostly the same participants and functionaries is criticized to be unsatisfactory and without progress by some people. But there are also small regular dialogue groups at grass route level which make possible real encounters and real learning progress. In bigger cities there have existed such groups in some parts of town for many years. But these groups usually reach only minorities on both sides.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Hg.), *Christen und Muslime in Deutschland* (Arbeitshilfen 172), Bonn 2003 ([www.dbk.de/schriften/arbeitshilfe/index.html](http://www.dbk.de/schriften/arbeitshilfe/index.html)).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Andreas Renz, *Asymmetrien und Hindernisse im christlich-islamischen Dialog. Beobachtungen zur gegenwärtigen Situation in Deutschland*, in: Egbert Ballhorn u.a. (Hg.), *Lernort Jerusalem. Kulturelle und theologische Paradigmen einer Begegnung mit den Religionen*, Münster 2006, 57-70.

<sup>19</sup> Christian W. Troll, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Germany*, 188.

In several cities there are Christian Islamic Committees which are firmly organized as for example the Christian-Islamic associations which have joined together to form the “Coordination Council of Associations of Christian Islamic Dialogue in Germany” (Koordinierungsrat der Vereinigungen des christlich-islamischen Dialoges in Deutschland e.V., KCID) in 2003. Apart from evenings when religious questions are discussed the participants invite each other to celebrations (Muslims mostly invite to the end of the period of Ramadanfasting, Christians invite for example to the celebration of Advent) and even so-called multi-religious prayers in the form of the prayer meetings in Assisi take place (that is to say they don’t pray together but they only come together and each religion prays according to their tradition.)<sup>20</sup> Since 1997 many Islamic communities are inviting for a Day of the Open Mosque on October 3th.

Kindergartens run by the church represent important supporters of concrete living together and learning from each other between Christians and Muslims.<sup>21</sup> Also religious education at school has been trying hard to enable pupils to learn in intercultural and interreligious respect for some years. This process of learning is not only about imparting knowledge about the different religion but it is also about concrete encounter with Muslims.<sup>22</sup>

Two recent events show how sensitive and even fragile the Christian Islamic dialogue is: firstly the speech Pope Benedikt gave in Regensburg in September 2007 which has led to quite an ill-feeling on the part of Muslims even in Germany.<sup>23</sup> Also the Protestant Church in Germany had to experience a set-back of dialogue efforts: in their new paper about dialogue with Islam they formulated the unmistakable term of Christian mission and they asked Islam critical questions (e.g. their opinion about violence).<sup>24</sup> As a consequence the Islamic associations called off and postponed for the time being a meeting with the chairman of the Association of Protestant Churches (EKD) in Germany.

A quite new form of dialogue is the theological academic dialogue which had not been possible before as a result of lack of German speaking Islamic theologians within the first generation of immigrants. But among the second and third generations there are increasingly more Islamic theologians who devote themselves academically to their own religion and who have

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Hg.), Leitlinien für multireligiöse Feiern von Christen, Juden und Muslimen. Eine Handreichung der deutschen Bischöfe (Arbeitshilfen 170), Bonn 2003 ([www.dbk.de/schriften/arbeitshilfe/index.html](http://www.dbk.de/schriften/arbeitshilfe/index.html)).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Barbara Huber-Rudolf, Muslimische Kinder im Kindergarten. Eine Praxishilfe für alltägliche Begegnungen, München 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Andreas Renz/Stephan Leimgruber (Eds.), Lernprozess Christen Muslime. Gesellschaftliche Kontexte – Theologische Grundlagen – Begegnungsfelder, Münster 2002; Stephan Leimgruber, Interreligiöses Lernen, München 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Benedikt XVI./Joseph Ratzinger, Glaube und Vernunft. Die Regensburger Vorlesung. Vollständige Ausgabe, Freiburg/Basel/Wien 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Rat der EKD, Klarheit und gute Nachbarschaft. Christen und Muslime in Deutschland. Eine Handreichung (EKD-Texte 86), Hannover 2006 ([www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/2059.html](http://www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/2059.html)).

been trained at German universities. In 2004 an academic network of German-speaking Christian and Muslim theologians was founded (“Theologisches Forum Christentum – Islam”).<sup>25</sup> An annual congress of the Forum is prepared by a group of Muslim and Christian scholars. Papers, lectures, discussions and results of these conferences are usually published in form of books.<sup>26</sup> The Muslim participants of these conferences are usually no official representatives of Islamic organizations, but independent Muslim theologians and scholars who are mainly striving for reform of traditional Islam. Thus they are not “representative”, but as active or future teachers of religion and professors etc. they are important scouts and multipliers. This “Theological Forum Christianity – Islam” is supported financially mainly by the ministry of the interior. Apart from the churches the state itself respectively the political level has recently become a further participant in the dialogue with Islam in Germany: the minister of the interior has started to invite representatives of Islamic organizations as well as individual Muslims to a regular meeting on a political level (“Islamkonferenz”).

### *Conclusion*

The Christian Muslim dialogue in Germany has been under way in some places, contexts and levels for many years and is definitely successful as for example in the settlement of conflicts about the construction of mosques. But in other places and contexts the dialogue is still at the beginning, very unstable and not rarely attacked by groups who are opponents of Islam and Muslims. Global events and problems have an effect on the local dialogue and living together: mistrust, fears and prejudices are increasing on both sides. In order to overcome these negative attitudes “there is need for the pastoral promotion of a theologically-underpinned basic religious attitude of Christians and Muslims, an attitude capable of considering individual and corporate dynamism of other religious groups as a positive challenge and as a chance for dialogue and collaboration beyond the confines of single confessions and religions.”<sup>27</sup> People must not expect an all comprising solution of socio-political problems from the interreligious dialogue – it is no panacea, but we cannot do without its contribution to peace within civil society.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. [www.akademie-rs.de/br-arbeitskreise.html](http://www.akademie-rs.de/br-arbeitskreise.html). Among others the author contributed and took part in its coming into being.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Hansjörg Schmid/Andreas Renz/Jutta Sperber (Hg.), „Im Namen Gottes ...“. Theologie und Praxis des Gebets in Christentum und Islam, Regensburg 2006; Hansjörg Schmid/Andreas Renz/Jutta Sperber/Duran Terzi (Hg.), Identität durch Differenz? Wechselseitige Abgrenzungen in Christentum und Islam, Regensburg 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Christian W. Troll, Christian-Muslim Relations in Germany, 183.