

The Position of the Muslim Community and Islamic Education at State Run Schools as an Important Factor of Social Peace in a Secular Society: The German Example

*Irene Schneider**

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Abstract

Freedom of religion in the sense of freedom of belief and of religious manifestations; in teaching, practice, worship and observance is one of the basic human rights laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 18. Freedom of religion in this sense is considered to be an important right and to play an important role in keeping up social peace in society. Germany, being a secular state with a historical connection to Christian religion, has anchored this right of religious freedom in its constitution in Article 4. According to Art. 7/3 religious education in state-run schools is accomplished in accordance with the religious communities. This religious education is normally provided for by the Catholic and Protestant Churches, but also by the Jewish community. There are 3,2 Mio Muslims in Germany, especially from Turkey, but also from the Arab countries and Iran. Most of these Muslims do not plan to return to their native countries and will remain in Germany. They do enjoy freedom of religion in the above-mentioned sense. In my paper I will deal with the question of how religious manifestations of the Muslims in Germany “in teaching, practice, worship and observance” is accomplished.

I shall focus on their religious education and endeavor to answer the following questions: What does Islamic education mean in Germany, in a secular state? Who provides for it and how? How does it differ from religious education in Islamic countries? How is it seen by the German society? I will deal with these questions on two levels (1) on the national level and (2) on the local level. On the national level a clear effort of the German state can be seen to integrate the Muslim minority as a religious group into the German state.

* Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Universität Göttingen, Göttingen, Germany.
Email: ischnei@gwdg.de



For this reason the German Minister Wolfgang Schäuble convened in 2006 the so called “Islamkonferenz” inviting jurists, scholars of Islamic studies and representatives of the different Muslim communities as well as independent persons to talk about the situation of Muslims in Germany. The unsolved question still is: how the different Islamic groups comprising Muslims from different social, political and religious backgrounds and from different countries as Turkey, Arab states, Iran, Afghanistan with different national Islamic traditions could find a common platform of religious Islamic belief in a secular state. By establishing the Coordinating Council (Koordinierungsrat) of Muslims in Germany in April 2007, some larger Islamic organizations tried to create a common structure for the representation of all Muslims. So far this organization has not been recognized by the German state as the official representative of all Muslims, but the discussions at the “Islamkonferenz” are not yet finished and are still going on.

One of the main aims of the Muslim Organizations is to gain the right to give Islamic religious lessons at German state-run schools. Whereas on the national level the integration of Islam as a religion within the secular system is discussed, on the local level religious teaching is currently taking place within different projects in many selected state schools in Germany as well as in local mosques. Religious teaching at mosques will be discussed by taking the example of mosques in Goettingen, a small university town in Central Germany. There are two main mosques in Goettingen: one belonging to the Turkish community (Ditib) and the other being an Arab mosque.

I shall sketch the concept of religious education given in this Arab mosque with regard to its content and the way it is taught to the children, whether it corresponds to the classical Islamic education and which concepts, beliefs, rituals and cultic acts are being considered important for children growing up in a completely secular context?

Finally, I shall compare this approach at the local level with the efforts made on the national level and discuss how these different efforts are judged by the German society.

Keywords: Muslim Community; Islamic Education; Secular Society; Peace.

Introduction

Freedom of religion in the sense of freedom of belief and of religious manifestations; in teaching, practice, worship and observance is one of the basic human rights laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 18. Freedom of religion in this sense is considered to be an important factor in safeguarding social peace in society. Germany is a secular state with historical and cultural roots in the European and Christian tradition. It has anchored this right of religious freedom in its constitution, in Article 4. According to Art. 7/3 of the German Constitution religious education in state run schools is accomplished in cooperation with the religious communities. There is a consensus in the German society and also the government, that Muslim children living in Germany (Germany has 3, 2 Million Muslims) have the right to religious (Islamic) education at state run schools. So far, however, Islamic religious education is not taught officially. The German federal states have opted for different solutions with respect to this problem. Some of them are planning to introduce Islamic religious teaching at state run schools and have already established this Islamic teaching in the form of an educational experiment. Other states plan to introduce some kind of “religious teaching” which is, however, not based on the religious confession of Islam.¹

Carried out in the name of Islam the criminal attack of 9/11 caused in Germany severe discussions about the security of the state and the integration of Muslims into the German society. Those events fostered, as Malik states,² the reductionist-monolithic view on Muslims. Muslim communities and organizations distanced themselves from the attack and condemned the terror attacks.³ At the same time they pointed to their right to peacefully practice their religion and teach their religion to their children, referring to Art. 4 of the German Constitution, arguing, that this religious teaching would bring forward the integration of Muslim children and Muslims into the German secular society. Religious education at state schools is seen by the Muslim community not only as a right guaranteed in the German constitution, but also as a possibility to anchor Islam as one of the main religions in Germany in the education system and give Muslim children the chance to develop their own identity as German Muslims. It is seen as an important means for the self-

1. See: Langenfeld, 2005: 17-18.

2. See: Malik, 2004: 1.

3. See: Schneider, 2005: 63.

definition and status of Islam in the context of a secular state.

In this article I will deal with the following questions:

1. What are the conditions for the establishment of Islamic religious education in Germany?
2. Who represents the Muslim Community in Germany?
3. How does the German society and the German state try to cope with this problem?
4. What are the conditions for the establishment of Islamic religious education in Germany?

In Art. 7/3 of the German constitution teaching of the belief and the central dogmas of the religious communities is meant. In case of the Christian Religion the Catholic and Protestant Churches are responsible for this teaching, in case of the Jewish Religion it is the Jewish community (Zentralrat der Juden), which has an official status in Germany. The establishment of permanent religious Islamic teaching at state run schools is only possible, when the German state has an officially recognized organization or some officially recognized organizations as a partner partners.¹ Religious communities accepted by the state have to have an organizational structure.

For a religious community, to be officially recognized, there are some conditions to be fulfilled: there has to be a religious consensus; there has to be an institution or union of persons on the basis of this consensus; and third this union of persons has to display this religious consensus; other points are e.g. loyalty to the constitution.² It is this last point which is discussed severely in the political and social discussions in Germany.

Only after these conditions are fulfilled, the organization or the organizations can be accepted as a counter part of the German state and only then Islamic education can be established officially at German state run schools.

Notwithstanding educational experiments at schools Qurān and Islamic religion are taught at local and regional – Arabic, Turkish and Iranian – mosques and in the many associations of the Muslims in Germany.³

The main question the Muslim community discusses in the last ten years is: How can they be officially accepted as a counter part of the German state? What are the obstacles existing? There are several reasons for the present

1. See: Langenfeld, 2005: 19.

2. See: Janke, 2005: 50-80.

3. See: Alacacioglu, 1999; Strunk, 2008.

shortcoming:

Legally a great number of organizations of Turkish but also Iranian and Arab Muslims, on the local as well as national level exists. These organizations are religious or cultural organizations, offering religious services such as prayers and religious teachings but also German courses for Turkish women, sports for Muslim children etc. Many of these organizations are Turkish, because the majority of Muslims in Germany is Turkish.

However, self-organization is difficult for the Muslims because many Muslims attend the mosques in their cities for prayers only, but do not engage themselves in the local organization or become organization members. Most of them are not ready to pay their membership fees.

On the social level the Muslim community in Germany is socially, religiously and seen from the national background, very heterogeneous. Muslims come from very different social, national and religious backgrounds. For Muslim migrants in Europe Islam serves as an integral part of their collective identity. According to sociological studies the second and third generation of Muslim migrants do construct a religious – Islamic – identity, but this identity is influenced by their living in Europe. As Cesari states, a new view of Islam emerges as a moral and educational resource, exalting the logic of individual choice and shunning the ethnications of religion. Believers no longer view their religion as a cultural relic; instead, they express their individuality by making the choice to practice and by giving a personal meaning to the revealed message. For many Muslims of the third and fourth generation this results in a sense of detachment from their families, justified by the view that parents do not comprehend what the “real” Islam is, but instead act under the influence of habits and superstitions born out of their culture.¹ There is, so far, no common concept of what Islam can be in the context of a secular state, no “German Islam” rooted in the secular context. Who, then, represents the Muslim community?

I come to the question:

1. Who represents the Muslim Community in Germany?

There are 3, 2 Mio Muslims in Germany, especially from Turkey, but also from the Arab countries and Iran. Most of these Muslims do not plan to return to their native countries and will remain in Germany. They do enjoy freedom

1. See: Cesari, 2004: 98.

of religion in the above-mentioned sense. This means that they practice their religion, have their rituals, build mosques etc. The number of Migrants from Islamic countries has increased since the Middle of the 20th century in the context of the then booming German economy. As a result, today, there are about 2, 1 Mio people with Turkish passports – and with Turkish or Kurdish background – living in Germany. The young generation growing up in Germany is now already the 4th generation.¹ There is a Shiite community in Hamburg, most Shiites in Germany come from Iran (120 000)² and, besides, there is a growing number of Germans converting to Islam.³

On the national level there are several organizations claiming to represent Muslims in Germany: the Turkish DİTİB (Diyanet İşleri Türk-İslam Birliği), which was founded by Diyanet, the ministry for religious affairs in Turkey which is, after all, influenced by the Turkish concept of state-interpreted Islam. In addition, there are other mainly Turkish organisations as Milli Görüş The Community of Islamic cultural centres (VIKZ) and others.⁴

Several of these organizations founded the so called Council of Islam/Islamrat for the German Federal Republic (IRD) in 1986; another umbrella organization was founded in 1994 with the name of Central Council of Muslims in Germany Zentralrat der Muslime (ZMD) in Deutschland. In April 2007 the so called Coordination Council of Muslims/Koordinierungsrat der Muslime was founded as a kind of umbrella organization comprising (ZMD), DİTİB, Islamrat (IRD) and VIKZ.⁵

Thus there are three levels: local Mosque-communities, regional Organizations as (DİTİB, IRD, ZMD, VIKZ etc.) which operate on the regional as well as national level and on the top the Koordinierungsrat at the national level as a kind of supra-structure uniting the different organizations.

The question arises: are these organizations representatives of the Muslim community? On the legal level they have to fulfil the above mentioned conditions to be accepted by the German state. One has to consider on a social level, whether these organizations represent the majority of Muslims and represent the interests of the majority of Muslims living in Germany, and, thus, the question arises, whether these organizations can be called a “Muslim civil

1. See: Duran, 1989.

2. See: Wunn, 2007: 123-127.

3. See: Wohlrab-Sahr, 1999.

4. See: Wunn, 2007.

5. See: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koordinierungsrat_der_Muslime, checked on 26 February 2009.

society” in the German society?

The definition of a civil society is normally the sphere between the state and the market on the one hand and the state and the individual on the other hand. Important conditions for civil society organisations are: independence from the state, voluntary adherence, autonomy¹ and a certain level of organisational structure so that civil society organisations can be distinguished from familiar structures. According to Croissant/Lauth/Merkel (2000) civil society organisations have several tasks: protection of the individual against the state; mediation between political and apolitical sphere, fulfilling the function of socialisation and communication and the building of a social community.

Taking this definition as a starting point it can be stated that all the organizations just named represent the Muslims, act in the interest of the Muslims, they focus on religious aspects, they are structured organizations which people attend voluntarily and they are thus independent from the German state and serve as communication and mediator for the Muslim community in Germany. These points being the standard definition of civil society one could argue that those organizations represent the Islamic civil society in Germany. There are, however, several objections to this argument. One argument is, that many of these organizations are independent from the German state, but not from other states.² This is e.g. true for DITIB, which has Imams or hocas who are paid by the Turkish state. In the case of other organizations this financial dependency is existent but difficult to be proven. Furthermore Islamic organizations claim to represent all Muslims but according to Lemmen³, the organization structures being not transparent, represent in reality only about 15% of the Muslims. Seen in this context the Islamic organization and especially the Coordination Council/ Koordinierungsrat can be called a civil society organization only with reservations.

Many of these organizations represent a traditional – more conservative – interpretation of Islam. This is especially true with regard to the gender question: discussions about the scarf, the participation of girls in sport education at school, the participation of girls at school excursions etc. are practical examples for discussions between Muslim parents and the German school authorities. In her study about the “daughters of the foreign workers and Islam” Sigrid Nökel has conducted interviews with Turkish women of the 2nd

1. See: Albrecht, 2005.

2. See: Lemmen, 2002; Spuler-Stegemann, 1998.

3. See: Lemmen, 2002: 129.

and 3rd generation. She points to the male dominance in the Islamic organizations which is connected to a hierarchy of seniority.¹ There are female hocas in some organizations as e.g. the VIKZ,² but most of them represent, as their male colleagues, a traditional, gender segregated Islam.³ Women engaged in this context reproduce the concept of traditional Islam which is typical for the whole organization.

Gender equality is, however, one of the main points of discussion with regard to the Islamic organizations, the position of Islam in Germany and the introduction of religious Islamic education at state run schools:

As stated above, a religious community which is acknowledged by the state has the right to determine the contents of religious education at state run schools: the teaching about the rituals, practice of worship but also the belief system.

Because the state is neutral in religious and ideological questions, it cannot influence the contents of this religious teaching. This is taken care of by the churches and the Jewish community – and now the Muslims strive for the same rights. Thus state and religious community have to cooperate in this question. Several problems arise: one of them is the question in which language this lessons should be given. The common sense archived is now, that this language should be German, so that Muslims from different national and ethnic backgrounds can take part. A second question is: who should teach the Muslim children and which education do these teachers need? There are, so far, some suggestions and concepts⁴ – but I cannot go into details, here.

For educating religious school teacher's Islamic theology and science has to be taught at German universities. Several chairs for Muslim professors at German universities focusing on the education of Religious Islamic teachers at German schools were founded.⁵ Since 2008 the University of Osnabrück has such a chair. It is held by Prof. B. Ucar, there is another chair at Frankfurt University, held by Prof. Ö. Özsoy and one in Münster held by Professor Kalish. However, beside the language for Islamic education and training of the teachers a third heavily discussed topic is the contents of this teaching. What are Muslim children thought to learn at school about the Islam? There is a multiplicity of interpretations of Islam from modern to traditional and Islamist

1. See: Nökel, 2002: 38-39.

2. See: Nökel, 2002: 39.

3. See: Nökel, 2002: 43-44.

4. See e.g. Behr, 1998; Mohr, 2006.

5. See: Rohe, 2001: 165-184.

Islam. The points of discussion especially in a conservative interpretations of Islam concern possible conflicts with the German constitution and human rights which arise in case of a traditional or conservative interpretation of Islam. Important questions where conflicts with the German constitution can arise are seen in the following themes: the equality of the sexes,¹ freedom of religion² the concept of jihād³ and corporal punishments.⁴

A public controversy arose especially about the question of gender equality. Here the debate about the wearing of the scarf can be named as an example.⁵

Now, these questions are closely connected to the question of the configuration of a “German” Islam, in the sense of a religion being practiced and being in accordance with the secular frame of the German state. The question arises, who the German society and how the German state cope with these questions.

2. How do the German society and the German state try to cope with this problem?

Surely the presence of more than 3 Mio Muslims has triggered the public discourse in Germany on the question of the relation between state and religion in a secular constitution. The slogan of a post-secular society⁶ attracts the attention to the position of religion in modernity. In the political context a slogan called “Leitkultur” was widely discussed few years ago. It describes a common concept of the most important social values of the German society. With the introduction of the slogan the debate became political.⁷ But what could these basic values be? Sometimes, those basic values are esteemed in the Christian and Jewish culture which influenced the history of Europe and are thus seen as different from other religions, especially the Islam. In connection with this discussion an increasing opposition towards the Muslims in the German society in the media as well as in the public discussions could be seen. The perception of “the other” changed from a national perception (the Turks, the Iranians, the Greek...) to a religious perspective (the Muslims and the Non-Muslims). According to studies the German society perceived these “Muslims” as a homogenous

1. See: Qurān 4:34, 4:3; 2:282 etc.

2. See: Qurān 2:256.

3. See: Qurān 2:190 und 9:5.

4. See: Qurān 24:1-5; 5:38, 5:33; 5:90 etc; Schneider, 2005: 62.

5. See: Rohe, 2001: 143-165.

6. See: Riesebrod, 2001.

7. See: see <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leitkultur>, for a critical evaluation see Volkmann, 2008.

group thinking and acting on the basis of a homogenous understanding and interpretation of Islam. It was this phantom of a homogenous and powerful “other” which produced fear in the German society.¹

Muslim Organizations reacted with their claim to gain official acceptance and formed – as stated above – the Coordination Council (Koordinierungsrat) as a superstructure of Muslim Organizations in Germany and pressed for more participation in the political arena.

In 2006 the German Minister of the Interior, Wolfgang Schäuble created the “German Conference on Islam (Deutsche Islamkonferenz)”.² The German government considered this conference as an important measure to preserve social peace in Germany, since it aimed to discuss, on the highest political level, the situation of Islam and Muslims in Germany and the legal frame for a greater political participation of the Muslims in a secular state. The official aim of this conference is to discuss how the German constitution and the legal system can contribute to the development of a modern German Islam and thus incorporate Islam into the secular political system.

The important and interesting question was: How was this Conference composed? I am not going into details about the structure and the different workshops associated with it but I will focus on its personal composition. I argue, that the selection of the participants of this “Islamkonferenz” reflects what the German government thinks constitutes the “Islamic civil society”. As a provocative statement one could say: politics encouraged in a discursive context the creation of a Muslim civil society. And this Muslim civil society – in a broader sense – started a discursive exchange with the German state about its own construction. One of the first results was the foundation of the Koordinierungsrat, the civil-society-super-organ of the Muslims, comprising the larger Muslim organizations of Germany. However, as stated above, these organizations may not be called civil-society-organizations, because, among others, their membership-structure is not transparent and so far there is no Islamic concept or dogma common to all of them.

The German state now chose the members of this conference with the aim to speed up the development of a common Muslim Organization which could then be accepted as official counterpart for the German state to discuss

1. See: Schiffauer, 2007: 115.

2. See: [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutsche_“Islamkonferenz”](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutsche_Islamkonferenz).

questions such as the religious teaching at schools.

Beside representatives of the States and scholars (jurists and some scholars of Islamic studies) the larger Muslim organizations were invited, and, in addition, individual Muslims from different cultural backgrounds who are not members of the organizations. Among them are women such as Necla Kelek, a scholar of social science, who criticizes sharply the conservative gender concept of the Muslim organizations fighting against the discrimination of women in the Turkish society in Germany, especially criticizing the practice of arranged and child marriages. Feridun Zaimoglu, a Turkish author living in Germany, criticised in October 2006 that all women taking part in the "Islamkonferenz" are – as he says – "secular". However, the actual problem seems to be, that the Muslim organizations do not have many women in their leading positions and are represented mainly by males. These organizations, on the other hand, sharply criticized participants like Necla Kelek and her gender concepts as not Islamic. It is evident from this quarrel that German Muslims have not so far developed a common position with regard to Islam in a secular state and perhaps never will. From the position of the German government, however, the discussions in the "Islamkonferenz" is seen as a chance for channeling a process of the creation of an Islamic identity in Germany, which, after all, cannot be homogenous. The conference surely brings together different parts of the Muslim civil society that exist in Germany, which otherwise would not speak to each other.

The Islamkonferenz is still ongoing. The legal problem of the official acceptance of Muslim organizations as representatives of all Muslims has not yet been solved. On a pragmatic basis the first officially accepted book on religious education in state run schools for the primary school, however, has just appeared. And it can be argued, that the Islamkonferenz is an important factor in the ongoing discussion and through the mass media and the press is has surely lead also to a greater acceptance of Muslims in the German public discourse. It is from this perspective, that it should be considered as important factor in the process of keeping social peace in the country.

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