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Muslim Immigration to Europe – The Challenge for European Societies – Human Rights – Security Issues – Current Developments



Hope for Europe

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Dr. Christine Schirrmacher

The Present Situation – History and Background

Globalization is a subject of great significance for Europe, too. The world has moved closer together. This is true also for the Islamic world and Europe.

New chances for the shaping of a shared future in the twenty-first century, as well as challenges, result from this situation.

North Africa is closely linked with France by virtue of its colonial past, as are Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India with Great Britain. Nearly two million Muslims live in Britain; in France, about six million; in Germany, 3.2 million. The immigration of Muslims to Germany began roughly 45 years ago when, in the post-war period, the recruitment of workers from southern (and southeastern) Europe, and later from Anatolia (Turkey), appeared to be the solution for an expanding labor market.

The first 10,000 Muslims came to Germany beginning about 1960. They were primarily male workers without families; women and children followed later. Through revolutions and

wars (above all, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the war in the Balkans, and the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988), through the influx of refugees and asylum-seekers, and by virtue of a higher birthrate compared with the Western population, the number of Muslim immigrants in Europe increased to roughly 16 to 20 million persons.

Even in the last 20 years, when this development was foreseeable, European countries found it difficult to consider themselves as countries “open to immigration.” There was repeated failure to discuss cultural, social, and political as well as religious commonalities and differences, to consider the mistakes that were made, and to work out rules for life together in the future. The German society, for example, assumed all too naturally that these people would prefer the Western, secular way of life to their own tradition, would give up their religious-cultural roots over time, and would “assimilate” themselves. Today, it is clearly evident that in many parts of Europe, a contrary development – a return to tradition and a retreat into

a world of their own – has long since begun.

Most of the Muslims who live in Europe today will remain; their number will continue to increase. The political or economic situation in their home countries frequently offers them no prospect for a return; their children and grandchildren have grown up in Europe, and they, too, will not return.

In view of this situation, several challenges result:

1. Social Aspects

Never before have so many people from the Islamic cultural sphere lived permanently in Europe. But are they also at home in Europe?

Many young people of the second and third generation speak too little German (or French, Spanish, or Dutch) to be successful in a vocation. What future do these young people face? Not a few of them retreat into their own world, their own language, the mosque, and the Turkish or Arab neighborhood.

Forced marriages and murders of honor occur precisely within the parallel society in which its members take justice into their own hands. At long last, the duty of speaking the language of the host country finally is being discussed openly in Europe. Without the command of the language, there is no integration; without integration, there is no vocational success and no shared future.

Neither the immigrants nor their host countries originally reckoned with

a permanent life together. Both sides at first thought their coexistence would last only a few years. Especially the majority society concerned itself too little and not intensively enough with the cultural and religious peculiarities of the immigrants. The “other culture” was either admired uncritically or ignored and rejected. The knowledge about Islam among many people in Europe is still too undeveloped. Many Muslims at first wanted to become “Europeans” but then turned away in disappointment. Many make contact with a mosque that preaches distance and withdrawal and extols the nationalism from the home country and Islam as an identity as an alternative in a “godless” Western society. Then it is perhaps only a small step to a turn toward political Islam (Islamism) or even to extremism.

A New Situation for Both Sides

The situation is new not only for Europeans but also for the Muslim communities. They must undertake a new definition of their theological and political-social position here in the “diaspora” in a non-Muslim Western society. Many questions arise: Is it possible in non-Islamic countries to do without the amplification of the call to prayer by loudspeaker – in Muslim countries an everyday occurrence? May meat slaughtered by non-Muslims (and, of course, not *ritually* slaughtered by them) be eaten by Muslims – a situation that hardly ever will occur in

Islamic countries? How are the Islamically based social conventions (e.g., no contact between young men and girls) to be adhered to in a liberal, pluralistic society in which only a few people still stand up for religious values? Is one's own son allowed to marry a German, non-Muslim woman who possibly judges the family of her husband to be "unbelievers"? All of these are questions that never arose in the Islamic land of origin, and they are questions to which the Muslim community must find answers, answers which can turn out to be quite different even within the Muslim community.

But even beyond the conduct of daily life, many questions arise in regard to religion: How can the Islamic faith be passed on to the younger generation that lives in the midst of a pluralistic secularized society that is often not characterized by visible ethical and religious values? Many families begin to practice their religion for the first time in the diaspora, in the desire to preserve their cultural roots. Others observe the regulations more strictly than they do in their lands of origin. Especially in Turkish Islam in Germany, a conservative religion is thus "conserved" that hardly exists in this form in present-day Turkey.

And how does the Western majority society act? Does it understand the tall minaret, which perhaps towers above all the other buildings in the neighborhood, as a cultural enrichment or as a threat? Or perhaps in earlier years as an enrichment but today as a threat? Does

it believe the peaceful declarations from the neighborhood mosque association, or does it consider the mosque to be the meeting place for "sleepers" and terrorists? Are the people who pray there those who practice their religion or those who form political cells? Is the headscarf worn as a personal confession of faith or as a political symbol? Do European societies at all desire a coexistence with the immigrants? And does the majority of immigrants today still desire integration? How far do the tolerance and freedom of democratic societies reach, and where does indifference or rejection begin?

2. *The Political Challenge*

Today, everyone is aware of what is meant under the subject of the "political challenge:" Many people in Europe in the last 30 years considered the occupation with this political dimension in Islamic countries to be subject matter appropriate for some Near East experts. It was assumed for a long time that extremist efforts limited themselves to internal conflicts in countries like Algeria, Palestine, or Iran. Today, this view has changed fundamentally, and quite rightly so.

Whoever focuses one's attention only on countries such as Afghanistan as areas of refuge for extremist networks will no longer grasp the present-day situation in all of its implications. European metropolises also have become the scenes of terrorist attacks, among them Amsterdam, Madrid, or London, which

for quite a long while have been considered to be the hub of international political Islam. With logistical and financial support from the Near and Middle East, Europe has become the area of refuge and action for extremist groups. Mosques and Islamic centers have become scenes of significant incidents. International Islamic terrorism, long underestimated in regard to its significance and its claim to power, has not stopped before the gates of Europe but rather today – as dreadful as this conclusion is – has become an element of European reality. It is no longer the only goal of present-day extremist groups to pursue the conflict in and in the vicinity of Israel in the Middle East, or to struggle against the regimes in their own Islamic countries they deem to be “open to compromise” or “un-Islamic.” Horror and terror are carried into the Western world, too, in the name of Islam, and Muslims as well as non-Muslims are killed because they are representatives of the “godless West” or because they are “collaborators” with it.

Islamism as a Political Power

Of course, political Islam does not consist only of violence and terror. Violent extremism is only one wing of political Islam and, in terms of numbers, is on the whole a small spectrum. That area of Islamism that pursues its goals by legal means, with a strategy, with financial resources stemming in part from foreign donors, with well-

schooled personnel, but not with less determination, is also to be counted as a form of political Islam. Politically motivated Islam exerts its influence over mosque associations and umbrella organizations, and this in two ways. First, it declares itself as organized Islam to be the spokesperson of “the” Muslims in Germany and employs titles such as “Zentralrat der Muslime,” although this “central council” is likely to represent less than one percent of the Muslims in Germany. All together, from five to, at most, ten percent of all Muslims in the country belong to one of these organizations, that is, a minority. Nevertheless, politically organized Islam formulates statements proclaimed to the public. Since the Muslim community has no membership status or hierarchy comparable to those in the churches, organized Islam thus appoints itself to be the partner in dialogue with the church and to be the contact organization for the state, although a majority of at least 90 percent of all the Muslims in Germany do not desire to be represented by one of these organizations.

Representatives of Islamism seek influence in universities and in politics, demand equality with the Christian churches and increased rights, or even demand adjustments in legislation (e.g., the law for the protection of animals had to be altered to allow special permission for the ritual slaughter of animals not previously named). Other points of contention carried before the highest courts in the last few years also include the question of the headscarf

for women teachers with civil servant status or the call to prayer broadcast by loudspeaker.

The preeminent goal is the recognition of Islam as a religion possessing equal rights in Europe and the acquaintance and pervasion of Western society with Islamic values. The second step is the establishment of Sharia, the Islamic order, first of all over the Muslim community. But in addition, politically organized Islam also has an effect within the Muslim community through its desire to urge Muslims in Europe to adopt a stricter observance of Islam. If female teachers from organized Islam give instruction in religion in the public schools while wearing the headscarf, and if they thus display their traditional role that legally discriminates against women, then the pressure upon female students in this environment to wear the headscarf more frequently obviously becomes greater. Thus is a traditional, non-enlightened Islam fostered and carried into the parents' house.

Thus, consideration of the background of political Islam is today neither "far-fetched" nor an off-beat intellectual field of activity but rather of the greatest significance for European society. Neither scare tactics nor minimalizing of the risk nor generalizing are appropriate here. A sober stocktaking is required.

Differentiation Creates Sobriety

If the background and motives of political Islamic groups, on the one

hand, are recognized and analyzed soberly, then this will contribute to the sophisticated perception of the Muslim community and, in the end, to the avoidance of false judgments. If apolitical Muslim groups distance themselves emphatically from violence, terror, and Islamism – indeed, it is even more valuable if they find arguments in the Koran and the writings of Muslim theologians that reject the justification of a violent Islam – then this will serve to make more clearly discernible the differences existing between it and the peaceful majority in the Muslim community in Europe. Neither a resistance directed against Muslim neighbors and fellow citizens arising out of fear nor a minimalizing of the political activities of the known groups will contribute to peaceful coexistence and the constructive shaping of a shared future.

Making an Accounting is Required

Critical questions also must be allowed if the urgently necessary objective discussion is to take place, critical questions of the majority as well as of the minority society. Subjects of such questions could be the mistakes of the past, the failed integration, but also subjects such as forced marriages and so called murders of honor. Both have existed in Germany for more than 40 years but until recently were of little interest to the majority society. The fact that today there is rather an increase in murders of honor and that there is still a large number of forced marriages of

young Turkish girls in Germany at the same time poses the question about the defense of European values, such as how women are to be protected and how European notions of the equality of men and women are to be established in an environment that, through the importation of antiquated traditions, fundamentally questions these values. Only a sober discussion of present problems will bring us a step forward.

3. The Question of Religion

In a time in which, in the West, the general mood is that religion has hardly any public significance anymore and, in the consciousness of many, is so characterized by the Enlightenment and secularization that it has only little to do with the European order of values, Islam appears as an exceedingly energetic, worldwide-networked, and above all self-confident religion with an apologetically presented claim upon absolute truth.

In Islam, of course, we encounter not only a religion but also a social system that is clearly bound with religion and tradition. At the same time, religion is in a much greater measure an element of daily life, of public life, and of the family than is the case in general in Europe. The tradition woven closely together with Islam contains detailed rules in regard to clothing and food, feasts and holidays, the conduct of men and women, marriage and divorce, the relationship of Muslims to non-Muslims, and war and peace. Because tradi-

tion and faith are bound closely to each other, and the tradition is grounded in religion, the tradition retains a determinative power in daily life. For this reason alone, it is not easy to separate the political sphere from the religious one in a question such as the significance of the headscarf or the function of the mosque. With religion and tradition (which does not always have to be specifically Islamic), social and political aspects are bound together. Thus, the headscarf is for many Muslim women more than a personal confession of faith; it also stands for recognition of the legal stipulations in Sharia concerning marriage and the family, and of the legally disadvantaged position of the woman. Thus, the significance of the headscarf goes far beyond a personal confession.

By virtue of the fact that Islam raises the subject of religion anew, Western society, too, will have to ask itself what values it wishes to defend. Do the values of European society rest upon the foundation of a Jewish-Christian legacy? If so, must this Jewish-Christian legacy be preserved in order to be able to preserve Europe's central values? Or, can both be decoupled from each other? The in part heated debate, within the framework of a possible entry of Turkey into the European Union, about whether Europe is a "Christian club" or not definitely has shown that this question, in the last analysis, always maintains an unspoken presence in the course of the confrontation with Islam. European countries first must answer

this question for themselves before they will be able to give an acceptable answer to Turkey.

Discernible is also the fact that Islam has gained in attractive power rather than lost. One today can no longer speak of the much-invoked “wearing down” of religion in the second and third generation. There is certainly the sphere of “secularized” Islam – Muslims who pursue the same forms of leisure-time entertainment as do European or German youth – but considered as a whole, Islam has remained a lively religion among the immigrants. Not, perhaps, in the sense that every individual Islamic religious regulation is observed to the last detail in every family, but indeed in such a manner that Islam offers support and identity. It is, in part, the case that precisely young people – after their parents have lived a relatively enlightened form of Islam – again turn to a stricter observance of Islamic regulations.

Concrete Fields of Discussion

A sign of a detailed treatment of the subject of “Islam” would be a discussion about concepts and content that, in another religious-cultural context, could have a different meaning.

A. The Question of Human Rights

There is, for example, the discussion about human rights. Muslim organiza-

tions have emphasized repeatedly that Islam not only respects human rights but even has formulated more extensive catalogues of human rights than the West and is really the “author” of all human rights. At the same time, however, a second look at the contents of the human rights declarations in the Western and Islamic contexts reveals clearly that all the Islamic declarations place the Sharia as a preamble before any kind of human right. In practical application, this means that an apostate can no longer demand any human rights at all, since he, according to the stipulations of Sharia, has committed a crime worthy of death and, thus, can no longer claim any religious freedom or other human rights. In the opinion of the vast majority of Muslim theologians, the right to religious freedom and human rights ends with the defection from Islam – even if the death sentence only rarely is carried out by courts but in most cases is done so by the offender’s family or the society.

Here lies the real focus in the discussion between the Western and the Islamic understanding of human rights and not in the superficial discussion of whether Islam recognizes human rights at all. If, however, there are reports from all Islamic countries about violations of human rights and limitations upon religious freedom – especially for converts – then these become understandable only in the context of the official Islamic definition of human and minority rights. Only on the basis of a detailed knowledge of the religion,

culture, and legal system of Islam will it be possible to conduct this discussion at all in wider settings and in the public realm.

B. Suicide Attacks

Another example: The terror attacks from 2001 and the following years were condemned repeatedly from the Muslim side with the argument that the Koran emphasizes that the one who kills a human being has “killed the whole world” (Sura 5: 32). Numerous Muslims emphasized that the attacks are in no way to be justified with the aid of Islam.

It is correct that the Koran (Sura 4: 29), as well as Islamic tradition, disapproves of murder, just as it disapproves of suicide. Murder is one of the serious crimes listed in the Koran. The tradition explicitly condemns suicide: Whoever commits suicide out of the fear of poverty or out of despair will not enter Paradise.

Of course, those who carry out attacks in Palestine and other places do not consider themselves as those who commit suicide but rather first of all as martyrs, that is, as human beings who fight and die for the cause of Islam, for the cause of God. An attack that is carried out with the high probability of the attacker’s own death is hardly ever interpreted as suicide but rather as Jihad, as commitment to the cause of God, as the final weapon against the wrongful oppression of the community of Muslims. The Koran promises mar-

tyrs entry into Paradise (Sura 4: 74), without examination of their faith: “I will let no action that one of you commits go unrewarded, whether it is done by a man or a woman ... And those who, for my sake ... have suffered hardship, and who have fought and been killed, I will forgive them their bad deeds, and, as a reward from God, I will let them enter gardens in whose valleys streams flow. With God, one is rewarded well” (3: 195). The martyr, however, can expect Paradise (Sura 47: 4-6). “And if you are killed or die for God’s sake, then forgiveness and compassion from God are better than what you manage to do” (3: 157).

C. The Question of Tolerance

Another example is the question of tolerance and of the concept of tolerance. A frequently expressed reproach made by Muslim apologists is that Islam accepts Christianity, but the Christians do not accept Islam. It is frequently pointed out in this connection that Muslim conquerors – in contrast to the Christian churches and crusaders – did not force the Christians to choose between conversion to Islam or death. In addition, so the argument goes, Muslims accepted Jesus Christ quite fundamentally as a respected prophet and the Old and New Testaments as revelations, while Christians refused their recognition of Mohammed as well as of the Koran.

Here, too, a discussion about the concept of “tolerance” easily moves in the wrong direction without a detailed

knowledge of Islam: What is understood under the term “tolerance” within Islam? In any case, not the recognition of another religion on an equal basis. The Koran already makes clear that Mohammed, to be sure, campaigned for the recognition of the new religion by Christians (and Jews) and urged Christians and Jews to become members of it, but, in his later years, after the Christians of his time refused to follow him, he considered the Christian faith more and more to be blasphemy and the Christian revelation to be falsified. Christians in areas conquered by Islam, indeed, were permitted as a rule to retain their faith. But they became subjugated persons (Arabic: *dhimmis* – protected minorities), who paid taxes for their “unbelief” and had to endure many legal disadvantages, even persecution and death.

The Koran, indeed, certifies the Old and New Testaments as God’s revelation, and Jesus is a respected prophet in the Koran. But he is respected only as a “herald of Islam,” a precursor to Mohammed who is only a human being and who brought salvation to no one. Jesus, in the Islamic position, was falsely revered by the Christians as God’s Son, and thereby Christians completely distorted Jesus’ “originally Islamic” message. The Christian revelation as a “falsified text,” is given only very little respect in Islam, and the person of Jesus as he is represented in the Old and New Testaments, just as little.

It is worrisome that many Muslim organizations in Europe today urge that nothing “negative” be permitted to be published anymore about Islam, since this would mean discrimination. In other words, everything not written from the Muslim point of view is to be prevented from being published (a development that is far more advanced, for example, in Great Britain, thanks to the efforts of Islamic lobbyists). The point of departure for these considerations is the *dhimma* status assigned in the Muslim view to the Christians, that is, the status of the protected minority that is placed under Islam and is subjugated to Islamic law. Here, how “awake” Western society is will be very essential as it follows this development, as well as to what extent it is ready to defend the freedoms of the press and speech established only after great effort.

D. The Question of Women

A further example is the frequently cited situation of women. Here, too, a detailed knowledge of Islam would lead to a better initial situation in the discussion and, finally, to more honesty in regard to the really controversial points. Muslim apologists emphasize that the woman in Islam enjoy equal status before God with men and, indeed, that Islam endows them with true dignity, freedom, protection, and respect. In the Western view, a woman with headscarf and cloak is an “oppressed creature.” What is right?

The Koran, indeed, speaks of the fact that man and woman were created equal before God, without giving an indication that the woman might be a creature of “less value.” At the same time, the Koran speaks – and the Islamic tradition even more clearly – of the different duties assigned to the man and the woman, from which different rights are derived and, indeed, with which the legal discrimination of the woman is sanctioned. She is legally discriminated against in the law of inheritance (she inherits only half of what the man inherits), in witness rights (her testimony is worth only half as much as the testimony of a man), and in marital law (a divorce is made more difficult for her; in some countries it is almost impossible; in most countries, polygamy is allowed for the husband). A foundation of Islamic marital law that is recognized everywhere is the wife’s duty to be obedient and the man’s right of discipline in regard to her that forbids her to make her own self-determined decisions against his objections (to leave the house, to maintain contacts to persons of whom he disapproves, and similar restrictions). If she does not render him this obedience, then, according to the opinion of the majority of theologians, he is permitted to resort to means of discipline in accord with Sura 4:34.

It is, thus, much more this marital law (polygamy, duty to obey, discipline, law of inheritance) – that, in the Islamic world, is interpreted in the vast majority of cases in a conservative sense (Turkey forms a certain exception

to this rule) – that stands much more in opposition to European conceptions of law than does a piece of clothing. But, these controversial “women’s questions” have appeared to the present only too seldom in public discussion.

Summary

It is not necessarily the case that the same content lies at the root of the same concepts. This cultural-religious content results rather from the specific cultural-religious-political context in which it originated. Concepts such as “tolerance” and “equality” – robbed of their occidental roots – cannot simply be transferred without problem to other cultures and religions and then, as a matter of course, also offer the same content.

The present debate about the foundations of this society and about the confrontation with a quite different value system and religion has in a sense forced itself upon us with all its might. This frightens us deeply and yet, at the same time, opens paths to a sound discussion as long as Western society is able to resist falling into panic and raising the barricades but rather is able to take stock soberly of the conditions in its countries and among the immigrants and to seek constructive solutions. Perhaps the debate about “integration” also is so agitated because the cultural-social or religious peculiarities of Europe, which should be defended here, have been defined clearly only in

rare cases. Does Islam perhaps make Western society's lack of goals and values particularly clear?

The majority of Muslims that lives and thinks apolitically in Europe and is worried about the rights that Islamic groups, bit by bit, successfully demand expects an answer from the state, whose task it is – on the basis of a detailed knowledge of Islam – to arrive at a reasonable demarcation over against polit-

ical forces. There cannot be any double legal standard – neither in regard to the position of women nor in regard to the recognition of polygamy, for example – for only an agreement upon a shared legal and value system will be able to guarantee the preservation of our state in the long run. It is rewarding to argue and to struggle for these shared values and to defend a new Europe's foundations for society, church, and state.

The Author

Über den Autor



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