



## CONFERENCE REPORT

# Approaches to Cooperation between the State and Muslim Communities



**Conference Report**

**Approaches to Cooperation  
between the State and  
Muslim Communities:  
Training of Muslim Religious  
Professionals in Europe**

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# 1. Preface



Dr Raida Chbib  
Managing Director of the AIWG/  
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This report presents a summary of some of the contributions presented at the AIWG International Conference from 24–25 June 2021, which was attended by approximately 50 experts from 14 European countries, with about 30 of whom were in attendance in Berlin.

As the title of the conference indicates, the link between the state and Islamic communities in Europe, with a specific focus on the cooperation in the field of religious personnel, was the common thread running throughout the discussions during the two-day event in Germany. This debate took up prior work and discussions on an international level facilitated by the Academy of Islam in Research and Society at the Goethe University Frankfurt and were primarily considered from two different angles: on the one hand, government officials addressed the question of how to adjust to the changing framework of a pluralised religious field, thus handling the needs of a growing Muslim population, while preserving security and the principle of secularity. On the other, different representatives of religious communities have critically observed the most recent state interventions in religious affairs,

asking about how best to face the challenges in the area of domestic training and working conditions of religious personnel with the resources at their disposal.

A consensus seemed to emerge that the issue is of increasing importance for various sides, and the need for cooperation between European states and Islamic communities was deemed crucial for specific areas. But it also became apparent that a common ground of interests, which is an important prerequisite for a goal-oriented exchange and cooperation on an equal level, does not arise all by itself. As several scholars pointed out, appropriate solutions and measures – which are supportive vs counterproductive to society as a whole – require a well-planned exchange between representatives of both fields that is built on trust and allows for moderation and guidance. Several examples of such a moderated exchange process were presented over the course of the event.

Given that trust is diminishing and conflicts on the rise in some of the country examples, mainly from the religious community perspective, academia might represent a useful instrument in designing productive measures in a coop-

erative way that fit the specific framework of each of the European countries represented here. In other cases, it was pointed out that the academic context offered a stable framework for exchange between states and Islamic religious communities and model institutions resulting from such cooperations – models that might offer valuable suggestions and stimuli for further work in various countries.

The AIWG conference in Berlin again facilitated the coming together of key figures to engage in an international debate on the interface between religious communities and the representatives of the public-political sphere. Such in-person events always harbor the possibility of controversial exchange, and this interaction is of fundamental importance when grappling with challenging issues – a form of exchange that cannot be replaced by virtual meetings.

The conference consisted of several different panels, each of which took up the overarching theme on the basis of sub-questions. The event started with some scholarly observations and a summarisation of what had previously been discussed and what still has to be worked out regarding sustainable

relations and joint initiatives between the state and Muslim communities. Different models of dialogue and cooperation between European state governments and national Muslim bodies were illustrated in the section that followed. This included examples from Great Britain, Austria, Germany as well as from Greece, each providing information on latest developments and relevant issues in the respective countries.

In another panel, community-based projects and institutions for education and training of Muslim religious personnel within Europe were presented, which provided a brief idea on how they work, in which cases their work is based on state funding and about their transnational offers or structures.

In a keynote presentation from a scholarly perspective on 'Governance of Religion in Secular States', the different modes of governing religion in (secular) European states were outlined, explaining the policy differences between individual states by pointing to varying basic institutional arrangements of religion in the public sphere which frame them. This enabled the participants to better understand the different approaches presented then from several regions in Europe. From a French government's point a view it was explained

why there is currently a specific interest in the issue of domestic training of Muslim religious personnel, while a representative from a German Muslim organisation was stressing that this was a community affair and how his institution has developed its own specific training. This panel was followed by a discussion of very recent examples and projects organised by state-funded institutions in Sweden, Germany, Spain and France to facilitate and enhance domestic training of Muslim religious personnel.

This report contains only a very brief and selective synopsis of the presentations of the main parts of the conference and thus offers just a brief glimpse at the open, lively and complex debate. The managing board of the AIWG was extremely pleased to welcome all of the experts and expressly thanks all participants for their contributions as well as the German Foreign Office for supporting this international event and this report.



## 2. The road so far

Dr Welmoet Boender and Dr Niels Valdemar Vinding

In the past decade, we have witnessed efforts to establish publicly funded training programmes for Muslim religious professionals in countries across Europe and in the United States. These programmes are meant to prepare for Muslim chaplaincy, mosque-based imams, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers, Islamic theologians and other.

Politicians have keenly followed these developments. 'To fight the ideology of hatred, we need to set up as soon as possible a European institute to train imams in Europe', said Charles Michel, President of the European Council, in response to recent terror in France. Whether phrased negatively as a response to radicalisation, extremism and foreign influences, or positively, as a way of supporting Muslim communities, fostering openness and training as a coordi-

nated European effort, the training and education of imams and Muslim professionals remains a principal challenge for Europe.

The quest for domestically educated Islamic authority figures has a longer history in Europe. Various authors have shown how it was originally formulated in the 1980s and 1990s in terms of integration (policy). Laborious political processes involving at least three stakeholders have so far accompanied the establishment of these programmes: the state, Muslim communities and the universities. Legal and historical frameworks that differ in each European country have set institutional conditions for possible forms of academic education; kin-states continue their attempts to maintain control, opening their own facilities in Europe, or suggesting international collaborations.



Dr Welmoet Boender





Dr Niels Valdemar Vinding

The question posed in several subsequent international meetings organised by the Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG) organised between 2018 to 2020 is: *What has worked so far and why?*

Five central elements came up in this regard in the AIWG conferences:

*First*, the international conferences brought into focus the stakeholders' landscape that includes Muslim communities and their representative organisations, state actors and educational stakeholders. If one wants to establish a sustainable publicly funded educational programme for imams or other Muslim religious professionals, none of the three individual 'parties' can do this alone.

*Second*, the conferences brought into focus two distinct forms of Muslim religious professionals: Muslim religious professionals employed by mosques, and Muslim religious professionals employed by other employers. It is important to distinguish between these professions and their training, as they

have different epistemic and institutional authority formation.

*Third*, and connected to this, is that it is important to realise that different institutional contexts call for different educational requirements in order to acquire authority from different audiences. This has consequences for national and international educational systems which must be processed accordingly.

*Fourth*, we pointed at the fact that Islamic religious leadership also involves gender dynamics that must be taken into account.

*Finally*, we explained and explored the predicaments of the political frameworks in which efforts to establish training programmes for Muslim religious professionals (MRP) take place, briefly referred to as 'integration discourse' and 'securitisation discourse'. We pointed at how educational initiatives hold tremendous promise of integration and cooperation across Europe, but are nevertheless highly contested and politically contentious.



### 3. Conference Report – Approaches to Cooperation between the State and Muslim Communities

In view of these fluid framework conditions and the importance of further exchange among the relevant parties, more space was given at the 2021 Conference in Berlin to discuss the current state of cooperation between the state and Muslim faith communities, above all with regard to the development of domestic training programmes for imams and Muslim chaplains inside Europe. Discussions focused on the strategic and political approaches to the development of domestic training for religious personnel, including the Islamic religious communities' points of view as well as perspectives of state employees, politicians and university scholars. The conference provided a space to gain deeper insights into different cooperation forms and processes as well as shed

light on the general state and atmosphere of current debates in different countries. The contributions presented by many of the participating international experts from government institutions, universities and Islamic communities are summarised here.

**The conference was opened with welcoming words by Prof Dr Bekim Agai and Dr Raida Chbib, from the directory board of the Academy for Islam in Research and Society.**

Prof Bekim Agai highlighted how the topic of training Muslim religious professionals is currently relevant in most secular countries in the West and has to be debated by bringing together researchers, state officials and Muslim communities. He explained



Prof Dr Bekim Agai and Ambassador Dr Volker Berresheim



Ilhan Tuna speaking online

that often there appears to be a divide between the state and the community in this context, but that both sides are in need of cooperation. He mentioned how international observations during the past conferences so far show, that there is no one single model suitable for all countries; and that good ideas for practical solutions must be developed through exchange on the international level by gathering the different experiences and expertise. The AIWG aims to act as a hub connecting all the relevant institutions which serve the production of well-founded Islamic knowledge inside and outside of the universities and to combine the practical with the theoretical framework.

**Ambassador Dr Volker Berresheim from the German Federal Foreign Office explained why the topic is relevant to the Federal Foreign Office.**

According to him, the major challenge for societies today is the growing polarisation and increasing rifts, in which religion is one factor of many. As societies become more international and diverse themselves and we become more connected globally, it comes to the question of where does the individual situate itself within the society. He notes, that one essential factor of how religion influences the individual and its place in society is religious literacy, which is the overarching goal of training Muslim religious professionals.

**Dzemaal Sibljakovic from the Islamic religious community in Austria (Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich – IGGiÖ) talked about the importance of sustainable relations between the state and Muslim communities from an Austrian perspective.**

He mentions the role of Imams and religious professionals in the prevention of extremism and that, academically sound Islamic knowledge should be widely accessible in order to provide individuals with sustainable points of contact. Sibljakovic also highlights the influence of public discourse and polarised political debate, which serves as an additional challenge to discussing the practical needs of the communities. He states how the thematic mixing of discourses as aspects of security, radicalisation and religious education are discussed without definitive distinction, making the communication with the communities very difficult and putting great strain on the relationship.

**Ilhan Tuna, senior advisor at the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment in the Netherlands, followed with a brief comment.**

He mentions the financial challenge of employment of imams and Muslim religious professionals and the connected lack of funding for the communities. He explains how most of the community work is currently done by volunteers and that this is a challenge to building sustainable structures.

### 3.1. State governments and national Muslim bodies: Models of dialogue and cooperation

Two guiding questions were discussed from the perspectives of the state representatives and the Muslim communities. What approaches or structures are being set up in different states to regulate religious affairs of Muslims, and where are the limits of (secular) state interventions or commitment in religious fields?

**Gabriel Goltz, from the German Ministry of the Interior, shed light on the German Islam Conference, which serves as a dialogue forum:**

In 2006, the Federal Minister of the Interior established the 'German Islam Conference' (Deutsche Islam Konferenz) as a national forum between State and Muslim communities. Since the relationship between the state and religious communities in Germany is characterised by both separation and cooperation, solutions needed to be found on how

»One of these traditional responsibilities of the ministry are the relations between the state and the religious community on the federal level. So, it was only natural that the Ministry of the Interior got the lead in organising the forum for the dialogue between the state and Muslims here. However, despite the wide range of the ministry's responsibilities one has to admit that the Minister of the Interior is widely seen as a security representative. That is why critics who emphasise the sensitivities regarding the role of the ministry organising the Islam Conference have their point. As a result, security issues were excluded from the Islam Conference about ten years ago, in 2012, and since then are dealt with in a separate dialogue mechanism. In my view, this was a very important step in order not to mix things up where they should not be.«

Gabriel Goltz

Muslim organisations could participate in areas of public religious cooperation, such as religious education in public schools or chaplaincy in public institutions, which was jointly discussed in the newly established dialogue format. According to Goltz, the German Islam Conference continues its aim of fostering social cohesion and 'an Islam of the Muslims in Germany' – an Islam which defines itself within the democratic order and is an integral part of society – as well as objectifying public debates about Muslims in Germany and preventing social polarisation and phenomena of group-focused enmity.

A major point of contention regarding the German Islam Conference, according to Goltz, concerns the question as to who represents the Muslims in this dialogue. The Conference's solution focused on

regular changes and adaptation. Whereas five nationwide umbrella organisations of mosques took part in 2006, today there are up to ten organisations and other involved parties who are either socially engaged in different civil society associations or are directly connected with state universities. From 2006 to 2017, the main results of the dialogue were policy recommendations and statements concerning areas of public religious cooperation and general principles of integration, social cohesion and prevention of social polarisation. These have often been the starting point for many processes of implementation, as a generator of commonly developed impulses in order to enable, encourage and enhance the process of integration and participation.

In 2018, the conference was transformed into an implementation body, as the previously discussed issues covered the main areas of public religious cooperation. Its programmes are based on its own recommendations and statements and include, among others, the support for the training of imams and Muslim religious personnel in Germany and in German language, the establishment of an expert community on how to combat Islamophobia and the funding of interreligious projects aimed at preventing Antisemitism amongst Muslims.

Building on this, Murat Gümüş, the General Secretary of the Islamic Council for the Federal Republic of Germany (Islamrat für die BRD), commented on the potential role of the state in training Muslim religious professionals from the perspective of the Muslim community representative in Germany.

He points out that the topic of imams, their educational background and their places of work, the mosques, are frequently discussed topics in Europe. Often, they are addressed at the interface of different policy fields, e.g. security, integration and foreign policy, affected by anti-Muslim racism as well as social exclusion – often to the detriment of Muslim communities. As Muslims become more and more rooted in German society, he says that the Islamic Council prefers imams who have been socialised in Germany, who know the local Muslim community as well as their way of life from an early age. According to him, the religious communities need imams who know the country, the everyday life and the local language. However, with appropriate training, imams from abroad can also be supported. He emphasises that according to the legal framework, the Islamic Council considers the training of Muslim religious personnel solely a matter of Muslim faith communities. However, cooperation between the communities as well as with the state is indeed possible, which both the German Islamic Council and the Islamic Community Millî Görüş have done in the past.

He observes that the state is increasingly taking the initiative in regulating imam recruitment and in their training, so that problems and difficulties of this commitment become evident. First, according to him, a two-class system of religious professionals in Europe might be a result from this intervention: rabbis and pastors who work within the guidelines of the constitution in one group, and imams who are specifically addressed in another. Second, a state's urge to control might actually lead to a loss of control. If imams are trained by Muslim communities according to political prerequisites, imams and mosques would lose trust in their faith institutions, because they might be perceived as puppets of the state.

As Gümüş stated, the state's recognition of training institutions for imams organised by Muslim communities is an important task.



»I think it is not too late, and that if both sides are aware of each other's sensitivities and fears, and show empathy to each other, it could be a win-win situation for all sides. As bad as the atmosphere is at the moment in some countries, if you approach the topic empathically and sustainably, it can lead to a positive rethinking and positive impulses in society.«

Murat Gümüş

There is a wide range of opportunities for cooperation between the state and Muslim communities, from which all sides can benefit, e.g. in the field of prison, hospital and school chaplaincy. The state wants to see mosques on its side, and the Muslim religious communities should support this, even though mosques should have the freedom to define themselves.

After the situation in Germany was discussed from the state's and community's perspective, Dr Stephan Hinghofer-Szalkay, from the Federal Chancellery of Austria, offered insights into the situation in Austria.

He explained that both the national constitutional law and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) case law precludes the possibility of a single 'national Muslim body' in Austria. Much like in Germany and other European states, Muslims in Austria are represented by several associations that make up the various dialogue partners for the state (IGGÖ and ALEVI as 'recognized religious societies' and SCHIA as a denominational community). However, organised Islam is primarily tied to one legal entity, the IGGÖ (Isla-



Dr Stephan Hinghofer-Szalkay speaking on the screen

mische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich), which is the largest organisation and considers itself the main representative body of Muslim religious affairs in Austria. Historically speaking, from 1867 to 1918, the special status for ‘recognized religious societies’ meant rights to public exercise of religion and the legal protection against demeaning speech. Currently, the status of ‘recognized religious societies’ is mostly about being treated like a public law corporation under the law and safeguarding the absolute protection against interference by the legislative body when it comes to ‘internal affairs’. According to Hinghofer-Szalkay, this is quite relevant when it comes to Muslim religious professionals, as the state can never interfere in the content of such religious education; it can set some limits, but it can never provide or interfere with the content of theology, he says.

»The state can therefore not impose any sort of “European” Islam – this is, of course, very much sought after by our colleagues in integration – by means of direct religious governance because autonomy is at the very heart of the system in Austria. So, the state cannot and must not interfere in this area.«

Dr Stephan Hinghofer-Szalkay

According to Hinghofer-Szalkay, the Islam Act of 1912 ‘set a milestone for the recognition of Islam’ and the establishment of the public law corporation in Austria. Initially, it was founded specifically for Bosnian Hanafi Muslims in Austria after the occupation (1878) and annexation (1908) of Bosnia by Austria-Hungary. The increasing number of Muslims means that this part of the religious community has become larger and more active in later years. Legally, this led to the Austrian Constitutional Court declaring the limitation on the Hanafi school in the Islam Act of 1912 unconstitutional in 1987, because it, the legal limitation, failed to grasp the pluralism within Islam and the possibility of creating a representative body for all Muslims as a public law corporation.

After a long debate, the Islam Act of 2015 was passed to regulate the rights and duties of public law corporations, to establish the Chairs for Islamic Theological Studies at Austrian universities and to regulate religious professions operating in prisons, hospitals and the armed forces (while restricting foreign funding).

Jasmin Jahic, from the Shoura Luxembourg, briefly described the situation in Luxembourg, where training Muslim religious personnel for the approximately 20,000 Muslims is widely carried out without a specific prearranged structure.

The main Islamic umbrella organisation, Shoura Luxembourg, was jointly created by Muslim organ-

isations and associations of different Muslim immigrants as a central body for their religious affairs. The Shoura acquired the status of a public corporation acting as a representative body, so that it is striving towards its purpose of coordinating the religious matters of all its Muslim associations. Still, the question of setting a minimum of educational requirements an imam should fulfil is unregulated. There is a Shoura fund reserved for educational costs as well as state financial support to the organisation, although the state is not interfering in the content-related dimension of education of the religious staff. A mufti has been elected in 2019 by the Shoura, who coordinates all the imams of the mosques. Some political actors have reached out to the Shoura for projects like in France or Germany, but no such project has as of yet been realised.

**Prof Dr Nikos Maghioros, from the Faculty of Theology of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, offered interesting insights into the current structures and mechanisms of the relations as well as into the most recent developments with regard to education of Muslim religious personnel in Greece.**

Due in large part to the fact that very few publications on the topic have been published in English, the Greek structures and discussions on the relationship between state and Muslim communities were un-



Prof Dr Nikos Maghioros

He explained that the supervision of religion in Greece is the task of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. As its head, the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs supervises the religious education and facilitates interreligious relations and dialogue to maintain religious peace and social cohesion. Relevant institutions for Muslims in Greece, within the structure of the ministry, are the Department for Muslim Affairs in the Directorate for Religious Administrations, the Department for Religious Freedom and Interfaith Relations as well as the



Jasmin Jahic

Department for Muslim Religious Schools.

The Department of Muslim Affairs is responsible for the organisation and supervision of Muslim teachers of the Qur'an and *muftiates* (territory under administration of a mufti, who is then responsible for supervising the local boards, imams, mosques and trusteeships), including their selection process. The Department for Muslim Religious Schools has to deal with all issues regarding the two *madrasas* (religious Islamic schools) in Greece, e.g. their curriculum and the appointment of teachers.

**With most of the estimated two million Muslims having Spanish citizenship, Prof Dr Maria del Mar Griera from the Department of Sociology, University of Barcelona, described the situation in Spain, focusing on its specific history of Muslims.**

The main legal framework is based on a cooperation agreement between the Spanish State and the Islamic Commission of Spain, signed in November 1992, similar to agreements with the Jewish and Protestant communities. It grants the right to spiritual support in all public institutions provided by imams or other religious professionals. Furthermore, the agreement states the right to Islamic education in public schools. Until 2004, this agreement existed merely on paper, as there was neither an initial budget planned for its implementation nor institutional development or capacity for potential claims to be made on the basis of the agreement. After the Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence (Fundación Puralismo y Convivencia) was established as a new government body along with regional agencies and more organisations of representation of the Islamic community were recognised, Muslim chaplaincy began to be subsidised.

New training programmes emerged and a register of chaplains was debated. Currently, according to recent regulations, chaplains and imams have to be accredited by the Islamic Commission of Spain (Comisión Islámica de España, CIE) to be included in the register of religious representatives.

For teachers of Islamic education, the requirements are less extensive. Only their university degree, i.e. a Bachelor degree in education, and an official permit of residency are required. Moreover, teachers need to be appointed by the CIE. A minimum of ten students are needed in a class to exercise their right for an Islamic education lesson.



»Everytime there is a controversy, there is this debate on imams and the idea of controlling imams. There is a new debate but it never generates results in the long run and quickly fades afterwards. It is worrying how this agenda evolves marked by external input, and not by needs of the community.«

**Prof Dr Maria del Mar Griera**

Training programmes for Muslim religious personnel are developed by private initiatives together with the Islamic communities. According to del Mar Griera, the policy agenda is affected by public controversies as well as framed by rising populism and by a foreign relations agenda. The never-ending question involves the issue of funding and economic concerns.



## 3.2. Cooperative and transnational programmes for training Muslim religious professionals in Europe



Dr Michael Privot

In the second part of the conference the participants discussed possibilities of training projects beyond national borders, asking what possibilities and approaches are to be found on a transnational level?

**Dr Michael Privot outlined recent developments with regard to the European Imam Training Project, which he had presented at previous meetings.**

The project started about four years ago in Brussels as a joint project with actors from France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. One key aim of this project is to develop a common training structure that is suitable for European Muslim communities in the next 10 to 15 years, as generational changes occur within the Muslim immigrant communities.

Still unresolved challenges include funding issues and getting university-level education equivalent to a universities' bachelor's and master's degree, i.e. offering a diploma that has measurable value in the labour markets. Furthermore, he expects a shift within the Muslim communities regarding the diversity of the Muslim communities throughout Europe: additional people with specific cultural backgrounds, people who attribute themselves to LGBTQIA+, people who convert to or leave the Islamic faith, people from mixed cultural and faith families. This shift should be reflected in the training of the imams, who will have to address these and further questions raised by their diverse community.



Participants in the conference room

Another challenge lies in the epistemic shift that still has to be worked out: universities are the centre of self-reflectivity, critical thoughts etc. If Islam needs to become European, the universities are also places where it needs to be shaped and articulated. Therefore, the key is to involve professors and academic personnel in the training, so that an intellectual and pastoral training can be shared and combined.

According to Dr Privat the advantages of this project are: first, that it stands above national interests. Second, a joint European institute would carry considerably more weight in the discussions with traditional institutions. What could already be observed is that there is a shift in conversation with European decision-makers regarding the role of Islamic studies in the training of Muslim religious personnel.

**Dr Imran Suddahazai presented the Markfield Institute in Great Britain, which includes an online approach to teaching in order to provide an international appeal.**

The Markfield Institute of Higher Education is one of the few Muslim academic institutions in Europe which is situated between the academic and traditional Muslim institutions. Most of the students have a traditional background, and most of the researchers and employees are also part of the communities themselves. At the same time, it is a recognised British institution of higher education. Although Markfield has reached out to the government to cooperate further, there has thus far been little response, Suddahazai says.

The aim of the institute is to offer an academic programme that trains future and present community leaders. Therefore, partnerships with local universities like Newman University have been established. The study programmes on offer include chaplaincy training (starting 25 years ago), Islamic education and sustainable development as well as project management among others. Markfield also offers international programmes for students from abroad. Because international students were not able to get a visa last year due to the pandemic, Markfield had to switch to online teaching. This, however, led to new possibilities and new partnerships. They are currently in the process of establishing an initiative for the training of scholars and researchers from abroad and, therefore, are working together with institutions in Austria, Australia and Indonesia.

**Meho Travljanin, an imam from a Bosnian mosque in Berlin, and Adem Hasanovic, from the Goethe University Frankfurt, outlined the example of the best-known form of transnational Islamic organisations: those who rely on foreign educational insti-**

**tutions for training their religious personnel and are connected to countries of origin of their specific migrant group.**

Many of the members of the Bosnian Mosque in Berlin, which is part of the Islamic Community of Bosniaks in Germany, came to Germany in the 1990s, and most of them will retire within the next few years. Imams of the Bosnian communities (also of Germany) are educated at a *madrasa* (Islamic school) in Bosnia and often have no university degree. Instead, the decree from the Grand Mufti of Bosnia is essential for access to professional work at the mosques, which gives permission to perform the duties for a religious professional.

Here in Germany, the communities usually employ imams educated in Bosnia, which often have language barriers and little knowledge of German society and the community's needs. Today, a university degree in Islamic theology studies (the so-called Imammat) is generally speaking needed to be admitted for work at German mosques. The Bosnian community is discussing the idea of establishing a *madrasas* in Germany in the future.



Meho Travljanin

### 3.3. Governance of Religion in Secular States: Opportunities and constraints vis-à-vis the education of Muslim religious professionals

It has become clear that the situation in European countries differs, not only due to the various judicial frameworks but also due to differing religion policies and institutional structures in the field of Islam. Shaping religious and continuing education of Muslim religious personnel in Islamic communities of Europe correspondingly encompasses a range of possibilities and structures in their specific national contexts.

Prof Dr Riem Spielhaus from the University of Göttingen outlined in her keynote different modes of governing religion.

She highlighted the wide range of countries who identify as secular, with a number of European countries having official religions and others valuing a very strict separation of religion and the state. On the constraints and advantages of state intervention

in the training of Muslim religious professionals, she states that education is a highly regulated field of practice and politics. With funding comes the demand for control and stricter forms of regulations, which can provide opportunities but also highlights the necessity of building trustful and stable relationships to create sustainable structures.

According to Dr Renaud Rochette, from the European Institute of Study of Religions at the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes, PSL Université Paris, the situation in France is determined by a long-standing tradition of centralisation and an overwhelming catholic majority until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The principle of *laïcité* serves as the building block for the relationship between the French state and Islam. Furthermore, Catholicism is perceived as the standard for religion on an unconscious and conscious



Dr Renaud Rochette

basis. Based on this, religion is usually considered as a unified group with a hierarchy and one leader. Even if not explicitly, there is in fact a mutual support of the state and Catholic Church, combined with state control of the Church. Finally, there is the factor of public opinion, as the relationship between state and Muslim communities is not negotiated behind closed doors but publicly. This means that stereotypes and racist attitudes are part of the discussion according to Rochette.

The French Council of the Muslim Faith (Conseil français du culte musulman, CFCM) was established as a model to foster an Islam of France in contrast to an Islam in France. Established in 2003, the CFCM serves as a representative body which can accurately represent the Muslim community in its diversity. According to the principle of *laïcité*, there can be no law regarding the governance of religious communities. This means that such issues have to be dealt with in another way. On the government side, however, there is the aim to regulate Islam, e.g. regarding practical issues of the community such as a common starting date of the fasting month for French Muslims, or the issue of imam education. Currently, about three quarters of full-time imams are trained abroad, and approximately 13% are dispatched by foreign governments. In order to establish a 'French Islam', these numbers have to be addressed, according to Rochette.

**Amb Jean-Christophe Peaucelle, Counsellor for Religious Affairs at the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, presented his view from a perspective of the French government.**

Despite differences in history and legal frameworks, all European countries face the same challenges of integrating Islam into the religious landscape of their respective societies, and each country needs to find specific ways adapted to its background. However, exchange can help find appropriate solutions, according to Amb Peaucelle.

The current situation in France is characterised by a need for better trained Muslim religious personnel. The already established and executed training programmes are not satisfactory for many reasons, such as proximity to extreme ideologies, low numbers of vocations and missing cooperation with French authorities. Amb Peaucelle interprets the concept of *laïcité* in a way that does not prevent cooperation



«Laïcité is an oft-misunderstood concept, established as kind of a peace treaty between conservative, catholic and more republican, sometimes anticlerical forces in the 19th century. It is not the hostility or rather ignorance of religion, but the freedom of religion and practice. It is a double system of protection: The state is protected from religious interference, but also cannot dictate the religions, what they should believe and how they should organise. The currently debated law in the French parliament dedicated to fight separatism will not affect the discussed issue of the training of Muslim religious personnel.»

Amb Jean-Christophe Peaucelle

between the state and religious organisations. At the same time, it cannot finance, organise nor manage the training in religious matters. This means in practical terms that it is up to the Muslim communities to organise themselves on these matters.

The French government created 30 civil and civic training programmes throughout the country for (Muslim) religious personnel, especially for those who are coming from abroad. The aim is to provide basic knowledge about subjects such as the principle of *laïcité*, French history, the French legal framework and the relationship between religion and the

state in overcoming the disconnection between the religious personnel coming from abroad and French society.

Amb Peaucelle concluded by stating that even though there is a huge decline in religious literacy in the European secular states, the societies themselves have been nourished by religion. Furthermore, he pointed to the need to reflect on the role of imams in European states. Whereas imams in a traditional understanding are mainly engaged in leading the prayer, imams in secular states are expected to do even more. Comparable to priests in Christian communities, they are expected to be spiritual leaders, represent the community and engage in interreligious dialogue. He closed with the point that the Muslim communities – along with the Catholic and Protestant church – have problems in attracting young people to learn the profession of religious personnel. Thus the religious communities must work on increasing the attractiveness of the job of an imam or a male or female Muslim religious professional.

Another role of religion was outlined for Germany by Dr Andreas Jacobs, head of the Department of Social Cohesion at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) in Berlin.

From a German perspective, the understanding of

the idea of secularism includes that religious communities should positively contribute to society. Religious affairs are coordinated and governed by the federal states (*Bundesländer*) in a decentralised manner, with the exception of the 'Deutsche Islamkonferenz', which has been established as an overarching communication platform at the federal level.

Until the mid-2000s, no state-supported educational institutions for German Muslim religious professionals existed. This changed with the establishment of faith-based Islamic theology programmes at several public universities, with its first graduates completing their degrees in 2017. While these programmes often have a high academic profile, there is a lack in professional training, which creates dead ends. With mixed job opportunities and problems of acceptance, perspectives for these graduates are not entirely sustainable. Furthermore, there are community-based approaches for training, for instance, from the Association of Islamic Cultural Centres (Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren-VIKZ), which was the first organisation to establish its education programme in the 1980s, and the vocational school established by the Islamic Community Millî Görüş (Islamische Gemeinschaft Millî Görüş-IGMG) in 2014. Most recently, the imam seminary was established by the DITIB in Germany, which is a two-year programme that offers follow-up training to BA graduates of the aforementioned German university programmes. Government support of these community-based programmes is limited, as there is no financial support (only mutual recognition in the form of visits). The 'Islamkolleg', a newly established (2021) training institution in Osnabrück, is different insofar as it emerged out of a cooperation between Muslim communities, academic stakeholders as well as political stakeholders. Building on a BA degree as an entry requirement, it offers further qualification to provide students with a broad job profile either as an imam or in the fields of counselling and social work. The state has committed to initially fund this project until 2025. Nevertheless, there are still challenges connected with all different forms of education in Germany, including lack of mutual recognition, limited job opportunities and insufficient salaries. According to Jacobs, there is no one-size-fits-all all solution to close the gap between top-down and bottom-up approaches.



»The guiding principle, as laid out by our Ministry of the Interior, is to establish an Islam in, for and from Germany«

Dr Andreas Jacobs



Hasnain Govani

**Hasnain Govani, from the Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities, described how Sweden is, on the one hand, quite secular, with the state taking a neutral stance when it comes to questions of faith. This means that faith institutions are separate from the state.**

Swedish society, on the other hand, is not necessarily secular, which means that faith communities have, as any other part of the civic society, their own place in democracy. Financial support for churches started in the 1970s, when the state began to distribute some funding. This same support was soon extended to other faith communities. Distribution of funds was then handed to an advisory board, which evolved into a semi-governmental Board Agency. Starting in 2010, the responsibilities of the Board Agency have expanded to include knowledge production and social cohesion. In 2017 it was upgraded to a full government agency operating under the Ministry of Culture. Currently, the agency allocates state funds

totalling approximately 9 million €, which is divided between organisational funding, project funding and operational funding, with the latter category covering chaplaincy and religious education.

Furthermore, according to Govani, the agency provides general support to faith communities as well as supports their efforts to develop and strengthen chaplaincy within the public health care sector. Not all faith communities, thus not all Muslim communities, are eligible for support by the agency. The Muslim communities meeting the eligibility requirements are organised under the Islamic Cooperation board (Islamiska Samarbetsrådet-ISR), which represents seven different organisations and around 500,000 participants of the Swedish Muslim community.

Regarding the training of religious professionals, it makes sense to take a look at other faith communities in Sweden as well. The Church of Sweden follows a hybrid solution in which universities, as state

agencies, provide the basic theological education and follow-up practical training is then completed within the Church institution. Other non-state churches have private university colleges, which also receive funding from the government. On the question of whether the state should support education of Muslim religious professionals, a government inquiry was commissioned in 2008. It concluded that Muslim communities are largely autonomous, which would make it difficult for the Muslim communities to build trust in a state-supported Islamic-religious education. As a matter of principle, the state should not involve itself in the internal affairs of faith communities, and Muslims should not be singled out from other faith communities in this regard. Finally, as part of the conclusion of the government inquiry, it was suggested that induction courses (courses for 'newer' faith communities in general), should be established. Based on this, alternative educational systems exist in the form of study associations and 'folk high schools', which are liberal and non-formal education institutes. For instance, Kista Folkhögskola offers a Muslim Chaplaincy course. As a public university, the Uppsala University has recently started with Islamic theology courses, but without providing full degrees. The agency for the support of faith communities itself has started offering leadership courses for faith communities in general, not just to Muslim communities.

**While the potential role of universities has already been touched upon by several speakers, Prof Dr Alison Scott-Baumann, from the Centre of Islamic Studies in the Near and Middle East Department of the SOAS University of London/GB, elaborated on this when speaking about her Universities and Muslim Seminaries Project.**

In her presentation she introduced another approach of extending competences of Muslim religious professionals by proactively connecting a public university institute with traditional Muslim communities. Scott-Baumann put together her team to work on the partnership between universities and *Darul Uloom*s (Muslim Seminaries/Islamic educational institutions), not only for the students but also for teachers, for example, by offering guidance to *Darul Uloom*

graduates to facilitate access to higher education. Furthermore, the project involves organising workshops with these institutions and teachers regarding accreditation, analysing how the process can work and what barriers exist. Moreover, given that the number of female scholars is rising, a further aim is to develop a toolkit for women's education institutions, which enable women to be more engaged in their community and to increase their influence by speaking with female scholars and community leaders.

The Universities and Muslim Seminaries Project (UM-SEP) team consists of people from different religions, in which dogmatic issues are put aside in order to work together on humanity and cultural imaginations. Within just five months they established a national hub to manage and coordinate partnerships between universities and *Darul Uloom*s. Since the launch of the project, two more universities have expressed their interest in taking part in the project.



## 4. Where to go from here?

Dr Welmoet Boender and Dr Niels Valdemar Vinding

### 4.1. Education and the larger contextual scope of cooperation between state, academia and Muslim communities

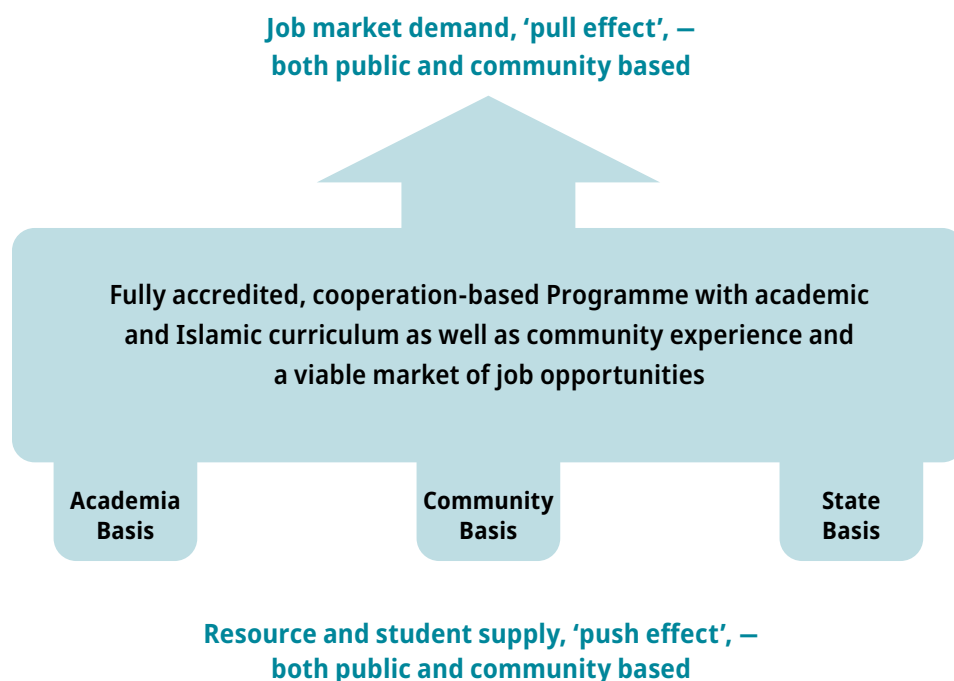
Although it is rarely fully satisfactory to simply consider the importance of education in a more general sense, we find the need to embed education and training of Muslim religious professionals in a broader context.

As illustrated here, a fully accredited programme according to both public and Islamic standards is a starting point. However, this cannot work properly and may have lack a sufficient number of students, resources and support if it does not rest on sure footing. This means that education requires a solid academic foundation involving research and teaching at the university level. It also needs a community basis that recognises the need and importance of the programme. Finally, it needs a public state or

municipal basis possessing the political legitimacy as well as a sense of importance that comes from both the political and public spheres. These are the three foundational bases represented in the diagram above.

At the other end of the educational flow depicted in the diagram, the need for a proper job market is of vital importance. Muslim religious professionals need to be able to find meaningful and rewarding employment, so that they can apply their training, receive supervision and vocational training as well as have structures of accountability.

From this simple model we may approach education and training from both the perspectives of the stu-



dent and the job market. Students and their communities value motivation (religious or otherwise), curiosity and desire. On this basis they seek education and from there they look to a job market. Employers and the job market requirements are on the other end, and they look to educational programmes and their graduates in search of competences and skills that are aligned with their own. Based on these expectations, they want education programmes to recruit prospective students.

Three brief (more or less) common sense points can be made here.

*First*, as with all other forms of education, we need to consider the entire set of educational logics at play. In other words, education is about experience, com-

petences, students, institutions and organisations, cooperation, and ongoing developments to improve and consolidate education programmes. This is true for all successful forms of education, including for training and education of Muslim religious professionals.

*Second*, supply follows demand. With the creation of professional jobs comes professional training.

*Third*, you get what you pay for. Wherever there are jobs with good working conditions, pay, supervision and continuous training is where graduates will seek employment. This means that a public sector chaplaincy job with full pay and benefits is more attractive than a low-paying job at a local mosque, despite religious convictions and community needs.

## 4.2. The road(s) ahead: where should we go?

When asked about the road ahead, we point at three focal points.

*First*, we observe that in the development of European training programmes for Muslim religious professionals – and with the efforts of AIWG in bringing German and international experts together with practitioners and religious communities – we are now witnessing the formation of an ‘epistemic community’, a network of knowledge-based experts who (can) help decision-makers to define problems and identify solutions. In the case of imam training and chaplaincy programmes, something similar is now happening that also occurred in the early phase of the establishment of Islamic theology programmes: we see that people from different disciplinary backgrounds and with different roles and expertise find each other, transgressing disciplinary boundaries. These experts make clear how the people involved value and perceive the relevance of the educational initiatives.

*Second*, we emphasise the importance of trust and deliberation. Not only must those involved as stakeholders understand how power dynamics play a role, it is also important to get beyond certain obstructing power dynamics. If representatives from Muslim

communities, the state and educationalists are to collaborate, they must agree on developing the training programs as sites of deliberative engagement with society.

*Third*, this means that shared ownership must be sought between the Muslim organisations, state actors and the educational partner(s) in a ‘tripartite model’ – instead of predominantly ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’. It also means that a logical solidified chain of education must be realised that aligns educational qualification with the job market, just as this would apply to any educational programme.

From this, we need to promote a public, cross-European deliberative discourse on the need and implementation of accountable and qualified training and education of Muslim religious professionals.

Overall, the objective is to normalise and regularise the need for education and training. This means that it needs to be broadly accepted within the public at large that education benefits both Muslim communities and the rest of society.

# 5. Conference Programme

## WEDNESDAY, 23 JUNE

**Check-in** at Leonardo Royal Hotel, Berlin

### 07:30 p.m.

**Informal Get-together** with international guests and speakers of the conference

## THURSDAY, 24 JUNE

### 09:30 a.m.

**Registration and Welcome Coffee** for participants in Berlin

**Online participants:** Welcoming and introduction to online participation



### 10:00 a.m.

#### Welcome Addresses and Introduction

Prof Dr Bekim Agai  
(AIWG, Goethe University Frankfurt, GER)  
Amb Dr Volker Berresheim  
(Federal Foreign Office, GER)  
Dr Raida Chbib  
(AIWG, Goethe University Frankfurt, GER)



### 10:20 a.m.

#### The road so far: The importance of sustainable relations and joint initiatives between State and Muslim Communities

Dr Welmoet Boender  
(Faculty of Religion and Theology, Vrije University Amsterdam, NLD)  
Dr Niels Valdemar Vinding  
(Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, Copenhagen University, DNK)



#### Comments

Džemal Šibljaković  
(Islamic religious community in Austria, IGGiÖ, AUT)  
Ilhan Tuna  
(Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, NLD)

**Chair:** Dr Raida Chbib  
(AIWG, Goethe University Frankfurt, GER)

### 11:20 a.m.

#### State governments and National Muslim bodies: Models of dialogue and cooperation

##### Presentations and Panel Discussion

Gabriel Goltz  
(Federal Ministry of the Interior, GER)  
Dr Stephan Hinghofer-Szalkay  
(Austrian Federal Chancellery, AUT)  
Prof Dr Alison Scott-Baumann (Centre of Islamic Studies, SOAS University of London, GBR)  
Prof Dr Nikos Maghioros  
(Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, GRE)

**Chair:** Prof Dr Mohammad Gharaibeh  
(Humboldt University of Berlin, GER)



### 1:30 p.m.

#### Lunch Break

### 2:45 p.m.

#### Cooperative and transnational programmes for training Muslim religious professionals in Europe

European Institute for the Studies of Islam Project  
*by Dr Michaël Privot (European Network against Racism, BEL)*

The Markfield Institute of Higher Education  
*by Dr Imran Suddahazai (MIHE, GBR)*

Islamic Community of Bosniaks  
*by Meho Travljanin and Adem Hasanović (Bosniak Islamic community, GER)*

The example of state cooperation and funding:  
SHURA Luxembourg  
*by Jasmin Jahić (Shoura Luxembourg, LUX)*

**Chair:** Prof Dr Bekim Agai  
(AIWG, Goethe University Frankfurt, GER)

### 4:30 p.m.

#### Coffee Break

## EVENING PROGRAMME

### 5:00 p.m.

#### Photo Gallery on History of Muslims in Germany

Julius Matuschik  
(Photojournalist, CAMEO Collective, GER)



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**6:00 p.m.****Guided City Bus Tour**

Muslim Life of Berlin – with Dr Gerdien Jonker  
(EZIRE, University of Erlangen, GER)

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**8:00 p.m.****Dinner and Networking**

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**FRIDAY, 25 JUNE**

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**8:00 a.m.****Breakfast**

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**9:30 a.m.****Governance of Religion in Secular States:  
Opportunities and constraints vis-à-vis the  
education of Muslim religious professionals***Keynote:*

Prof Dr Riem Spielhaus  
(Department for Arabic and Islamic Studies,  
Georg August University of Göttingen, GER)

*Response and discussion:*

Amb Jean-Christophe Peaucelle  
(French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, FRA)  
Murat Gümüs (Islamic Council Germany, GER)

*Chair:* Dr Jan Felix Engelhardt  
(AIWG, Goethe University Frankfurt, GER)

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**10:45 a.m.****Coffee Break**

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**11:00 a.m.****Policy approaches to strengthen domestic  
education of Muslim religious professionals Panel  
Discussion:**

Dr Andreas Jacobs  
(Konrad Adenauer Foundation, GER)  
Hasnain Govani  
(Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities, SWE)  
Dr Renaud Rochette  
(European Institute of Religious Studies, FRA)  
Prof Dr Maria del Mar Grieria  
(Department of Sociology, University of Barcelona, ESP)

*Chair:* Prof Dr Agata S. Nalborczyk (European Islam  
Studies, University of Warsaw, POL)

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**12:45 p.m.****Lunch**

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**02:15 p.m.****(15 min. Coffee Break)****Interactive Sessions****Session 1: Funding and working conditions of  
Muslim religious personnel**

Jean-Francois Husson  
(CRAIG & Liège University, BEL)  
Mohammed Toualbia (School for Advanced Studies in  
the Social Sciences EHESS, Paris, FRA)  
Prof Dr Tuomas Martikainen (University of Eastern  
Finland, FIN) as supervisor

**Session 2: Policy approaches to strengthen domestic  
education of Muslim religious professionals**

Dr Raida Chbib  
(AIWG, Goethe University Frankfurt, GER)  
Norbert Müller (SCHURA Hamburg, GER)

*Dr Welmoet Boender (Faculty of Religion and Theology,  
Vrije University Amsterdam, NLD) as supervisor*

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**4:30 p.m.****Résumé of the interactive sessions**

Dr Welmoet Boender  
(Faculty of Religion and Theology,  
Vrije University Amsterdam, NLD)  
Prof Dr Tuomas Martikainen  
(University of Eastern Finland, FIN)

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**4:50 p.m.****Observer Report**

Sir Prof Dr Azyumardi Azra, CBE  
(PPIM UIN Jakarta, IDN)

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**5:10 p.m.****Closing words and next steps towards policy  
recommendations**

Dr Raida Chbib  
(AIWG, Goethe University Frankfurt, GER)  
Dr Welmoet Boender  
(Faculty of Religion and Theology,  
Vrije University Amsterdam, NLD)

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**5:30 p.m.****End of Conference**

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## 6. Participant's list

(*Bold: Attended personally in Berlin*)

Country	Name	Institution
GER	<b>Prof Dr Bekim Agai</b>	<b>Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG)</b>
GER	Mariam Ahmed	Stiftung Mercator
GER	Amir Aziz	Lahore Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat in Wilmersdorf, Berlin
IDN	Prof Dr Azyumardi Azra	Center for Islamic and Community Studies (PPIM UIN) Jakarta
GER	<b>Amb Dr Volker Berresheim</b>	<b>German Federal Foreign Office</b>
NLD	<b>Dr Welmoet Boender</b>	<b>Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam</b>
GER	<b>Susanne Breuer</b>	<b>German Federal Foreign Office</b>
FRA	Dr habil Landry Charrier	Institut Français in Germany
GER	<b>Dr Raida Chbib</b>	<b>Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG)</b>
GER	Samy Charchira	University of Osnabrück
ESP	<b>Prof Dr Maria del Mar Griera</b>	<b>Autonomous University of Barcelona</b>
GER	Dr Yasemin El-Menouar	Bertelsmann Foundation
GER	Abdessamad El Yazidi	Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD)
GER	<b>Dr Jan Felix Engelhardt</b>	<b>Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG)</b>
GER	<b>Tobias Fried</b>	<b>German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community</b>
GER	<b>Prof Dr Mohammad Gharaibeh</b>	<b>Humboldt University Berlin</b>
GER	<b>Gabriel Goltz</b>	<b>German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community</b>
SWE	<b>Hasnain Govani</b>	<b>Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities</b>
GER	<b>Murat Gümüs</b>	<b>Islamic Council for Germany</b>
GER	<b>Adem Hasanović</b>	<b>Goethe University Frankfurt</b>
ITA	Dr Mohammed Hashas	Libera University of Social Studies
AUT	Dr Stephan Hinghofer-Szalkay	Federal Chancellery of Austria
BEL	Dr Jean-Francois Husson	University College Leuven
GER	<b>Dr Andreas Jacobs</b>	<b>Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS)</b>
LUX	<b>Jasmin Jahić</b>	<b>Shoura Luxembourg</b>
GER	<b>Dr Gerdien Jonker</b>	<b>University of Erlangen</b>
GRC	Nikolaos Karaitidis	General Secretariat of the Prime Minister
USA	Dr Nancy Khalil	University of Michigan
GER	<b>Dr Silke Lechner</b>	<b>German Federal Foreign Office</b>
GER	Julia Ley	Journalist
GRC	<b>Prof Dr Nikos Maghioros</b>	<b>Aristotle University of Thessaloniki</b>
FIN	Prof Dr Tuomas Martikainen	Migration Institute of Finland
GER	<b>Julius Matuschik</b>	<b>CAMEO Collective / AIWG Praxisfellow</b>
FRA	Lorris Mazaud	French Embassy in Germany

<b>Country</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Institution</b>
<b>GER</b>	<b>Norbert Müller</b>	<b>Schura Hamburg</b>
<b>POL</b>	<b>Prof Dr Agata Nalborczyk</b>	<b>University of Warsaw</b>
<b>FRA</b>	<b>Amb Jean-Christophe Peaucelle</b>	<b>French Ministry of Foreign Affairs</b>
<b>BEL</b>	<b>Dr Michaël Privot</b>	<b>European Network Against Racism</b>
GRC	Prof Dr Marina Pyrovolaki	School of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
<b>FRA</b>	<b>Dr Renaud Rochette</b>	<b>European Institute for Religious Studies (EPHE)</b>
GER	Dr Hannah Schepers	Federal Chancellery of Germany
GER	Dr Klaus Schindel	German Federal Ministry for Education and Research
GRB	Prof Dr Alison Scott-Baumann	School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London
<b>AUT</b>	<b>Džemal Šibljaković</b>	<b>Islamic Religious Community in Austria (IGGiÖ)</b>
<b>GER</b>	<b>Prof Dr Riem Spielhaus</b>	<b>Georg August University Göttingen</b>
GRB	Dr Imran Suddahazai	Markfield Institute
<b>FRA</b>	<b>Mohammed Tualbia</b>	<b>School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS), Paris</b>
<b>GER/BOS</b>	<b>Meho Travljanin</b>	<b>Islamic Community of Bosniaks</b>
NLD	Ilhan Tuna	Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment
<b>DNK</b>	<b>Dr Niels Valdemar Vinding</b>	<b>University of Copenhagen</b>
GRC	Prof Dr Angeliki Ziaka	School of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki





Akademie für Islam  
in Wissenschaft  
und Gesellschaft

The Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG) is a university platform for carrying out research and debates on Islamic-theological and social issues. It facilitates nationwide projects and exchange among researchers in Islamic-Theological Studies, in related disciplines and with different players in civil society, including Muslim communities.

The AIWG has three main objectives:

1. Research: The AIWG advances the further incorporation of Islamic-Theological Studies at German public universities and facilitates nationwide, interdisciplinary research and cooperation.
2. Interaction: The AIWG facilitates interaction between Islamic-Theological Studies, Muslim civil society and other sectors of society.
3. Providing Facts: The AIWG takes part in the public discourse on Islam by sharing expert opinions and views on related topics.

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