

Hamdard Foundation Pakistan



Hamdard Thinkers' Forum

**Muslim Ummah
in the Modern World
Challenges and Opportunities**

Collected Papers and Speeches
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held in Karachi, Pakistan
3-5 September 2004

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FOREWORD

We have great pleasure in presenting this collection of the papers and speeches delivered at the International Conference on Muslim *Ummah* in the Modern World - Challenges and Opportunities, sponsored by Hamdard Foundation Pakistan and held under the auspices of Shura Hamdard at Karachi on 3-5 September 2004.

Although ideally much more time should have been devoted to the planning and organizing of the Conference than what could be devoted in the circumstances, the participation in and the contributions to the Conference turned out to be quite varied and substantive. The collection clearly represents this variety and substance.

As readers will note, we have not produced this volume as a record of proceedings as such of the Conference. In other words, it is not a sequential session-by-session account of what happened at the Conference, rather; it is a compact presentation of the themes and concepts as emerged. By the same token, the volume has kept the evolution of themes as the main presentational guideline rather than the personalities of the authors and speakers.

Right after the Summit of the OIC member States in Malaysia, we in Hamdard Foundation Pakistan and in Shura Hamdard - the think tank of the Foundation - felt strongly that, independently of what OIC might itself propose to do, a follow-up was needed as quickly as reasonably possible so that the basic concerns expressed at the Summit could be explored further and substantiated, essentially by scholars and professionals, for future consideration and action in the Muslim world. This is in fact one reason why we proceeded rather headlong, if we may say so, in organizing the Conference.



GERMANY AND ISLAM DIALOGUE FOR THE FUTURE

DIETRICH REETZ*

Today we live in an era of generalisations and prejudices. Muslims around the world rightly complain about assumptions being made about Islam in the West that tend to stereotype the religion of Islam and the way of living in Muslim countries. But the same holds true for the so-called West. Germany is an example of the complex relationship between internal developments and external events. As part of the Western world it seeks to promote global understanding while it is faced with its own requirements and compulsions.

First, I will briefly talk about the Situation of Muslims living in Germany. Then, I will sketch the relationship between Germany and Muslim countries. In the end, I will comment on the requirements for better understanding between the Western and the Muslim countries in a rapidly globalising world.

Currently about 3.5 million Muslims live in Germany. They constitute almost 2.8 percent of Germany's population of

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82.5 million people. This is remarkable in the sense that their numbers have doubled since 1987. It reflects certain recent trends of immigration in connection with the civil war in the former Yugoslav States.

The Muslim community in Germany represents a diverse cosmos of cultural, linguistic and doctrinal traditions, of pious and secularised lifestyles. Two-thirds of the Muslims are of Turkish origin who came to Germany as contract workers in the sixties and early seventies, or who fled repressive political conditions under the military regime in Turkey. Approximately one-fourth of the Muslims (650,000) are now German passport-holders. There is a slow but growing trend of conversion to Islam in Germany. About 120,000 Muslims are ethnic Germany who converted mostly in connection with marriages to Muslims, but also on their own choice. Muslims of other ethnic stock include 170,000 from Bosnia, 115,000 from Iran, 81,000 from Morocco, 71,000 from Afghanistan, 51,000 from Iraq and 38,000 from Pakistan.' These regions of origin mirror the geography of recent political and religious conflict more than economic deprivation.

The vast majority of them are hard-working and law-abiding citizens who are highly respected in the German society. However, conflict and tension also exist and they become partly inflated by political contingency and partly by the media. Some of the problems are a reflection of the particularity and diversity of their social and cultural milieu, the demands of which occasionally clash with integration into the German society, and also with each other. Immigrants bring some of the conflicts of their home countries to their new place of residence where old feuds continue and new ones are started. The Muslim community comprises strongly secularised Muslims as much as those who organise themselves for religious renewal and awakening. Orthodox groups are present, reformist sects and groups such as the *Alevites* (400-600 thousand) and the *Ahmadiyya* (60 thousand) who have fled from persecution in Turkey and Pakistan. Also extremist groups are represented. Groups such as *Hamas*, the Algerian

GLA, the *Khilafat* State, the Lebanese *Hizbollah*, the international *Hizb ut-Tahrir* or the mainly Pakistani *Khatm-e-Nabuwwat*, increasingly make their presence felt in Germany too. I remember that some years ago I was consulted by the Internal Security Services (*Verfassungsschutz*) about the nature of the controversy between the *Ahmadis* and *Khatm-e-Nabuwwat* people as the latter had physically threatened and abused *Ahmadi* asylum seekers in a hostel.²

Previously the political class had largely remained oblivious to the presence of Muslims in Germany although the history of immigration of Turkish workers had not been without a political conflict. Social issues dominated their presence earlier while references to Islam became public issues at a much later stage. Since the late 1990s, public debate has intensified in Germany about the role of Islam and the integration of Muslims in the society. At issue are the integration into Germany's society within the parameters of the constitution and the respect for individual and human rights by the demands and practices of Islamist groups. While Germany in many ways is a secular polity where freedom of religious - and also non-religious - belief is a fundamental principle, the separation of State and religion is not complete. The Christian churches have been privileged by German law in certain ways - as, for instance, the State collects their membership fees through the tax system - even though the German constitution does not stipulate Germany to be a Christian State.

It is particularly in the field of education where the parameters of integration have recently been scrutinised more intensely. There is no uniformity in German educational policy as it is not a federal but a State subject with the states adopting different concepts. The left-leaning social-democratic states had previously opted for a multi-cultural approach where schools opened in areas with large migrant communities, were teaching also Turkish or Arabic. Recent studies reveal that a significant number of second-generation immigrant children speak little or poor German. This has often hampered their chances of

better education and employment opportunities. The number of Turkish unemployed and lower-educated youth is much higher than among their German equals. Now emphasis has shifted to compulsory German language tests and a much stronger insistence on learning good German at an early age which is seen as a better way of preventing immigrants from remaining at the social margins of society.

Religious instruction at schools has also become a bone of contention. It is supposed to be a voluntary subject in every school, organised by religious communities with logistic support from the State. This constitutional right is now claimed by non-Christian communities, notably Muslim organisations. There is no common Organisation representing Muslims in Germany which makes it difficult for them to be heard on issues such as religious education. Due to doctrinal differences of Muslim groups, they could not agree on a common curriculum which until now delays the first State-sponsored Islamic instruction in German schools.

The headscarf controversy which became prominent in France has also reached Germany. The question was if wearing the headscarf by teachers and female students in state institutions violated the Separation of State and religion considered to be the basis of secularism. In Germany a female teacher, Fereshta Ludin from Afghanistan, moved against the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg the federal constitutional court, which declined to ban the headscarf as the current legal situation did not warrant such a ban, but left it open to individual states to pass new laws to this effect. This has already been done in three states (Baden-Wuerttemberg, Lower Saxony, and Saarland). But again there is no unanimity in the Legislation. The Berlin city government proposed a law which is more even-handed but also more radical in that it targets all religious symbols - Christian included - causing strong protest from the Christian churches in turn.³

Public debate in Germany also took note of major court cases against Islamic terrorist suspects. But Germany's Ministry

of the Interior in charge of counter-terrorism activities made it a point to state in its annual reports that neither the religion of Islam nor the personal beliefs or practice of Muslims are subjected to scrutiny.⁹ One prominent case was instituted against the Leader of a Turkish extremist group *Khilafat State*. His name was Metin Kaplan and he was called the Caliph of Cologne. The organisation, founded in 1984, was banned in 2001 as it was alleged that it aimed at removing the current political order in Turkey to introduce *Shari'ah* law there and was ready to use force for this purpose.¹⁰ Germany had expelled him but he was successful in preventing his repatriation through the courts as he claimed he would not have a fair trial in Turkey.

Other major cases concerned suspects from the so-called Hamburg cell, the group of Muslim immigrants who allegedly helped prepare the September-Eleven attacks in New York. The prosecution was not very successful in getting a conviction of the two Moroccans, Abdelghani Mzoudi and Mounir El Motassadeq, as corroborating evidence from prime suspects under detention in the US, Khalid Sheikh Muhammad and Ramsi Binalshibh, who were arrested in Pakistan, could either not be obtained or did not support the allegations. But the Minister of the Interior, Otto Schilly, may not even succeed in expelling them from Germany without conviction. If they can claim that they face the danger of being handed over to US security agencies where they might face torture, the courts are expected to issue a stay order against their expulsion.¹¹

Public issues concerning the internal and external relationships of Germans with Muslims and Islam have heightened interest in information about Islam. Germany has a long tradition of studying Islam and its various cultures and has in turn attracted cultural ambassadors from these regions. Most popular in South Asia is Annemarie Schimmel (1922-2003) who had specialised in Iqbal, his poetry and *Sufi* Islam. Prominent Muslim leaders had visited Germany or studied there, with Muhammad Iqbal (1873-1938) and Zakir Hussain (1897-1969) being the most well-

known examples. As a historical footnote, it may be remembered that during the World Wars launched by Germany both the Wilhelminian and the Hitlerite regimes attempted to exploit relations with some countries and groups in Islam to their advantage. More recent historical research confirms that so far largely unnoticed Arab and other Muslims also faced Nazi repression during the Second World War.¹² Currently, 24 German universities offer Islamic studies courses attracting around 3,000 students. 34 chairs of Islamic studies are held by academics valued for their linguistic and cultural competence.¹³ Research institutes, such as the Centre for Modern Oriental Studies in Berlin where 1 come from, engage in academic inquiry into the recent history and current development of various Muslim societies.¹⁴

Growing public interest is also reflected in the emergence of approximately 30 Internet web portals that seek to inform Germans about Islam and Muslims, to serve the community of Muslims living in Germany, often with a regional focus.¹⁵

It should be no surprise that these issues have found increasing expression in Germany's foreign policy too. Germany was affected by events of September-Eleven in several specific ways. The repercussions for Muslims living in Germany were a concern as much as their relationship with non-Muslims. Would extremists take advantage of the situation and also create tension in Germany? Some groups and forces connected to the perpetrators of the attacks had obviously lived in Germany for some time and, as was alleged, hedged some part of the conspiracy right there without anyone taking notice.

Germany then quickly became involved in international counterterrorism measures and, together with Pakistan, joined the US-led anti-terrorism coalition in Afghanistan. It contributed forces to peace-keeping through ISAF which it headed together with the Netherlands in 2003. Germany helps with the training of the Afghan police force. It got directly involved with the peace process through the Petersberg conferences in Bonn and Berlin in 2001 and 2002 which laid the foundation for a new constitution

and the revival of democratic politics in Afghanistan." While this process still looks fragile and haphazard, there is no alternative to it. In this connection, Germany decided that it needs to know more about those countries where the majority of the population follows Islam. It therefore created the separate office of a commissioner of dialogue with the Islamic world and cultural dialogue in general, currently headed by Ambassador Dr. Günter Mulack.* He is responsible for inter-departmental coordination and also, within the framework of the Afghanistan Stability Pact, for the coordination of the cultural reconstruction of Afghanistan. The office has hired specialists largely with an academic background and competent in Arabic, Persian or Turkish forming a separate task force. They are attached to the Foreign Service for two years. These advisers are posted to German embassies in 26 countries to study related international events, to contact major stakeholders of civil society, including the media, and to launch and conduct separate dialogue projects. Already they are said to have contributed to a higher quality of information on these countries and a higher awareness of Islamic affairs.

The office also administers a Special Fund for the European-Islamic Dialogue (EIID) to the range of approximately 5 million Euros in 2002 and 2003 each. The money is spent through projects facilitated by German foreign cultural and academic organizations such as the Goethe Institute, the Academic Exchange Service, DAAD, or the German Foreign Broadcaster *Deutsche Welle (DW)*. The range of activities financed from EIID resources is wide; examples of measures already implemented include:

- A workshop on the reconstruction of the judicial System in Afghanistan in cooperation with the University of Kabul, with the participation of jurists from Germany and Islamic countries;
- Creation of the Internet Portal "*Qantara*" in German,

*He regretted being unable to attend the Conference but has nevertheless conveyed his greetings.

English and Arabic as a joint project of Deutsche Welle, Goethe Institute and the Federal Centre for Political Education, and www.gantara.org designed to facilitate communication between citizens from Muslim countries and Germans;

- Advanced training for female Muslim teachers in Germany;
- Advanced training for diplomats from the Islamic world in Germany; and
- Courses in languages and applied geography for Turkish *Imams* before their appointment in Germany, in cooperation with the Turkish Office for Religious Affairs.

Keeping in mind the severe budgetary constraints in Germany, separate funds for 2004 are no longer available. Now the emphasis has shifted to ensuring the continuity of the dialogue commitment.

The office states as its long-term objectives that it seeks to improve mutual understanding and respect to strengthen tolerance. This is also seen as a specific contribution to crisis prevention and to fighting the causes of Islamist-supported terrorism. To achieve these objectives the dialogue aims at young people in Muslim countries where 60% of the population is younger than 25 years, and devotes particular attention to women.

These comments show a great variety of forms through which Germany is connected with Islam and the Islamic world. Recent events have not only a negative fallout for this relationship, but we can also draw a positive lesson from them. They demonstrate to us that we live in a relentlessly globalising world. Events and developments in one part will invariably affect faraway regions. We need to know more about each other and understand that we sometimes use the same words with a very different meaning. Take for example the concept of secularism. Even in the West, there is no unanimity on its usage. Politically it means separation of politics and religion, but it also implies religious freedom and the defence of this freedom. Sociologically, the

academics talk about secularisation processes in terms of waning interest in and practice of religion. In South Asia, this term evokes deeply contradictory emotions. In Pakistan, some political and religious groups regard it as a byword for forcible State-sponsored atheism. In India, it is enshrined in the constitution and has become a defence line of civil liberties in a context where secularism means the equal protection of competing religious practices. What is important is to widen our horizon and broaden our perspective so that we would look at this common world not only through our own eyes but also from the perspective of those with whom we are connected. Today more than ever, there is a strong case for a broad-minded and tolerant dialogue. By this we will not respond to any kind of pressure or do someone a favour; this is first of all in our own enlightened self-interest. We cannot realise the aspirations of our own people without connecting with all the other peoples in the world.

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7. See Gerhard Höpp, *Im Schatten des Mondes: Arabische Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, in: *Junge Welt*, 21, 22 December 2002.
8. Ekkehard Rudolph: *Islam und Wissenschaft*, at <http://www.magazin-sieutsehland.de/content/archiviarchiv-ger/02-02/art7.html> saved on 17 August 2004.
9. See the website at www.zmo.de.

10. A typical example is www.islam.de, the website of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (*Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland - ZMD*), the leading Muslim umbrella group in Germany. It sees itself primarily as facilitator of contact and communication between Muslims and non-Muslims towards the state and its administration. The portal also provides a link list of German-language websites on Islam and Muslims: <http://www.islam.de/?site=muslimfuehrer/islamweb>. Cf. the Foreign Office country information for Afghanistan at http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/de/laenderin/fos/1ac/nder/1aende/reu/seabe/html?tvpe_id=14&iand —