



Homepage > Migrations

## “Germany’s progress”

Dietrich Reetz interviewed by Nancy Porsia

[IT]

**"Second and third generation Muslim immigrants have a different approach to Western society than the previous one. They perceive themselves as an integral part of it". PD Dr. Dietrich Reetz**

**- from the Zentrum Moderner Orient ZMO in Berlin, coordinator for the project entitled "Muslims in Europe and Their Societies of Origin in Asia and Africa", funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research within the program "The social sciences in the social dialogue". The programme studies the current relationship between European societies and their diverse Muslim communities, groups and organizations as well as the social-religious traditions introduced by the new German citizens of Muslim faith.**

### Who are the Muslims in Germany?

There is no precise statistical data because the government does not take a religion-based census. Approximately the number of Muslims living in Germany currently ranges between 3.2 and 3.4 million. The largest group of Muslims is made up of Turks, approximately representing 77% of the Muslims here. Then there are smaller communities from ex-Yugoslavia, Arab countries, Iran and Afghanistan. In addition, some Germans have converted to Islam, but many of them are of Turkish origin. Islam in Germany also includes a large number of Islamic groups. Obviously there are no exact figures on the various Islamic communities. There is however statistical data concerning their countries of origin. This creates the problem that German statistics treat every descendent from a Muslim country as Muslim. But not all are Muslims and not all are active believers. According to rough estimates between 70 and 77% are Sunni Muslims, representing the largest Muslim group. Then there are a number of Shiite Muslims who came for the most part from Iran. Furthermore, in Germany as generally throughout Europe, there is a high percentage of believers belonging to groups under pressure in their own countries, such as the Alevis from Turkey. In Germany, approximately 16% of Turkish immigrants are Alevis who are regarded by some Muslims as a heterodox sect.

### What is the difference between the first and the second generation Muslims who migrated to Germany?

The first flow of Muslim migrants came to Germany from Turkey during the 1970s and 1980s, in particular from Anatolia and the countryside. They settled mainly as "guest workers" within the German labour market. They lived in Germany with little social and cultural integration. Many retained conservative customs believing they would go back to their own country rather soon. But as it happened, they did not return to Turkey, and the workers' families moved to Germany. The political debate of the 1990s linked this phenomenon to their Islamic identity. Later on the second generation of Muslims were individuals born and raised in Germany, and educated there, who eventually started applying for German Identity Cards. Almost one third of second generation Muslim migrants are now believed to have a German passport. So the second generation Muslims made their choice; they changed their perspective with regard to their new country. Despite that, many still strive to preserve their values and keep their faith.

### What is the level of the Muslims social and political integration in Germany?

The Muslim community in Germany is very diverse. Among those of Turkish descent there exists a large number of associations representing different forms of rituals and beliefs. Several are religious organizations affiliated to Turkish headquarters. Also the Turkish state is involved by supporting close links with Muslim communities in Germany, providing them also with prayer leaders (Imams). But there are also many Turkish cultural associations, which organize meetings, conferences and debates about Turkish culture that do not deal with Islamic issues at all. Germans of Turkish descent have also become members of German associations. For example, there are now ten German members of Parliament, both federal and local, who are of Turkish origin.

### What does the German Islam Conference represent?

The German Islam Conference is the platform for dialogue between Muslims and the German State organized by the Ministry of the Interior. It includes members of some Muslim organizations and also non-organized Muslims. The Conference's first objective was to regulate certain forms of religious life for Muslims in accordance with the constitution. One of the most important issues is the teaching of Islam in state schools. The Conference endorsed on-going local projects for teaching Islam in state schools in some regions in cooperation with Islamic organizations. But it is becoming important to establish a standardized approach for teaching Islam just as Christianity is being taught. Then there is the problem concerning the construction of new mosques in Germany. An agreement has already been reached on this subject as we learnt from the conference proceedings. The new provisions apparently strengthen the standard procedures for the construction of new prayer halls for Muslims as they do for

Christians or any other faith or minority communities. Such procedures also give local populations a say in the process. The conference will probably also discuss the format and working conditions for Muslim groups in Germany, whether they can and will form a joint association or act separately. From an analytical perspective one could say that the conference constitutes an open format where conditions and requirements for Muslim religious life in Germany are discussed and negotiated.

### **Do the anti-terrorism measures affect the daily life of Muslim migrants in Germany?**

Anti-terrorism policies have recently become a hotly debated issue. As far as security aspects are concerned, Germany coordinates with other European countries and has introduced similar rules. These have led to certain restrictions on public life and civil liberties in Germany, as in all European states. Differences on security issues also become a bone of contentions between German political parties. So far Germany has escaped major conflict as a result of these issues; neither has there been any major terrorist attack. Nevertheless political polarisation is on the rise where Muslims feel they come under increased pressure and where the German public becomes too easily irritated about Islam. But the German Islam Conference demonstrates that Germany's ruling elite, including also conservative Christian politicians, now understands the need for a long-term solution and a successful integration of Muslim migrants. Due to demographic factors migrants will continue to play an important role in German society. Globalisation and Germany's strong export orientation are further factors supporting a positive outlook on migrants, regarding them as an asset rather than a problem.

*Translation by Francesca Simmons*

31 Jul 2008

Send us your opinion. Write to us at [doc@resetdoc.org](mailto:doc@resetdoc.org)

---

Dialogues on Civilizations ©2008