



## Copenhagen University Islam Lecture Series

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# Introducing Islamic Theology at German Universities, Aims and Procedures

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## **Introducing Islamic Theology at German Universities, Aims and Procedures**

### **Introduction**

In late 2010 and early 2011 the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research selected five universities to develop departments or Institutes of Islamic Theology. On this process of introduction of Islamic Theology the ministry will spend around 18 Million Euros over the next five years. This decision will alter considerably the theological landscape within Germany and Europe. Its impact on the academic approach towards Islam will even be felt in Muslim countries in due course. The well funded German institutions will certainly attract international attention, and become an important meeting point for Muslim theologians throughout the world. The best educated, most professional and well paid Muslim theologians of Europe and, arguably the world, will come out of the German university system. This will not happen tomorrow as there are still obstacles in the way but in the long run it will be happening.

For the time being, though, the process is far from being completed. Moreover, the interference of many domestic and international actors complicates this sensitive and highly political issue. Maybe because of these sensitivities, the introduction of Islamic Theology was marked, as we will see, by a high degree of intransparency, which might hinder its overall acceptance within neighboring academic fields and among the German Muslim community. But despite its shortcomings this evolution represents a very remarkable decision in the European context of Islamic thought with long lasting irreversible consequences and it means a further step for the Muslim community to be granted equal rights with German Christian communities.

The present contribution will try to explain as accurate as possible the developments and procedures which led to this decision, its presumed aims and an outlook of its consequences. But in order to get a better grip on the subject let me first briefly introduce the reader to the sometimes peculiar world of the institutional framework of religion in Germany.

## Religion in Germany<sup>1</sup>

Germany has been religiously divided for centuries. This is due to the historical fact that in Germany none of the two large Christian churches has managed to gain the upper hand since the reformation. After the stipulations of the peace agreement of Westphalia of 1648, which ended the religiously motivated war of thirty years, a system of compromise and religious freedom was agreed upon.<sup>2</sup> This religious undecidedness is mirrored by article 140 of the German constitution from 1949 which states that there is no state church in Germany and religious communities should administer themselves independently within the framework of the existing law. Although this means in principle a clear separation between the state and the religious communities, they can interact as partners more closely, if the religious community is recognized as so-called “corporation under public law” (*Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts*). Such “corporations under public law” benefit from certain specific rights. For example the state levies „church taxes“ on their behalf, the corporations have the right to employ people according to the status of a civil servant of the state, they receive land in order to build religious buildings in new projects of urban and rural developments and they benefit from numerous tax privileges. In connection with the rights of a “corporation under public law“ there are further aspects where state and religious community function as partners as in the question of pastoral care for the military or faith based religious education in school which the state provides in state schools in accordance with the religious community.<sup>3</sup>

Every religious community which already enjoyed the status of a “corporation under public law” in the constitution of the Weimar Republic from 1919 was automatically granted the same rights in 1949 after World War II. This meant at that time the Federal Protestant Churches, the Catholic Church and the Jewish community. Article 140 of the constitution states in addition that “other religious communities can be granted such rights, if they apply and if their constitution and the number of their members allows to predict the permanence of this religious community in Germany.”<sup>4</sup>

Some smaller religious communities, mainly out of the Christian spectrum, have been granted these rights within the last decades, but no Muslim community yet. The overall state-

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<sup>1</sup>The present section on “Religion in Germany” is an abridged version taken from: Albrecht Fues, “Unifying Islam in Europe. A Comparison of the French and German Approaches towards their Muslim Minorities”, in: *Islam in Europe: Case Studies, Comparisons and Overviews*, ed. by Reuven Amitai and Amikam Nachmani, Jerusalem: European Forum at the Hebrew University 2007, 73-74.

<sup>2</sup> Arnd Uhle, *Staat – Kirche – Kultur*, Berlin 2004, 109.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Lemmen, *Muslimen in Deutschland. Eine Herausforderung für Kirche und Gesellschaft*, Baden-Baden 2001, 183.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

church system does not really contain a clear cut separation from state and religious communities. The former conservative German interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble and jurists of state law therefore describe the German system as a “limping separation” between church and state.<sup>5</sup>

### **Christian and Jewish Theologies at German Universities**

Christian theological faculties have been founding faculties and therefore an integral part of universities in the German realm since the mid-fourteenth century. Usually they were mono-confessional after the reformation according to the religious belief of the regional prince following the principle “*cuius regi – eius religio*” (to each realm its religion). In the transition process from the German Empire to the Weimar Republic, the state guaranteed (Art. 149/3 Constitution of the Weimar Republic) the continued existence of the Christian theological faculties. This guarantee was carried forward by the Federal Republic of Germany after World War II.<sup>6</sup> The first university without Theology was the so-called “Citizen University” of Frankfurt from 1914. However, even Frankfurt installed through the initiative of many academics, which had come back from American immigration a Faculty of Theology immediately after World War II. Theology professors are paid by the federal states and their universities, but churches have the right to object to possible candidates to professorships. The local Catholic bishop gives a clearance (“*nihil obstat*”) for candidates for professorships and the Protestant church enjoys similar arrangements through fixed contracts.<sup>7</sup> The churches enjoy as well the right to have professors removed from chairs of theology if they disapprove of their teachings and research in subsequent years. These professors stay at the university but cannot teach in the departments of theology any more. The most prominent case to date is Prof. Hans Küng who was stripped of its teaching permission (*missio canonica*) at the Catholic Theology department of the Eberhard-Karls University of Tübingen in 1979.

To date 368 Professors of Protestant Theology and 351 Professors of Catholic Theology work at German universities, maintain a high academic level for future theologians

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<sup>5</sup> Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 26.09.06.

<sup>6</sup> Wissenschaftsrat, *Empfehlungen zur Weiterentwicklung von Theologien und religionsbezogenen Wissenschaften an deutschen Hochschulen*, Köln 2010, 13, 16. (An English version: Recommendations on the Advancement of Theologies and Sciences concerned with Religions at German Universities is accessible on the Internet: [http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/9678-10\\_engl.pdf](http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/9678-10_engl.pdf) ) [25.4.2011]

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

and cater for the education of future teachers of Christian religious education. 42,500 students were enlisted in Christian theological faculties in 2010.<sup>8</sup>

Jewish theologians were unable to enter German universities prior to World War II. However, within Faculties or Departments of Protestant Theology chairs for Jewish studies were installed. Jewish theology is taught nowadays at two public funded Jewish institutions of Higher Education, the “School for Jewish Studies” in Heidelberg for Orthodox Judaism, founded in 1979, and the Abraham Geiger Kolleg founded in 1999 for Liberal Judaism. Since 2001 the “School for Jewish Studies” in Heidelberg has the right to educate teachers for Jewish religious education at public schools.<sup>9</sup> However, because of the small size of Germany’s Jewish community which counts currently around 200,000 persons, only few schools need such an educational offer.<sup>10</sup>

As no Islamic organization has been officially recognized yet in Germany as “Corporation under Public Law” there is no legal obligation for the German state to install Islamic Theology at public universities. In general, the right place of Islam within the German society is a very hotly debated issue of German domestic politics. Only recently, in March 2011, the new German Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich re-launched the debate on whether Islam is part of Germany in insisting that Islam itself is not if one takes the historic viewpoint, but Muslims as individuals are part of German society. Of course Muslims in Germany were upset by the fact, that they themselves are part of Germany but their religion is still a foreigner demanding entry. However, this utterance of the new Minister of the Bavarian Christian Socialist party has much to do with German interior politics and shows a rift within German conservatism, especially when one takes into account that leading Christian Democrats like the German President Christian Wulff have declared that Islam is clearly an integral part of Germany now, a viewpoint, which of course was not shared by all conservative followers in Germany.<sup>11</sup>

## **Religious Education in Germany**

Despite the overall debate of integration of Muslims into German society which will haunt the topic of Islam in Germany time and again in the near future, there has been a remarkable institutional progress in terms of Islamic Religious Education at German schools and there

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 24, 27.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 34-37.

<sup>10</sup> [www.remid.de](http://www.remid.de) (Religionswissenschaftlicher Medien- und Informationsdienst e.V.) [25.4.2011]

<sup>11</sup> See on this issue for example: „Islam gehört historisch nicht zu Deutschland“, 4.3.2011, [www.faz.net](http://www.faz.net) [25.4.2011]

have been initiatives to install Islamic Theology at universities. The main reason for the overall progress in the German Islamic Education sector has to be seen in the demographic evolution. With the rising numbers of Muslim pupils in schools, headmasters and teachers were confronted with the problem of where to put young Muslims during the faith-based religious education class of Christian pupils. The first solution was to reshape the subject “ethics” which was initially created to cater for increasing numbers of non-baptized children of atheist or non-Christian parents. For example, the federal state of Hesse initiated and planned the course “Ethics with special stress on Islam”, while the Christian pupils go to their Religious Education class.<sup>12</sup> Experiences with these classes, however, showed that conflicts arose if staunch secularists among the teachers of “Ethics” clashed with young believing Muslims about simple questions, like: “Is there a God?”<sup>13</sup>

Therefore this way proved to be not really workable, but pressure increased from the side of the schools on German politicians to find solutions for this ongoing and increasing problem. Officials reacted and looked for solutions. Still they manoeuvred always within the general framework of the existing church-state system. A general public debate about whether confessional segregated faith based religious education should be maintained never took place, not even during the heydays of German unification in 1989/90 when East Germany with its population of 70% atheists was integrated into a system that does not suit non-believers at all.

Article 7 paragraph 3 of the German Constitution (*Grundgesetz*) calls for confessional religious education taught by believing teachers to believing pupils. This regulation is by no means restricted to the Christian churches. Furthermore, the third paragraph of Article 7 states that religious education is executed by the state in accordance with the basic principles of the religious community.<sup>14</sup>

Proposed changes to the German constitution have to achieve a 2/3 majority in the Parliament and the Council of the Federal States (*Bundesrat*). It is even a matter of debate if this article is changeable at all as the first 19 articles of the German constitution are the so-called “basic rights” and are interpreted as deriving from the unchangeable article 1, which underlines that “the dignity of humans is untouchable”.<sup>15</sup> There are therefore almost

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<sup>12</sup> Hartwig Schröder, *Religion – Islamischer Religionsunterricht*, see: [www.gew-hessen.de/index.php?id=127&backPID=127&tt\\_news=332](http://www.gew-hessen.de/index.php?id=127&backPID=127&tt_news=332) [25.4.2011]

<sup>13</sup> Albrecht Fuess, “Islamic Religious Education in Western Europe: Models of Integration and the German Approach”, in: *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 27/2 (2007), 227.

<sup>14</sup> Ali Özgür Özdil, *Aktuelle Debatten zum Islamunterricht in Deutschland*, Hamburg: 1999, p. 32; Fuess, “Islamic Religious Education“, 216.

<sup>15</sup> See for Religion and constitution in Germany: Peter Unruh, *Religionsverfassungsrecht*, Baden-Baden 2009. For Religious Education, see: *Ibid.*: 238-263.

insurmountable legal obstacles which lie in the way of altering the constitution at all in respect of religious education. This presumed impossibility and unwillingness to alter the existing system triggered then quite effectively the development of Islamic religious education in German public schools.

### **Islamic Religious Education and Islamic Theology in Germany**

In the following the recent evolution of Islamic Religious Education within the five Federal States (*Bundesländer*) which house a large Muslim community and have now been selected to obtain an Institute of Islamic Theology at one of their universities, will be described. These five *Länder* are the lands of North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony, Hesse, Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg. The federal state of Berlin also houses a large community of Muslims, but as the constitution of Berlin is different compared to the other five states it will not be included here, as in Berlin religious education in public schools is not a state obligation but has to be completely organized and funded by the religious communities themselves.<sup>16</sup>

Within the German federal system school education is within the jurisdiction of the federal states. Therefore any kind of innovation in the education sector has to be done on the level of federal states. The longest history of teaching Islam in public schools traces back to North Rhine-Westphalia and the year 1999.<sup>17</sup> This present “school trial” runs at around 200 schools. Initially it was called “Islamkunde”, roughly translatable as “Knowledge of Islam”, as for real “Islamic Religious Education” in accordance with the German constitution you would need as partner an officially recognized Muslim organization. Still, it is taught by Muslim teachers with a positive approach towards Islam and therefore it resembles very much the intended final product. As with many aspects in this area of complexities it is a matter of legalistic semantics. But North Rhine-Westphalia is getting closer to the “real thing”. On 22 February 2011 the Federal Minister of Schools from the Green Party, Sylvia Löhrmann, concluded an agreement concerning Islamic religious education with the Coordination Council of Muslims in Germany (*Koordinationsrat der Muslime in Deutschland/ KRM*) which includes as members the four large German Muslim organizations, which are:

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<sup>16</sup> Fuess, „Islamic Religious Education“, 231-232.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Kiefer, “Staatlicher Islamunterricht in Deutschland. Unterrichtsmodelle der Länder – Der aktuelle Sachstand im Schuljahr 2004/2005”, in *Staatlicher Islamunterricht in Deutschland*, ed. by. Stefan Reichmuth, Mark Bodenstein, Michael Kiefer and Birgit Väth, Berlin:2006, 17.

- 1) The “Turkish-Islamic Union of the Institution of Religion e.V. (*DITIB/ Diyanet Isleri Türk Islam Birlik*)”, representing the German arm of the Turkish “Department of Religious Affairs” (*Diyanet*).
- 2) *Islamic Council (Islamrat)* with the large member association *Milli Görüs* (“national religious view”) close to the former Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan. Under former Turkish governments it stood in clear opposition to the Turkish state, but this seems to change under the present Turkish AKP government.
- 3) The Association of Islamic Cultural Centres (*VIKZ, "Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren"*) which has a strong emphasis on traditional religious education and stands clearly against the renovations which were introduced in the educational sector in Turkey by the so-called *kemalist revolution* of the founder of the Turkish Republic, Kemal Atatürk.<sup>18</sup>
- 4) The *Central Council of Muslims in Germany (Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland)*, whose members are more drawn from Arab Muslim and Bosnian background, but it has also Shi'i organizations as members like the Islamic Centre of Hamburg, which has close ties to the current government in Iran. It is roughly speaking the organization which speaks in Germany for Muslims of non-Turkish origin.

The common declaration between the ministry in North-Rhine Westphalia and the Coordination Council is very important as it will set legal standards for other Federal States dealing with the same issue. The declaration agrees that the goal is to implement Islamic Religious Education in schools and that the state is regarding this as a further step to recognize the coordination council as an official religious community.<sup>19</sup> This could pave even the way to the recognition as “Corporation under Public Law” in the future. In order to teach the estimated 320,000 Muslim pupils in its schools one needs large numbers of professional teachers who have to be educated somewhere. The University of Münster in North Rhine-Westphalia had installed with an initial approval by local Muslim organizations in 2004 Sven Muhammad Kalisch as Professor for Religion of Islam in order to train future teachers. However, as will be shown later, this did not work out quite as intended and things came to a standstill, but since July 2010 the newly appointed Professor Mouhanad Khorchide took over and Münster will be the place of Islamic Theology in North-Rhine Westphalia in the next years.

The state of Lower Saxony is in the process of concluding a similar agreement with its Muslim organizations. A common Islamic council between the so-called *Schura* of Lower

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<sup>18</sup> Lemmen: *Muslime in Deutschland*, 65

<sup>19</sup> „Durchbruch beim Religionsunterricht in NRW“, 22.02.11. [www.deutsch-tuerkische-nachrichten.de](http://www.deutsch-tuerkische-nachrichten.de) [25.4.2011]

Saxony, an association of local Muslim societies, and the DITIB is ought to function as official partner for Islamic religious education. The school trial “Islamic Religious Education” which counts 42 schools at the moment will soon be enlarged to include all schools in Lower Saxony. However, the official signature of the DITIB representative is still missing, but the fact that DITIB signed in North-Rhine Westphalia a similar agreement represents a hint that the signature in Lower-Saxony might follow.<sup>20</sup> However, regional DITIB organizations can differ in their approach on the same issue. The University of Osnabrück has meanwhile started since 2008 a programme for prospective teachers for Islamic religious education with the Professors Bülent Ücar and Rauf Ceylan. They intend to train imams for German mosques as well.

In Bavaria no such official agreement has been prepared yet between the state and organizations, but in January of 2010 all former existing trials of Islamic Religious Education at Public schools<sup>21</sup>, which has run in its German speaking form for around ten years already, were stopped and replaced by a new five year long trial of so-called “Islamic Education” (*Islamischer Unterricht*) with around 70 teachers at selected schools based on the school trial which had been undertaken in Erlangen and which had been coordinated by the University of Erlangen and the local Muslim community.<sup>22</sup> After five years this new trial will be evaluated and the intention is to find (or form) during that time period an official partner on the Muslim side to launch a fully fledged “Islamic Religious Education” in 2015. Teachers are trained at the University of Erlangen since 2004 and starting with 2006, Professor Harry Harun Behr teaches Islamic Religious Education there to around 30 pupils per year.<sup>23</sup>

The state of Baden-Württemberg initiated a first school trial of Islamic Religious education at twelve primary schools in 2006. However, the local “Islamic Community of Baden Württemberg” (RGIslamBW) objected to it as they had been initially asked to participate only to find out that the ministry had altered the initially planned curriculum.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, there has been no agreement between the state and Islamic organizations so far in Baden-Württemberg. Teachers for the school trial are meanwhile trained by Jörg Imran Schröter at the School of Education in Karlsruhe.<sup>25</sup> Until 2010 no university programme for Islamic Theology or Islamic Religious Education was installed in Baden-Württemberg.

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<sup>20</sup> „In Niedersachsen fehlt nur noch eine Unterschrift“, 5.03.11, [www.deutsch-tuerkische-nachrichten.de](http://www.deutsch-tuerkische-nachrichten.de) [9.4.2011]

<sup>21</sup> See for the former forms : Kiefer, “Staatlicher Islamunterricht“, 15-21.

<sup>22</sup> [www.verkuendung-bayern.de/kwmb/jahrgang:2010/heftnummer:4/seite:38](http://www.verkuendung-bayern.de/kwmb/jahrgang:2010/heftnummer:4/seite:38) [24.5.2011]

<sup>23</sup> [www.islam.de](http://www.islam.de), <26.05.05> [24.5.2011]

<sup>24</sup> Fuess, “Islamic Religious Education“, 230.

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.ph-karlsruhe.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/studium/Studienangebot/Info\\_Erweiterungsfacher.pdf](http://www.ph-karlsruhe.de/fileadmin/user_upload/studium/Studienangebot/Info_Erweiterungsfacher.pdf) [25.4.2011]

The Land of Hesse had no school trial at all in the sector of Islamic Religious Education and lags behind totally. As stated above the conservative government there had opted for the school subject “ethics with a special stress on Islam”. Since the last elections in 2009 the new conservative-liberal government has changed its stance on this issue. Now it wants to install either “Knowledge of Islam” (*Islamkunde*) or “Islamic Religious Education” (*Islamischer Religionsunterricht*) by 2013 in as many schools as possible.<sup>26</sup> In order to do so, they are still looking for a reliable partner on the Muslim side as the State of Hesse explicitly does not want to conclude agreements on a provisional basis like North-Rhine Westphalia or Lower Saxony. A final decision about what kind of Islamic Education should be taught at public schools should be reached during 2011.<sup>27</sup> Currently the federal government of Hesse is scrutinizing applications of Muslim organizations to be recognized as official partner of the state. No wonder that there has been no teachers training programme in Hesse so far, but two temporary endowed professorships for Islamic Religious Studies were installed at the University of Frankfurt within the Faculty of Protestant Theology in 2003. The whole construct is quite unusual given the fact that the two professors are paid for by the Turkish Diyanet. The inauguration of this program was heavily criticized by scholars of Religious and Islamic Studies in Germany. Bassam Tibi (former Professor of Political Science at the University of Göttingen) warned that Diyanet would by no means propagate a tolerant and liberal Islam and by allowing them to teach at German Universities Tibi’s ideal of a “Euro-Islam” was at stake. Such chairs would create an intellectual dependency on the Turkish state and its official understanding of Islam. However, the officials of the University of Frankfurt replied to these accusations that Diyanet was only the sponsor and that it had no say whatsoever regarding the contents of study programme.<sup>28</sup>

Due to legal considerations within German protestant theology the two Diyanet professors had to leave the faculty of Protestant theology, and an Institute for the Study of Culture and Religion of Islam was founded in 2009 and incorporated within the Faculty of Languages and Culture of Frankfurt University.<sup>29</sup> This remains in dispute inside the university as does the exact place of Muslim theologians within German universities generally.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Frankfurter-Rundschau, 17.8.2010.

<sup>27</sup> „Hahn prüft Antrag auf islamischen Religionsunterricht“, 12.1.2011, [www.liberales.de](http://www.liberales.de) [25.4.2011]

<sup>28</sup> Fuess, “Islamic Religious Education“, 233.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.uni-frankfurt.de/fb/fb09/islam/index.html> [25.4.2011]

<sup>30</sup> For example the senate of the university of Frankfurt voted only with 8 to 5 (with two abstentions) for the introduction for the degree programme “Islamische Studien“, [www.fr-online.de](http://www.fr-online.de) , 17.07.2011. [25.4.2011]

## **German Islam Conference<sup>31</sup>**

The developments of Islamic Religious Education in the Federal states since the nineties have gradually changed the institutional approach towards Islam in Germany, but there is as well the security issue. The threat of terror has been dominant in the public discourse on Islam in the early years of the 2000s. The security issue then merged with aspects of the allegedly failed immigration and the declared end of multiculturalism by conservative politicians. Islam is now one of the main topics of German interior politics.

The government had therefore to move in this question while trying not to alienate neither the majority society nor the Muslim community. In September 2006 the German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble then invited 15 representatives from the Muslim community and 15 representatives from local, federal, and governmental institutions to a so called Islam Conference to Berlin. Besides the four large Muslim organizations and the Alevis, ten individual Muslim personalities from different backgrounds were invited. The aim of the conference was to reach a better integration of Muslim migrants. “How can we achieve that the Muslims in Germany see themselves more increasingly as German Muslims?”, the minister said.<sup>32</sup> And another goal was according to him to state “where we want to be in five, ten or thirty years and how we get there”.<sup>33</sup> The German Islam Conference started in 2006 already with the consensus of the leading German political parties that Islamic Religious Education should be implemented according to the German constitution. Not surprisingly, a central space of the final report of the first phase of the German Islam Conference in 2009 was therefore reserved to this question although it lies within the legislation of the federal states and not the central government. Moreover at the end of the third phase in June 2009 the members of the German Islam Conference agreed upon the postulation that the state should introduce Islamic Theologies at German universities as soon as possible in order to teach and research in the same manner as the Christian Theologies.<sup>34</sup> This of course is a logical conclusion as you have to educate the teachers somewhere and within the German system it is usually done at universities. However the speed and the size the question of introducing Islamic theology gained during the following months was breathtaking.

## **The Recommendations of the German Council of Science and Humanities**

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<sup>31</sup> The present statements on the German Islam Conference is partly a thoroughly revised version of a section to be found in: Fuess, “Unifying Islam in Europe”, 80-81.

<sup>32</sup> Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung., 26.09.06.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> [www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de](http://www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de) [25.4.2011].

The German Council of Science and Humanities (*Wissenschaftsrat*) is a Federal Scientific Organization which helps to maintain and to innovate in the scientific standards at German Universities. It is funded by both the central and the federal states. In January 2008 it installed a working group on the current situation of theology in Germany. The working group was constituted, according to its president Professor Lutz Raphael, out of elected permanent members of the scientific committee of the *Wissenschaftsrat* and external members from the fields of Catholic and Protestant theologies, Islamic Studies (*Islamwissenschaft*), Jewish Studies and Religious Studies. And because legal aspects were so important in this matter, legal experts were on board as well.<sup>35</sup> However, no Muslim theologian and it seems even no Muslim at all was part of the working group.

On 29 January 2011 the *Wissenschaftsrat* published its “Recommendations for the Advancement of Theologies and Sciences concerned with Religions at German Universities” where it gave for example recommendations concerning the too great interference of the Catholic Church into academies.<sup>36</sup> Recommendations completely ignored to date by the church, but more importantly for our topic, the *Wissenschaftsrat* encouraged the funding of what it called “Islamic Studies” (*Islamische Studien*) at German Universities: “The Council of Science and Humanities recommends setting up institutionally strong units for Islamic Studies at two or three state-operated universities where other sciences concerned with religions are already established. These should become centres for Islamic theological research and play a pivotal role in the advancement of young scholars in Islamic Studies. At the same time, they would be responsible for teacher training for Islamic religious education and, beyond that, enable the proper, academic training of religious scholars in the state-operated higher education system. To provide a solid foundation for the required cooperation between state-run universities and Muslim religious communities, the Council of Science and Humanities proposes the establishment of theologically competent advisory boards for Islamic Studies at the universities that offer the respective courses. These bodies would be instrumental in the appointment of professors and the definition of course contents to be offered. The newly

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<sup>35</sup> Lutz Raphael: Empfehlungen des Wissenschaftsrates zur Einrichtung von Islamischen Studien in Deutschland. Einleitungsvortrag im Rahmen der Tagung "Islamische Studien in Deutschland" am 13./14. Juli 2010, Köln, 2-3, [www.wissenschaftsrat.de](http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de) [25.4.2011]

<sup>36</sup> Wissenschaftsrat, *Empfehlungen zur Weiterentwicklung von Theologien und religionsbezogenen Wissenschaften an deutschen Hochschulen*, Köln 2010, 13, 16. (An English version: Recommendations on the Advancement of Theologies and Sciences concerned with Religions at German Universities is easily accessible on the Internet: [http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/9678-10\\_engl.pdf](http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/9678-10_engl.pdf))

established units and the proposed advisory board model should be evaluated after a period of five years.”<sup>37</sup>

Two conferences were held in the course of 2010 by the *Wissenschaftsrat* in order to emphasize its recommendations. The first one in June 2010 in Berlin under the Titel “Variety of Religions – Theology in Plural” and a second one in July of 2010 in Cologne under the Title “Islamic Studies in Germany” (*Islamische Studien in Deutschland*).

### **The initiative of the Federal Ministry for Education and Research**

Already in January 2010 the Conservative German Federal Minister of Education, Annette Schavan (who had studied Catholic theology), announced that she was willing to follow through the recommendations of the *Wissenschaftsrat* and to finance these new Islamic Studies at selected universities although she could only offer “short term money” due to the fact that as central minister she is not allowed to finance tenured professorships at universities of German federal states. In early summer 2010 in the midst of the conferences, her ministry sent letters to the ministries of education in order to announce that the Federal Ministry would now expect applications. It intended to fund two or three universities at first, but then switched to three or four in the course of the summer as informal talks behind the scenes made clear that demand was higher and that all five federal states mentioned above with a high percentage of Muslim pupils in school would like to have and were in need of such centers. The application should follow the recommendations outlined by the *Wissenschaftsrat* and only one application per federal state was allowed. Applications were to be handed out to the respective federal ministries of education which should pick their favourite and send one application per land to the central Ministry by September. The whole proceeding was quite unusual for a scientific application process in German academics. Usually there is no such pre-selection by ministries of federal states for central funding. Many questions of the further process staid unclear at the beginning and were only answered during the process or simply were not answered at all. For example it was unclear how many candidates would succeed. However, the possibility of a second selection round was mentioned by the ministry. The following universities were the nominees of the first round. North-Rine Westphalia went in with Münster, Lower Saxony with Osnabrück, Baden-Württemberg with Tübingen, Bavaria with Erlangen and Hesse with a combination of Marburg and Giessen. The University of

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<sup>37</sup> Wissenschaftsrat, *Empfehlungen*, 8 f. The Traduction follows the English internet version, p. 7 f.

Marburg houses the oldest Faculty of Protestant Theology in the world, dating back to 1527, and a large center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies. Together with Giessen which has strengths in Turkology and Primary Education it presented a package which convinced the Federal Government of Hesse at that stage to be the first round candidate.

After deliberations by members of a selection committee, whose exact personal composition is until today unknown, Minister Schavan announced, accompanied by the Professor of Islamic Studies (this time this does not mean Islamic Studies in the sense of Theology) Reinhard Schulze from Bern, on 14 October 2010 the results: Osnabrück and Münster, which are separated geographically only by some 50 kilometers were both selected but should merge into one centre.<sup>38</sup> The reasons for this forced merger remained unclear. The committee mentioned of course the good effects of synergy and cooperation possibilities. But as both universities never really intended to merge their Islamic Theologies, it is difficult to see how this will work. In public commentaries representatives of both universities said they respect the will of the scientific sponsor but they feel a certain unease with the question, still they might explore possibilities for closer cooperation in the time to come.

The second winner, the University of Tübingen, came as a surprise for acquainted academics of the field as Baden-Württemberg had been less active than the unsuccessful Bavaria in the sector of Islamic Religious Education, where the University of Erlangen had already gained profound experience in recent years through the professorship of Harry Harun Behr. However during the course of the year 2010 Baden-Württemberg, where Annette Schavan had been minister of education from 1995-2005, and its candidate Tübingen had already gained a status as secret favourite.

Three candidates now being chosen to create two new centers, a second selection round was announced for the beginning of 2011, where there would be two places left for two candidates. Bavaria presented the same candidate, i.e. the University of Erlangen. However in Hesse things changed. After the decision of Federal Ministry of Education on 14 October the Vice President of the University of Frankfurt, Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, declared on 20 October to be quite optimistic that in the second round Frankfurt would be selected to become a center for Islamic Theology.<sup>39</sup> However at that time Marburg-Giessen was still the official candidate of the State of Hesse. Unfortunately, he did not explain further in detail the reasons for his assumption which turned out to be right, as the University of Frankfurt with its Diyanet-sponsored professors was the candidate of the Hesse in the second round and

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<sup>38</sup> [www.faz.net](http://www.faz.net), 14.10.2011 [25.4.2011]

<sup>39</sup> See exemplary for several newspaper articles: "Islamische Studien" an der Uni Frankfurt", Rheinische Post, 22.10.2010.

somehow Giessen went along with Frankfurt. However, the Conservative Minister of Education of Hesse, Eva Kühne-Hörmann, insisted that the University of Marburg will be part of an overall concept for Islamic Religious Education in Hesse in the years to come.<sup>40</sup> In February of 2011 Minister Schavan announced that both candidates for the remaining two places had been successful, i.e. Frankfurt-Giessen and Erlangen.<sup>41</sup> Information about the selection and evaluation process however remained scarce.

### **The reaction of the “Old-Style” Islamic Studies**

Patrick Franke, Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Bamberg, was the first professor of the traditional Islamic Studies in Germany to react to the recommendations of the *Wissenschaftsrat* from January 2010. He did this publicly with an open letter in May of 2010. One point which was raised already by him and is common to all subsequent critics by scholars of Islamic Studies is thereby the name “Islamic Studies” for institutes of Islamic Theology.<sup>42</sup> In German there is a slight semantic difference made by the *Wissenschaftsrat* with “Islamische Studien”, intended as name for Islamic Theology, in contrast to “Islamwissenschaft” (“old style” Islamic Studies). However in English both translate to the term “Islamic Studies” already in the English version of the paper of the *Wissenschaftsrat*. The *Wissenschaftsrat* wanted to avoid the term theology in the Islamic context because of its alleged Christian connotation. However “Old-Style” Islamic Studies (*Islamwissenschaft*) traditionally looks from an outside perspective on Islam whereas “new style” Islamic Studies (*Islamische Studien*) ought to do the same from an inside perspective. In the first case any academic can teach regardless his personal belief, in the second case it has to be a believing Muslim. The *Wissenschaftsrat* did also underline the fact that in the German context the term Jewish Studies is theological while Judaistik is secular. However, this does not work for the context of academics in relations to Islam. The term Islamistik is not usable any more as it is now clearly fixed to Islamic terrorism in the German usage. In order to mark the difference between inner- and outer perspective on Islam the term Islamic Theology will have to be used while implementing the new institutes at universities as the greater German public, and the Anglophone world in special, will not be able to distinguish the two. Another important point

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.hmwk.hessen.de>

<sup>41</sup> [www.bmbf.de](http://www.bmbf.de) (24.2.2011). [25.4.2011]

<sup>42</sup> Patrick Franke: "Über die zukünftige Verortung des Islams an deutschen Universitäten - ein islamwissenschaftliches Positionspapier zu den Empfehlungen des Wissenschaftsrates vom 29. Januar 2010" in Hasan Karaca (Hrsg.): Bachelor-Imam? Überlegungen zur Einrichtung Islamisch-Theologischer Fakultäten in Deutschland. Köln 2010, 25-39. (The paper is also available on the Internet since Mai 2010)

raised by Patrick Franke is that *Islamwissenschaft* will have to redefine itself with the advent of its theological twin at German universities. However he also underlines the chances of such a process.

In October 2010, shortly after the end of the first selection round concerning the introduction of Islamic Theology, the German Oriental society launched a general statement of its executive board which was signed by over 160 researchers in the field. It stated that, while scholars were in principle *d'accord* with the introduction of Islamic theology at German universities in order to facilitate the social and academic integration of Muslims in Germany, they would have serious thoughts about the following four points:

1) The name Islamic Studies (*Islamische Studien*) should be replaced by Islamic Theology; 2) Islamic Theology should be incorporated in Faculties of Theology and not in Faculties of Humanities; 3) The role of the Muslim councils and their influence should be defined clearer as subscribers would object to any outside interference into the universities without a clear legal basis, 4) The whole process of selection of universities by the Federal Ministry of Education had been totally intransparent and should be made open to the public.<sup>43</sup> However, this statement was only partially taken into account. The selection process of round two remained as intransparent as round one had been. But it seems that the question of naming the new departments and the demand not to incorporate these new institutes in faculties of humanities has been taken into account by political actors.

### **General future problems**

One major challenge will be to define the role of the Muslim councils (Islamischer Beirat) of the new institutes of Islamic Theology. It seems that these councils will be given equal rights to the Christian churches to object to candidates for professorships or to withdraw the permit to teach Islamic Theology from professors whom the council considers to have left faithful teaching.

A case in point is presented by the first Professor for the Religion of Islam of the University of Münster, Muhammad Sven Kalisch who was appointed in 2004. In 2008 the Coordination Council of Muslims of North-Rhine Westphalia ended its cooperation with the University and told Muslim students not to study any more with Kalisch who had started to develop in his seminars serious doubts if the Prophet Muhammad ever lived or was not

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<sup>43</sup> [http://www.dmg-web.de/pdf/Stellungnahme\\_Islamstudien.pdf](http://www.dmg-web.de/pdf/Stellungnahme_Islamstudien.pdf) [25.4.2011]

entirely a construction of historians. The University reacted and withdrew Kalisch from the teacher training. As he is a tenured professor, his designation was changed to “History of Ideas in the Near East in Late Antiquity”. In 2010 he then officially announced that he had left Islam and was no longer a Muslim.<sup>44</sup>

Another question which arises in the context of interference within Germany, is the influence of the security issue. Some of the Muslim organizations and a considerable number of their members are watched by the German secret service, the *Verfassungsschutz*. How will a University react if the *Verfassungsschutz* wants to take part in the creation of the Muslim councils or raise their objection to members of the council.

And there are possibilities of interference from outside. As in Germany most migrants are of Turkish origin, the Turkish state will claim and play a leading role in the years to come within the German Muslim community. In this context I would like to quote a remarkable interview which was released by the web journal “welt-online” on 3 November 2010. The interview with the current head of the Turkish Diyanet, Mehmet Görmez, was conducted by the German-Hungarian journalist Boris Kálnoky after the first round concerning the introduction of Islamic theology at German universities.<sup>45</sup> In this interview Görmez had talked about future imam training at German universities. He stated that the Germany had fewer problems with its Muslim community because it was mainly of Turkish origin, whereas Britain and France had more difficulties with their Pakistanis and Arabs. Germany would not really appreciate fully the positive role of *Diyanet* in the process of providing stability to Germany through imam training.

“Question: Is this a problem ?

Görmez: No, but at the moment Germany has not enough experience in this question. We hope that this experience will come over time. We think that especially the Goethe-University in Frankfurt am Main is very well suited for these kinds of questions. There is a theological faculty which we are involved in. But exactly this university does not get a licence for training imams, but others who have no experience got a licence.

Question: Why is that so?

Görmez: We have asked for an explanation in a letter but have not obtained any answer yet. I have an idea, but it might not be appropriate to tell it to you as German.

Question: No problem, I am Hungarian.

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<sup>44</sup> [http://www.westfaelische-nachrichten.de/lokales/muenster/nachrichten/1307166\\_Umstrittener\\_Islamwissenschaftler\\_kein\\_Moslem\\_mehr.html](http://www.westfaelische-nachrichten.de/lokales/muenster/nachrichten/1307166_Umstrittener_Islamwissenschaftler_kein_Moslem_mehr.html) (9.4.2010) [25.4.2011]

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article10696044/Religionsbeamter-sieht-Deutschland-im-Niedergang.html> (9.4.2011) [25.4.2011]

Görmez: It is unquestionable that Germany has played a leading role in culture and philosophy in the past. However, for a while Germany has been taking the path towards a serious cultural decline. It is not good for a country to be driven by fear.”

### **Immediate Outlook**

What will happen now in the immediate future? Germany is in desperate need of good candidates for professorships of Islamic Theology or Islamic Religious Education. Tübingen has opened four professorships in March 2011, Osnabrück followed with two new openings in April, Erlangen has announced it will open three as well in due course. Münster will search for three more in the weeks to come, and only Frankfurt will look for just one new professor. They have opted to transform their existing, now apparently already three, Diyanet-financed professors of Turkish origin into tenured professorships now paid by the German state. Altogether the field is looking for thirteen new professors of Islamic Theology within a year and as there has not been any Islamic Theology in Germany until very recently, the supply of German speaking Islamic Theologians is almost non-existent. Some of these professorships might therefore be filled with temporary hirings in order to wait for well-trained home-grown young Muslim academics.

### **Conclusion**

The process of introduction Islamic theology at German universities is well on its way and it is irreversible. In the years to come even more institutes for Islamic Theology will be founded, especially after the full nationwide implementation of Islamic Religious Education for the 700,000 Muslim pupils in public schools, which calls for approximately 2000 teachers of Islamic Religious Education in the years to come.<sup>46</sup>

However, it will develop in the German institutional framework set by the churches. Security issues and the ongoing immigration debate will contribute as well to its future appearance. German officials and society will look closely at what is taught and researched in the new faculties. Public funding will direct its topics towards a liberal, open-minded and even enlightened Islam. On the other hand one has to predict as well that serious and profound debates will take place as well which will have repercussions in the Muslim world. German Islam will become highly professional and very rich to the envy of its European Muslim

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<sup>46</sup> See: German Ministry of Education and Research, <http://www.bmbf.de/press/3045.php> [25.4.2011]

neighbouring communities. Moreover, Islamic theology will provide young Muslims in Germany with a positive approach towards their religion and will open them a path into public service as teachers as long as they do not wear headscarves, but this is another question which will be solved in the years to come by Muslim theology made in Germany.