German Islam Conference

Conclusions of the plenary held on 17 May 2010

Future work programme

I. Embedding the German Islam Conference into society

As a forum that promotes the dialogue between government bodies and Muslims, the German Islam Conference is pursuing the goals of enhancing the institutional integration of Islam, fostering the social integration of the around 4 million Muslims living in Germany and strengthening social cohesion in our country.

In the initial phase of the German Islam Conference, important foundations were laid to promote the dialogue between government bodies and Muslims in our country and a few important steps were taken. They were documented in the interim summaries of the German Islam Conference held on 13 March 2008 and on 25 June 2009\(^1\). They essentially involve:

- Reaching agreement on a shared understanding of integration. In principle, integration is a process that changes both sides, both the majority society and the immigrants. It requires a higher level of adaptation by immigrants. The host society is challenged to make its contribution towards integration. It is all the more important that the state and society support immigrants in being part of German society and that they are recognised accordingly and are seen as enriching society.

\(^1\)The interim summaries are published, inter alia, on the German Islam Conference’s website (www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de).
- Commitment to the German legal system and the value system enshrined in the Basic Law,
- Specifying the general constitutional framework for introducing denominational religious instruction on Islam (and defining the term “religious community” within the meaning of Article 7 para. 3 of the Basic Law),
- Drawing conclusions on the establishment of Islamic theology courses and research at German institutions of higher education and on the training and advanced training of imams, dedes and preachers,
- Issuing guidelines for schools and parents on practical religious matters that arise in schools,
- Drawing of conclusions by the Muslims participating in the German Islam Conference on the promotion of tolerance and integration,
- Drawing conclusions on the construction of mosques, Islamic funerals and the applicability of Islamic standards in Germany,
- Drawing conclusions on cooperation for the prevention of extremism,
- Establishing the “Prevention and Co-operation Clearing Point” at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees,
- Creating the website “www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de” in order to provide information about the German Islam Conference and the life of Muslims living in Germany and to fuel public debate about the issues addressed at the German Islam Conference.

In its second phase, the German Islam Conference will concentrate on implementing these results. The aim is for the results to be communicated to society and Muslim communities and to generate greater acceptance and consideration in a dialogue between government bodies and players in civil society and indeed to intensify them. The agreements reached in the first phase of the German Islam Conference such as the issuing of a publication “Muslims for Freedom and Diversity” are to be implemented. Another aim is to strengthen contacts in important countries of origin of Muslims living in Germany, to renew these contacts and to provide these countries with information about the work performed by the German Islam Conference and the results it has achieved.
Reports are to be issued on a regular basis on the work performed by existing bodies set up by the German Islam Conference such as the “Prevention and Co-operation Clearing Point”. Furthermore, existing communication structures between government bodies and Muslim institutions are to be consolidated and further expanded, for instance, by fostering networking.

The study commissioned by the German Islam Conference and carried out by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees “Muslim Life in Germany” was the first representative study of its kind to be implemented in Germany on the number of Muslims living in Germany, on their religious beliefs and religious practises as well as integration-related aspects. In-depth follow-up studies will take up where this study left off both through and in cooperation with Muslim institutions.

II. Promoting institutionalised cooperation and integration-based project work

In Germany, the freedom of religion of the individual and society as well as the positive and negative freedom of religion are protected by the Basic Law. The religious freedom of the individual has its limits when it infringes upon the rights of third parties and is in opposition to the liberal democratic constitutional order. The Basic Law stipulates that the religious and ideologically neutral constitutional state shall protect the rights of freedom of each of its individual citizens and guarantee the right of Churches and religious communities to self-determination.

Germany is a secular state but not a laical state. German constitutional law on religious organisations (ecclesiastical law) makes provision for many different types of cooperation between the government and religious communities in the public sphere. These apply in particular to the area of education (religious instruction at publicly maintained schools, theology at public institutions of higher education) and to the area of social issues including social welfare (e.g. religious support institutions, private charities).
The German Islam Conference supports the aim of establishing institutionalised cooperation between the government and Muslims and Muslim organisations in Germany on the basis of the German constitutional law on religious organisations. Muslims are to be offered assistance in meeting the relevant constitutional requirements. Achieving this goal is a prerequisite for Muslims living in Germany also being able to exercise the rights of religious communities. This applies in particular to the introduction of denominational religious instruction on Islam.

In the first phase of the German Islam Conference, the issue of introducing Islamic religious education was discussed intensively. The general constitutional framework for introducing Islamic religious education was specified in detail. The Federal Länder are responsible for introducing Islamic religious education and in this context, for examining whether organisations actually represent religious communities within the meaning of Article 7 para. 3 of the Basic Law. As the national and nationwide forum for the dialogue between government bodies and Muslims in Germany, the German Islam Conference will continue to focus on this key issue based on the results achieved in the first phase. The German Islam Conference provides the framework for a nationwide exchange of information and experience on practical developments and concrete progress made in relation to the introduction of Islamic religious education and the existing models of religious instruction at publicly maintained schools. Concrete tools for consolidating the exchange of experience are also to be discussed. Furthermore, the German Islam Conference will help to enlighten people and raise awareness also in connection with any prejudice that may exist regarding the introduction of Islamic religious education.

There is also consensus that there is a considerable need for school teachers who are theologically and academically trained in Islamic religious education at publicly maintained schools. The exchange of information and experience will therefore encompass the training and advanced training of teachers who have trained in Islamic religious education.

The German Islam Conference will also begin by addressing two specific subject areas, namely
a) Establishing and further developing courses on Islamic theology at public institutions of higher education and

b) Training and advanced training of imams, dedes and preachers as well as other multipliers in Islamic communities.

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a) Establishing and further developing courses on Islamic theology at public institutions of higher education

The plenary of the German Islam Conference held on 25 June 2009 has already adopted initial recommendations on the introduction of Islamic theology courses and research at German institutions of higher education. These recommendations were then handed over to the Council on Scientific Affairs which had itself published recommendations in January 2010 on the establishment of theology-oriented “Islamic Studies” at public institutions of higher education. The German Islam Conference will continue to monitor and assist with the process of introducing courses on Islamic theology at public institutions of higher education.

The establishment of Chairs/faculties is res mixta, which means that they come under the remit of the state (Federal Länder) and religious communities the same as religious instruction. This means that in relation to Islamic theology, the Federal Länder will need partners in the form of Islamic religious communities to help with course development and with the appointment of professors. Against this backdrop, the German Islam Conference will, inter alia, look into the proposal put forward by the Council on Scientific Affairs to set up “Advisory Councils for Islamic Studies which have expertise in theology”.

b) Training and advanced training of imams, dedes and preachers as well as other multipliers in Islamic communities

The German Islam Conference already issued initial recommendations during the past legislative period for the training and advanced training of imams, dedes and preachers which were adopted in June 2009. As such, it needs to be taken into account that the employment and training of imams, dedes and preachers comes under
the right of religious communities to self-determination enshrined in the Constitution. Even in the first phase of the German Islam Conference it was agreed that in the medium to long term it will be above all persons who have been raised and educated in Germany who will become full-time or part-time imams, dedes and preachers. It was also agreed that these imams, dedes and preachers need to study Islamic theology at institutions of higher education. In order to enable imams, dedes and preachers to study Islamic theology in Germany, courses and research in Islamic theology need to be set up at German institutions of higher education. This is another issue that will be discussed within this framework at the German Islam Conference (cf. above).

In Germany, there are an estimated 2,000 to 2,200 imams, dedes and preachers in approximately 2,600 Islamic mosque communities and other places of worship such as cemevis established by the Alevi. These imams, dedes and preachers are assuming more and more responsibility as teachers and multipliers. Those who come to Germany from the respective countries of origin in particular tend to have very little knowledge of the German language and the social environment of the members of their community. It is therefore of paramount importance for the promotion of integration in Germany to provide German lessons and offer advanced courses on German culture and society to imams, dedes and preachers working in Germany as this will also enable them to take part in public life. Other target groups are those responsible for Islamic communities and their staff (inter alia, the executive boards of associations) and other multipliers involved in Islamic communities, many of them in a voluntary capacity.

The German Islam Conference will be discussing projects involving advanced training for imams, dedes and preachers that have already been launched and of other multipliers involved in Islamic communities and will be developing and recommending project concepts, particularly at local authority level. These concepts should also take Islamic communities into account that are independent or are not members of any other the Islamic umbrella associations represented in the German Islam Conference.

In this context, the plenary of the German Islam Conference has established that there is a need for nationwide representative, valid data on the organisation of Is-
Islamic communities in Germany and of imams, dedes and preachers working in Germany.

III. Living out gender equality as a shared value

Within the framework of the further work performed by the German Islam Conference on issues relating to shared values, the German Islam Conference will focus in particular on the issue of promoting gender equality in society especially for Muslim women and girls. This involves, for instance, creating access to the labour market as well as equal opportunities that will enable them to participate in gainful employment which will include creating access to education and providing the training that leads to the necessary qualifications. On the other hand, it will also mean addressing the stereotypes and preconceived expectations that in many cases are not marked specifically by Islamic structures but by patriarchal structures which are explained and justified by religious or alleged Islamic traditions. These stereotypes are capable of hampering gender equality. The foundations for gender typical patterns of behaviour and expectations are laid in families and girls and boys tend to be raised according to different educational ideals. This can restrict both their rights as children and their right to freedom.

In order to be able to exercise self-determination, individuals need to have access to the labour market and equal opportunities for participating in gainful employment which includes access to education and training leading to the necessary qualifications. They are closely linked to the level of acceptance shown by the majority society. Studies conducted show that men and women who have Turkish names, for instance, are discriminated against in their search for jobs. Muslim women who wear headscarves also say they encounter clear prejudice and actual disadvantages on the labour market. Many of these women have had previous experience of discrimination when they were schoolchildren. Discussing this experience within the framework of the German Islam Conference also provides the opportunity to discuss anti-discrimination and gender equality in the religious and cultural context. It also provides an opportunity for both sides to develop practical strategies for tackling the issue at a political level, also as a socio-political issue. The aim here is also to identify
concrete measures that will enable Muslim women to gain non-discriminatory access to and equal participation in the labour market.

Rigid stereotypes have the capacity to affect the self-determination and social participation of women and girls even beyond the labour market. By the same token, rigid role expectations of men can curtail their scope for action even though men are accorded more activity. In extreme case scenarios, they can lead to domestic violence. We want to explore together in the German Islam Conference practical ways of helping Muslim women and girls to become more aware of their rights and to assert them. In this context, difficulties encountered by Muslim men should also be discussed. These difficulties may arise when traditional role concepts and role expectations come into conflict with real options for action. Experience, assessments and already existing solution approaches aimed at preventing violence and at assisting victims of domestic violence particularly by the Muslim community will play a most important role in developing further prevention and relief measures. As such, it is important to strengthen existing Muslim structures and to create better access to these structures for Muslim women. In doing so, it is also to be analysed to what extent traditional measures and points of contact are reaching the target group of Muslim women and girls affected and to explore how more intercultural points of contact can be set up. In this context, the German Islam Conference will also look into ways of ensuring forced marriages and acts of violence committed in the name of honour are declared unacceptable more so than ever before. These phenomena which the Muslims represented in the German Islam Conference say cannot be justified by invoking Islam continue to be observed in Germany regardless of this which mean solutions are badly needed.

IV. Prevention of extremism, radicalisation and social polarisation

We want the results of the German Islam Conference to generate acceptance both among Muslims and mainstream society. To this end, we will address the varying opinions and perceptions of the problems encountered with the coexistence of Muslims and non-Muslims in our country.
The German Islam Conference will deal with the prevention of extremism, radicalisation and social polarisation and will endeavour to develop practical ways of improving peaceful and respectful coexistence. The plenary is aware that there are controversial views on the interpretation of terms such as “Islamism” and “Islamophobia”. However, this should by no means prevent us from tackling the underlying problem areas in an open-minded way.

Hostile stereotypes that are often deliberately portrayed simplistically and rejection “of the West” are behind the hostile reactions to “Islam” (Islamophobia) in parts of German society and European societies. The work performed by the German Islam Conference has the capacity to help to identify any such distorted images and hence to promote the elimination of mutual prejudice.

As such, it will also be a matter of making a clear distinction between Islam on the one hand and the abuse of this religion for Islamist, political-extremist, or other radical positioning on the other. The vast majority of Muslims living in Germany combine religion with democracy, demonstrate a high level of religious tolerance vis-à-vis people of different faiths and lead peaceful lives. However, there is also some evidence of radicalisation right up to the willingness to participate in Islamist groups that have a propensity for violence among Muslims living in Germany. The prevention of extremism and radicalisation is a shared existential concern which the Muslims living in Germany can make a particularly valuable contribution towards.

Even in the first phase of the German Islam Conference, all the participants agreed that the rights and obligations expressed in Germany’s social system as a free democracy governed by the rule of law are binding for all those living in this country. The majority of Muslims take this outlook which is recognised by the majority society for granted. The values or our pluralist democracy expressed with this positioning and the value system of our Basic Law are indispensable for the peaceful coexistence of everyone living in Germany. Showing contempt towards “people of different faiths or non-believers” is a position that will not be tolerated in our country.

At the same time, the Muslims living in Germany have every right to expect not to be tarred with the same brush as Islamism as propagated by radical minorities. Reli-
gious ties are positive factors that have a stabilising effect for coexistence in our society. Xenophobia and racist attitudes towards Muslims need to be actively counteracted, Islamophobia and defamation in everyday life must not go unchallenged. It is essential for social cohesion in our country that tolerance vis-à-vis Muslims and their faith be fostered. The German Islam Conference is working towards this goal.

By the same token, the German Islam Conference will look into ways of enhancing practical, preventative strategies. Biographical surveys on various extremist phenomena show that radicalisation is most prevalent among young people. Yet in many cases it is crucial to ensure that young people have both access to and the opportunity to experience a wide range of facilities. Some young Muslims may resort to Islamism as a political ideology which provides a breeding ground for intolerance towards other ethnic and religious groups. Likewise, anti-Semitism seems to be spreading particularly among young Muslims (the results of the working group “Anti-Semitism and Racism among Immigrants” set up by the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Integration will need to be taken into account in this respect). On the other hand, xenophobic and racist patterns of behaviour vis-à-vis Muslims represent stereotype thinking particularly among right-wing extremist, non-Muslim young people which need to be effectively counteracted. In order to achieve practical improvements in respect of prevention, the German Islam Conference will therefore focus initially on the important target group of young people, young adults and their families.

As such, the focus will be placed on practical questions. How can we jointly and successfully prevent radicalisation? How can we raise awareness among the families of these young people? What role does experience of discrimination at an early age play? What importance is attached to religious recollection as a phenomenon that promotes a sense of identity? How can the debate with Islamist positions be enhanced? What kind of attractive alternatives are available? How can the intercultural orientation of youth facilities and youth organisations and the intercultural competence of multipliers enhance youth work performed on a full-time and voluntary basis? How should Islamophobia and xenophobia vis-à-vis Muslims be counteracted? How can bias and prejudice between young people of different faiths be overcome? What types of shared experiences have the capacity to counter polarisation and mutual rejection among young people? It is not just a matter of finding answers to these
questions, it is also necessary to develop and indeed implement concrete solution approaches.

Youth work and teaching at schools can help to prevent extremist radicalisation and stigmatisation if they adopt a pluralist and intercultural approach. The German Islam Conference will therefore begin by dealing with concepts of preventative work with young people and parents. After taking stock, we will analyse concepts of general and intercultural work with young people and families with the target group of persons of Muslim origin and will draw up recommendations accordingly (guidelines for preventative strategies based on the results achieved).