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ISSUES OF INTEGRATION OF ISLAM ON THE EXAMPLE OF
THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE OF GERMANY

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*Abstract. The integration of Islam and its bearers into the system
of social relations of a country that has never had an indigenous
Moslem population is a complex, multilateral process that includes
institutional, political, legal, cultural and social aspects. In this article,
attention will be paid exclusively to the formal side of the issue, i.e. the
institutions of integration, the main of which is the Islamic Conference
of Germany under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of
Germany.*

More than ten years ago, the German Federal President (at
that time he was Christian Wulff, CDU), reflecting on the
“Christian-Jewish history of Germany”, mentioned along the
way that Islam in Germany had already become German Islam,
became part of the country, belongs to it¹. The controversial
phrase, which caused a lot of criticism, sounded like a statement
of fact, but in fact it did not express it at all. It was rather a

slogan that outlined the ambitious goal of Angela Merkel's government, starting from her coming to power: to overcome the shortcomings in the relationship between the state and mass, "immigrant" Islam, admitted by all previous German governments and led to the fact that the religion professed by a significant part of the population functioned practically without any significant contact with the institutions of the German state, but in close connection with the religious (and sometimes state) institutions of those countries from where the bearers of Islam and its preachers arrived in Germany.

After almost half a century of history, during which German politics stubbornly turned a blind eye to the growth of the Moslem diaspora, convincing itself and German citizens that Islam for the most part is the religion of migrants, refugees, guest workers, i.e. temporary contingents of the population that did not need integration, the authorities decided to bring Islam, as far as possible, into the same administrative relationship with the institutions of the German state, in which there are also other large confessions represented in it. In Germany, the relationship between the state and the confessions represented in it is regulated at the level of official treaties. The so-called concordats (treaties with the Vatican) are concluded with the Catholic Church, Protestant churches and other large religious communities recognized by the state enter into agreements directly with the state. Relations with churches and religious communities are the responsibility of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.² The condition of such agreements is the status of a denomination precisely as a "recognized religious community", which gives its organizations the right to receive the status of "subjects of public law"³. Islam has never been a "recognized religious community" and for a long time did not even claim this status.

The integration of Islam and its bearers into a country that previously did not have a native Moslem population is a multifaceted task, it includes institutional, political, legal,

cultural and social aspects. In this short article, attention will be paid exclusively to the formal side of the issue, i.e. integration institutions, the main of which is the Islamic Conference of Germany (IC) under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Germany⁴.

A Few Words about the Current State of the Moslem Diaspora

Islam began to turn into a religion practiced by a significant part of the population only during the recovery of the West German economy in the 50–60s of the 20th century and its heyday during the “economic miracle”, when Germany received significant contingents of Turkish guest workers, mainly from rural, conservative and religious Anatolia.

Before the Second World War, there were only about three thousand Moslems in the country, mainly from the well-to-do strata. Now there are more than five million of them (the total population of the country is 82 million), 38% of Moslems with migration roots from Islamic countries have German citizenship (previously it was 45%, but their share decreased during the mass entry of new migrants from the Arab space into the country in 2014–2015).⁵ More than half of Moslems are thus foreign nationals, and the issue of their integration is closely linked to their religion.⁶

About 63% of Moslems are Turks, and most of them are progeny of guest workers loyal to Turkey. Refugees of the Moslem faith arrived in the country mainly from Arab countries, from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bosnia, Kosovo. During the migration crisis of 2015, the proportion of Syrians increased. Accordingly, Turkish Sunnis prevailed in the directions of Islam in the country, they were followed by Shiites (Alevis, Iranian Imamis, Turkish Shiites, Ishmaelites), Sufi groups. Geographically, the diaspora is concentrated in large industrial cities of the former “West Germany”.

To protect its interests, the diaspora created an extensive structure of unions and associations. However, it did not have a single parent organization: Moslems of various denominations did not see the possibility of uniting even in the interests of interaction with the state, which would bring them a solution to many issues of daily religious life.

In the 80s, two Councils were created and each claimed to be the head. The Islamic Council of Germany united 37 predominantly Turkish-Sunni organizations, and the Central Council of Moslems of Germany united 21 organizations, mostly Arab and multi-ethnic. The Coordinating Council established in 2007 tried to establish itself over them, however in fact, influential unions preferred to interact with the state without intermediaries.

The number of active members of the unions is about 20%, however, a Moslem does not need to formally be a member of the organization, it is enough to sympathize with it.

The Germans, like other European states, began revising their positions in relation to Islam after the terrorist attacks in the USA on September 11, 2001; however, it was taken up "in earnest" with the coming to power of Angela Merkel in 2005. It became obvious that the uncertain legal status of Islam had long been in conflict with its real domestic political power.

It should be noted that in Germany by that time the so-called "liberal" Islam was also represented, open to Western values and believing that Islam as a religion, in its main directions, could well get along with them and is able to function in democracy and with democracy. However, it is represented mainly by intellectuals, often liberal Islamic scholars from Moslem countries, who are in Germany due to persecution in their countries, a considerable part of them are politically close to the German Greens.⁷ The number of its supporters was negligible compared to the mass of the people, which was "herded" by the imams sent from Turkey and from the Arab countries. Liberal intellectuals had no influence among Moslems living in Germany. In the country, mainly due to migration

processes, the proportion of traditional, and sometimes radical Moslems, grew more and more, but their religion was not linked to the system of legal, social and cultural relationships to the extent that Christianity or Judaism were integrated into it. The reason was only partly in the organizational features of Islam, excluding integration into centralized structures of hierarchical subordination, but to a large extent also in the state, which did not burden itself with attempts to systematically interact with this denomination.

The so-called. "parallel societies" began to take shape back in the days of guest workers, as families and kinship arrived to them, began to intensify as the country received Moslem refugees, however, at the beginning of the new millennium, these "societies" tried to legally arrange their lives in Germany with the maximum of their religious conveniences (for example, lawsuits by Moslem teachers to allow the wearing of the hijab, lawsuits by Turkish parents against schools regarding the exemption of girls from physical education classes and overnight trips, etc.). Islam, in all its confessional diversity, became socially offensive and began to pose a threat to social stability, making it clear that without being integrated into the system of state relations, it integrates them for itself, for example, in matters of the effectiveness of Sharia.

Realizing that "Islam belongs to Germany", and the country is responsible to the German population for those whom it brought to itself, but did not integrate, German politics wondered how to regulate relations with this religion. The main task for the "state of political parties", as the German democracy officially calls itself, was to develop a single, supra-party strategy in relations with the Islamic community of Germany, represented in associations and unions.

The way out was found in the creation of an institution of constant interaction and dialogue between the state and Islam. In it, on one side were represented: the federation (represented by the Minister of the Home Affairs and the resource headed by

him), as well as lands and communes, and on the other, influential and massive Islamic unions. Participation in this institution was seen at the same time as an encouragement for these unions, a reward for moderation and recognition of their right to represent the Moslem population in its relations with the state.

The initiative to create an institution called the German Islamic Conference belonged to the experienced Christian Democratic politician Wolfgang Schaeuble, who received the post of Minister of the Interior. It started working in 2006.

For the reasons of political correctness, the state invited to participate not only the strongest, the so-called. "head associations", like the Turkish DITIB, which indeed brought with them a lot of unresolved problems, but also liberal organizations and even individual intellectuals of Moslem origin living in Germany, who are persons of public life, as a rule, secular-minded and quite critical of Islam. Thus, the state wanted to emphasize: for it, Islam in Germany is not limited to conservative religious associations and, from the point of view of the state, liberal European Islam and secular Islamic intellectuals are as much a part of the Islamic life of Germany as the organizations of immigrant German Islam.

In the early years of its work, the Islamic Conference of Germany functioned as a permanent working forum, whose tasks included the identification of loyal Moslem organizations with a view to further integration, as well as the political and social marginalization of radical trends of Islam. The Islamic Conference of Germany is a tool for the integration of Islam, capable of integration. Organizations that gravitate towards radicalism did not participate in it, members of their communities were deprived of the advantages that unions cooperating with the state had.

The second task was to identify and search for solutions to such problems relevant to the Moslem diaspora, which could not be solved without the state (for example, teaching Moslem schoolchildren "Islam" within the framework of the school

subject "religion"). It was assumed that the permanent and loyal participants of the Islamic Conference would eventually be able to obtain the status of a "subject of public law", which would give these Moslem associations the opportunities provided by church law.⁸

The conference was held in rounds, in thematic circles, both on general issues (secularization, gender issues) and on special ones, such as teaching Islam in schools, training imams in Germany or building mosques.

Unfortunately, time has shown a significant disadvantage of this institution, associated with the peculiarities of the political culture of Germany as a state of political parties. The course of the Islamic Conference, the nature of the topics discussed showed a strong dependence on the positions of the changing interior ministers, and consequently on the political parties in power. Thus, Thomas de Maiziere (CDU), who replaced the initiator of the Islamic Conference Schaeuble in his post, turned the fight against terrorism into one of the main topics of the negotiations, which led to the withdrawal of some influential Moslem associations from the conference. All subsequent years, the work of the conference, and the very fact of its existence, despite the declared supra-party nature of this institution, was instrumentalized by political parties. As a result, German politics has so far failed to develop a unified concept of the relationship between the state and Islam, free from inter-party competition.

Nevertheless, conceptually, the Conference is perhaps the only option for integrating immigrant Islam in a democratic country with such a variety of its directions as Germany. Currently, the unions represented in it have already managed to coordinate, for example, the teaching of Islam in schools or the training of Moslem preachers in Germany. Ten German universities have already introduced the subject of "Islamic theology" at theological faculties, which trains teachers for school classes. These classes have already been introduced in federal lands with a large proportion of the Moslem population,

about 600,000 schoolchildren are already taking part in them in more than 900 schools.⁹ At the last rounds of the conference, it was possible to agree even partial participation of the state in salaries for German imams.¹⁰

There is a Special Islamic College in Osnabrück

It is difficult to underestimate this achievement. Previously, Moslem children studied Islam in schools of the Quran at mosques belonging to the relevant Moslem organizations, from preachers sent to them from the respective countries. The mosques of the Turkish "DITIB" (a powerful union of Turkish Sunnis loyal to Turkey), for example, focused on supporting the ties of former compatriots with Turkey, sometimes outspoken Islamists preached in the mosques of other unions, which led to the radicalization of Moslem youth.

Therefore, the work with Moslem youth is now being carried out by the state. In the course of its work, the Islamic Conference has created a youth branch, a Young Islamic Conference, which is held on the eve of the annual forums of the Islamic Conference.

The Islamic Conference is the brainchild of the "Merkel era", which lasted 16 years. After Angela Merkel left the chancellorship and the coalition of the SPD, Greens and Liberals came to power, there were concerns about the further activities of this institution. Indeed, in previous years, it was the Greens who were the main critics of the conference, expressing dissatisfaction with the insufficient, in their opinion, number of free critical intellectuals represented there, ethnically coming from Islamic countries. In addition, more recently, a prominent Green politician, the head of the Baden-Württemberg land government, Winfried Kretschmann, caused negative reactions from Moslem intellectuals and politicians (not to mention organizations and unions), saying that "Islam in Germany is not integrated enough", should be reformed and demanding that

Moslems of Baden-Württemberg if they have German citizenship, consider Kretschmann as their representative, and not Islamic organizations and unions.¹¹

However, in May 2022, the situation became clearer. The new Minister of Internal Affairs, Nancy Feather, during the Conference, speaking to representatives of more than 40 participating Moslem parent organizations, confirmed the continuation of the work of this institute.¹² She proposed three thematic complexes on which work will be carried out: "Support for public cooperation", "Prevention of organized conflicts" and "Strengthening the structures of Moslem self-organization". If critical voices were still frequent at the initial stages of the IC, according to which this institution is unsuitable for one or other parameters and should be abolished, then over the past years too significant results have been achieved through it to abandon it. Islam in Germany remains in the phase of active integration, and the IC will remain the main institution of this process. The German state continues the course it has taken: to integrate the loyal, to isolate the non-integrated. Special emphasis, as practice has shown, will continue to be placed on the "Germanization" (but not on the liberalization)¹³ of immigrant Islam, so that it is taught to Moslem schoolchildren by teachers educated at German universities.

Notes

1. Wulf Ch. "Der Islam gehört zu Deutschland". - Handelsblatt 3.10.2010, S. 3 - Mode of access: <https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/wulf-rede-im-wortlaut-der-islam-gehört-zu-deutschland-seite-3/3553232-3.html>
2. For example, the Christian Church takes part in public life, expresses its position on important issues of state policy, Easter and Christmas are days off, in federal lands with a predominance of Catholics or Protestants, their holidays are also days off. The state collects a church tax (about 9%) from citizens, and the churches pay the state for this procedure. In all federal lands, except for Berlin and Bremen, the subject of "religion" is included in the school curriculum, schoolchildren study it according to the confession they profess. In universities, in the departments of theology, the churches

have a decisive say in the appointment of professorships. The state treaty at the level of the Bundeschancellor, on the one hand, and the Central Council of Jews, on the other, has also been concluded with Judaism.

3. Some religious communities are recognized only at the level of the federal lands and there they conclude agreements with the state authorities. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses sued the federal lands for this status.
4. Deutsche Islam Konferenz (DIK). – Mode of access: <http://www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de/>
5. Muslime mit Migrationshintergrund nach Herkunftsregion und Staatsangehörigkeit- Mode of access: <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1232542/umfrage/muslime-mit-migrationshintergrund-nach-herkunftsregion-und-staatsangehoerigkeit/>
6. See: BAMF (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge) – Integration. Muslimisches Leben in Deutschland 2020 – Mode of access: <https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/ProjekteReportagen/DE/Forschung/Integration/muslimisches-leben-deutschland-2020.html?nn=283560>
7. Liberal Islam in Germany has been organized into several unions, and since 2017 has its own mosque in Berlin, the Ibn-Rushd-Goethe Mosque.
8. The Ahmadis (Ahmadiyya Moslem Jamaat) were the first to receive such a status in 2013 at the land level and the level equivalent to it (the land of Hesse and the Hanseatic city of Hamburg). The Islamic Conference is an instrument for the integration of integrable Islam. The same Islamic organizations operating in Germany, which gravitate towards “universality” and towards radicalism, are supposed to be infringed on the legal paths, and if this is not possible, then to isolate them politically and neutralize socially, excluding them from cooperation and thereby depriving the members of these organizations of those conveniences possessed by unions cooperating with the state.
9. Islamischer Religionsunterricht (IRU) in Deutschland im Spannungsfeld von Religion, Bildung, Politik und Gesellschaft- SpringerLink – Accesed date : <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41682-022-00120-5#refCR24>
10. Der Staat könnte Imane bezahlen - Herder Korrespondenz Hefte Heftarchiv 2022 Heft 4/2022, S. 25.
11. *Kretschmann W.* Der Islam ist nicht wirklich integriert in Deutschland – SWR Aktuell, 2022. – Mode of access: <https://www.swr.de/swraktuell/baden-wuerttemberg/was-tut-deutschland-fuer-die-integration-von-muslimen-100.html>
12. Innenministerin Nancy Faeser will Islamkonferenz weiterentwickeln. – Herder Korrespondenz, 6/2022 S. 36. – Mode of access: <https://www.herder.de/hk/hefte/archiv/2022/6-2022/innenministerin-nancy-faeser-will-islamkonferenz-weiterentwickeln-muslime-in-deutschland/>

13. The state does not plan to influence Islam in terms of its substantive liberalization. Liberal Islam exists by its own community, which has little overlap with traditional Muslims, and its activities, being the pride of the authorities (Berlin announced that it is proud of the Ibn-Rushd-Goethe mosque), are more than controversial for the mass of Muslims living in Germany. For example, in July 2022, on the eve of the LGBT Christopher Day in Berlin, this mosque flew a pride rainbow flag under the slogan "Love is Halal", which caused criticism from a number of Islamic associations. -- See: Month P. Berlin: Erste Moschee Deutschlands hisst Regenbogenflagge. - Berliner Zeitung. Mode of access: <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/news/pride-month-berlin-erste-deutsche-moschee-hisst-regenbogenflagge-li.243843>

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3. Innenministerin Nancy Faeser will Islamkonferenz weiterentwickeln. - Herder Korrespondenz, 6/2022 S.36. - Mode of access: <https://www.herder.de/hk/hefte/archiv/2022/6-2022/innenministerin-nancy-faeser-will-islamkonferenz-weiterentwickeln-muslime-in-deutschland/>
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5. Kretschmann W. Der Islam ist nicht wirklich integriert in Deutschland - SWR Aktuell, 2022. - Mode of access: <https://www.swr.de/swraktuell/baden-wuerttemberg/was-tut-deutschland-fuer-die-integration-von-muslimen-100.html>
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daten/studie/1232542/umfrage/muslime-mit-migrationshintergrund-nach-herkunftsregion-und-staatsangehoerigkeit/

8. Pick U. Zahl der Muslime deutlich gestiegen // Tagesschau, 28.04.2021 – <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/muslime-deutschland-studie-101.html>
9. Red.: Der Staat könnte Imame bezahlen. - Herder Korrespondenz Hefte Heftarchiv 2022 Heft 4/2022, S. 25.
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