

SWETLANA POGORELSKAYA. GERMANY: ISLAM AND SOCIETY. OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION

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Abstract. While the state and Moslem organizations of Germany, in the course of many years of work of the Islamic Conference at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, find ways of interaction with the aim of integrating moderate Islam into public structures on legal paths, the problems of interaction at the level of society still remain. Moreover, sociologists have begun to use the term “anti-Moslem racism” and talk about its strengthening in society. The indigenous population feels not only misunderstood, but also unprotected, moreover, attacked by their own politicians. The article provides an overview of the situation over the past year.

For 17 years now, German politics, having created a permanent institution of the Islamic Conference under the Ministry of the Internal Affairs, has recognized that Islam in Germany has long ceased to be a religion of temporary contingents of the population, has become, as Minister of the Interior Affairs Schäuble stated at the opening of the conference, “a part of Germany”¹ and, therefore, must, like other great religions represented in Germany, find its place in the

system of institutions of the rule of law state and society. At that time, just over 3 million Moslems lived in the country.

The path traveled over the years has not been easy, but the success of the Islamic Conference is indisputable. Recognizing, albeit very belatedly, the fact that, due to structural deficits in immigration policy from the early 1960s to the late 1990s Germany eventually acquired its own, and very heterogeneous, Moslem community, federal policy made serious efforts towards the integration of Islam capable of this process, involving large Islamic associations and motivating federal states to cooperate with moderate Moslem unions in the same framework in which cooperation with other religious communities is being carried out. Solutions were found to a number of pressing issues in the everyday life of Moslems, for example, regarding the teaching of Islam as part of the school subject "religion" and the training of imams in higher educational institutions in Germany².

Today, the legal, cultural and social situation of the Moslem population in Germany is not comparable to what it used to be, Islam, which is interested in integration, is much better tied into legal, social and social structures than in the early 2000s.

And yet, at the end of June 2023, the concept of "anti-Moslem racism" of the Germans appeared in the media and began to be intensively introduced into the public consciousness, no, not the state and not its institutions, but the indigenous population. The concept of "racism" sounds much more serious than "hostility to Islam" (Islamfeindlichkeit), which from time to time accused the inert, "deep" German population by left-liberal politicians and intellectuals. How does such an accusation correlate with the visible progress in the social, professional and political integration of moderate Moslems? Did the increasing share of Moslems in elite professional communities and in public and political life lead the Germans from their vague and obscure "hostility" to open "racism"? And how can "racism" be manifested in relation to religion in general? The answer is simple: it was not the Germans and their attitude towards

Moslem fellow citizens and migrants that changed, but the ideological and political climate in the country – after the infamous interdisciplinary “post-colonial studies” came to Germany (branding even Immanuel Kant a “colonialist”), as a part of the collective West, was overtook by a fashionable and in the English-speaking world for a long time no longer new interdisciplinary “studies of racism”³, which, not having had time to get stronger and develop a clear conceptual scientific apparatus, began to take root in the public consciousness at the journalistic level. In the proposed short review, I would like to consider the current situation in the context of “anti-Moslem racism”.

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In 2020, in Germany, at the initiative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, an “Independent Expert Group for the Study of Hostility towards Moslems” (UEM) was created. Funding came from the funds of the Islamic Conference under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which has been dealing with this phenomenon since 2012, also from the state budget. It should be clarified that at the same time, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the internal intelligence service (Constitution Protection Service) fought against the growing Islamism and the danger of Islamic terrorism inside the country, observing or even prohibiting suspicious associations in this regard, expelling them from the country or (in the case of German citizenship) placing suspicious persons under the supervision. Intersecting information, on the one hand, about the activities of the state to ensure security against Islamic terrorism (disclosure of ever new terrorist groups, prevention of terrorist acts) and, on the other hand, about “anti-Moslem” speeches on the ground left a natural impression that “hostility to Islam” is not part of activities of state institutions, but implies an exclusively civil, if not everyday level, although in fact the fears of the population were mainly fueled by media reports about the

multiplication of Islamic terrorism in the country, about the allegedly increasing desire of local Moslems to “live according to Sharia”, etc. The criminal actions of right-wing extremist groups were not aimed at Islam as such, but against certain categories of migrants who were its bearers, i.e. had the ethnic character of discrimination inherent in Nazism. There were no burnings of Qurans and similar public anti-Islamic gestures in Germany.

At the end of June 2023, the Independent Expert Group for the Study of Moslem Hostility presented the final report “Hostility to Moslems – German Balance”⁴. The nearly 400-page publication contains an extensive analysis of “German racism” against Moslems and “contains extensive recommendations for policy, administration and society”⁵.

On the one hand, the study separates “hostility towards Islam” from “anti-Moslem racism”, making it clear that racism is aimed at individual bearers of religion in the country, on the other hand, it introduces into circulation a controversial (according to the author of this article) concept from a scientific point of view, since it unites all the Moslems of the country into one object suffering from discrimination by society (the indigenous population), which is not true. Not to mention the fact that Islam in Germany, due to its specificity as a religion and, in particular, its ethnic and geographical diversity, was not able to come to an agreement even within itself (create a single parent organization for cooperation with the state on the model of other religious communities),⁶ it is incorrect to present it as a single object of discrimination. The fears and hostility of the German population are not diffuse, they still have a cultural-ethnic and concrete, everyday character, they are not directed at religion and not at all its bearers, but are tied to realities. They manifest themselves, for example, in confrontations with criminal migrants, with attempts to introduce mosques (especially with minarets) into German regions, in cases when mosques are moved into closed Christian churches. The Pegida movement against the Islamization of the “West” was again directed against

the political course of its own elites, and not impersonally against Islam and Moslems, etc.

Since the direction in which the study was carried out is relatively new for Germany, there is no clear scientific conceptual apparatus in it. At the beginning of the study, the authors try to develop a working conceptual apparatus.

However, these not very well-founded attempts to pass off working concepts as universal ones are less problematic than the very attempt to unite all forms of discrimination under the general term "racism", and not just at the level of a working concept, but as a definition for a whole area of research. It is understood that Islamophobia is a form of culturally conditioned racism, which, in turn, "ethnicizes" religious affiliation⁷. The "Racism Monitor"⁸, run by the aforementioned Centre for Integration and Migration Studies, postulates that culture, mentality and religion perform the same function in "neo-racism" as the term "race" does in older forms of racism.

The practical application of this concept in empirical studies leads, for example, to the publication by the Alliance Against Enmity towards Islam and Moslems⁹ of data such as: "Over the past year, at least 898 anti-Moslem torts took place in Germany, an average of two per day... Of these 22 per cent discrimination, 20 per cent abusive behavior and 58 per cent verbal attacks" - and controversial findings: "Anti-Moslem racism is not a far-right phenomenon, it is rooted in the very middle of society... It defines the daily lives of its victims and manifests itself mainly in the public space, but also in schools, universities and even kindergartens¹⁰".

The momentary political benefit from bringing all social forms of discrimination under the single concept of "racism" is obvious - this is the maximum moral condemnation, since in the society of modern political correctness, the accusation of racism is, in fact, a ticket to the status of a political cast-off. As a means of attracting public attention and mobilizing the state to take drastic action, such a move can be understood, it remains debatable what this has to do with scientific research.

The unification under the single concept of “racism” of diffuse phobias of the “deep people”, criminal torts of right-wing extremists and real cases of ethnic genocides that still take place in the world (not in Germany) is debatable, not only in scientific, but also in a far-reaching perspective – and in a political sense, because it devalues the concept of “racism” as such, even if you call it “neo-racism”. It seems that the introduction of the concept of “anti-Moslem racism” in Germany and, especially, its widespread use not in a narrowly scientific discussion, but in a public one with a political outlet (i.e. in the public sphere), regarding specific issues of interaction between the Moslem and non-Moslem populations, is most likely will entail, precisely because of the conceptual uncertainty and lack of clear boundaries, not repentance, but the embitterment of the native German population and, as a result, the political strengthening of the right-wing populist forces, which are already gaining strength.

How, for example, to assess the opposition of the German population to the construction of a mosque in the Frankfurt district of Griesheim, reports of which did not leave the newspaper pages in June 2023?¹¹ Is it an act of “anti-Islamic racism”? The Islamic centre, which settled in this area, without integrating, but without disturbing the indigenous population, declared its desire to expand, and acquired a land plot on which it decided to build a mosque. Or is this a case of opposition to Islamism – after all, it turned out that the site was acquired not at all by the harmless Centre (it only called for donations), but by the German Moslem Community, an organization that is under the supervision of the secret services due to its ties with the Moslem Brotherhood. But isn’t the very clarification of this fact by the Germans a case of “anti-Moslem racism”? At least the Centre itself, in its statement on this issue, speaks of “creating an atmosphere of fear and mistrust towards the Moslem community”.¹²

Or a recent case from school life in the state of Baden-Württemberg, where since 2020 it is forbidden to wear a burqa in

schools. A teenage girl, a student of a sewing school, due to her religious beliefs, came to class in a paranja, while safety regulations prescribed that students wear short-sleeved clothes when working on sewing machines. The girl filmed a conversation with the director on this topic on her phone and posted it on Tik-Tok with the statement that she had become a victim of anti-Moslem intolerance. The subsequent educational actions of the directorate (exclusion from school for a week), if desired, could well be assessed as “anti-Moslem racism”¹³.

Thus, it seems that in Germany at present there is a premature removal to the public sphere and politicization of a conceptual apparatus that has not yet been clearly developed at the scientific level and is not defined from a legal point of view from the new interdisciplinary direction of “racism studies”, and in such a significant for internal political stability topic, as the life of the Moslem diaspora and its interaction with the non-Moslem population of the country. The price of the rapid growth of the popular scientific direction of “racism studies” and hasty publications about the “anti-Moslem racism” of German society can be not only numerous unresolved methodological problems at the scientific level, but also, which is really dangerous for the “state of political parties” (which Germany calls itself) – a shift in electoral sympathies towards right-wing populist forces.

Application:

Moslem community in Germany, data:

The Moslem population in 2023 is 5.5 million, its share in the total population (83.17 million) is about 6.6 per cent.¹⁴ 45 per cent of Moslems are from Turkey (about 2.5 million people). Their share in the total number of Moslems decreased compared to 2015 (53 per cent) due to the increase in the number of the Arab population during the migration crisis of 2015–2016. Moslems of Arab origin make up 27 per cent of the total number

of Moslems in Germany, they come from Syria and North Africa, followed by Moslems from Southeast Europe (19 per cent) from Afghanistan and Iran. Three quarters of Moslems are Sunnis. The proportion of Shiites in the total Moslem population is 4 per cent. About 8 per cent are Alevis. Representatives of the Ahmadiyya and other directions make up one percent each. According to surveys, 70 per cent adhere to ordinary religious rules, for example, in drinking and eating, 66 per cent say they celebrate religious holidays. The proportion of those who pray five times a day is 38 per cent. About 25 per cent do not pray at all. Three-quarters of Moslems living in Germany say they fully (56 per cent) or partially (20 per cent) observe Islamic fasting. The remaining quarter does not fast. Volunteers in mosques number slightly less than 12.5 per cent. However, the actual number of believers who regularly visit the mosque or volunteer at it is much higher. About 65 per cent communicate with the native German population at least once a week.

References

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2. Prior to this decision, Islam was taught to children in "Quran schools" at mosques, the teachers were imams sent from abroad, and the radicalness of their views depended on which Islamic union the mosque belongs to. Thus, there was a religious radicalization of children and adolescents, which the state had no opportunity to prevent. Therefore, the teaching of Islam in schools was one of the first issues at the Islamic Conference.
3. Enormous funds were allocated from the budget to integrate the new direction into the scientific and university process. The German Research Community (DFG), the largest academic funder of scientific research, alone funded 581 large-scale projects between 2015 and 2019 with a total value of 238 million euros, according to its own data. In January 2023, at the Centre of Integration and Migration Research there was created the "Information Network for Racism Research" ("Wissensnetzwerk Rassismusforschung" (URL: <https://www.dezim-institut.de/projekte/projekt-detail/wissensnetzwerk->

- rassismusforschung-winra-0-02/)), which aims to coordinate and strengthen research on racism in Germany.
4. s:Muslimfeindlichkeit - Eine deutsche Bilanz 2023 // URL: http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/themen/heimat-integration/BMI23006-muslimfeindlichkeit.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=9
 5. BMI - Presse - Unabhängiger Expertenkreis stellt Bericht zur Muslimfeindlichkeit in Deutschland vor // URL: <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/DE/2023/06/uem-abschlussbericht.html>
 6. About attempts to create a coordinating centre for work with the Islamic Conference, as well as about the diverse organizational landscape of Moslem life in Germany, about Islamic associations and unions, see for example: Pogorelskaya S.V. Moslems in Germany: The specifics of integration [Electronic resource] // URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/musulmane-v-germanii-spetsifika-integratsii>
 7. At the same time, the authors of the study refer to the theories of "neo-racism", see: Muslimfeindlichkeit - Eine deutsche Bilanz 2023 // URL: https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/themen/heimat-integration/BMI23006-muslimfeindlichkeit.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=9. - P. 28.
 8. Program portal: Nationaler Diskriminierungs- und Rassismusmonitor (NaDiRa).
 9. The organization is funded by the Federal Ministries of Family Affairs (see organization portal: Über uns / CLAIM - Allianz gegen Islamfeindlichkeit und Muslimfeindlichkeit (claim-allianz.de) within the Living Democracy program.
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 12. Kößler gegen Moscheebau in Griesheim. - Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 24.06.2023, Nr. 144, S. 5m.
 13. Soldt R. Schülerin im Niqab. Erstmals greift das Verhüllungsverbot. - Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 27.06.2023, Nr. 146, S. 3.
 14. Hereinafter data from the portal of the Islamic Conference: DIK - Deutsche Islam Konferenz - Daten und Fakten (deutsche-islam-konferenz.de).