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## THE MOSLEM WORLD: THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

SWETLANA POGORELSKAYA. SOME PROBLEMS OF TRAINING  
IMAMS IN THE EU (USING THE EXAMPLE OF GERMANY)

*Keywords: Islam in the EU; Islam in  
Germany; Islamic unions in the EU; imams;  
Islamic theology.*

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*Abstract.* As Muslim diasporas grow in a number of significant  
EU states, associated with the radicalization of the Islamic world after  
the end of the era of blocs confrontation, the correlation of the religious  
life of Muslim diasporas with the requirements of the internal order of  
the legal democratic state became an increasingly pressing domestic  
political problem for these countries. One of the significant risk factors  
for stability and, most importantly, for the integration of diasporas into  
the life of civil society was the factor of unpredictability of imams, who

*were often sent to mosques of Islamic unions from abroad and received funding from there. Therefore, the most important domestic political task of European states with significant Muslim communities is the training of Muslim clergy in these states. The article will consider the problems and difficulties associated with this on the example of Germany.*

The quantitative growth and increment in activity of Muslim diasporas with the simultaneous religious and political radicalization of the Islamic world after the end of the era of blocs confrontation, assigns a serious and difficult task for the internal policy of a number of EU states (primarily in the countries of the so-called "old Europe<sup>1</sup>"): how to correlate the religious life of "their" Muslim diasporas with the requirements of the internal order of the legal democratic state.

One of the significant risk factors for stability and, most importantly, for the integration of members of Muslim diasporas into the life of European civil society was the fact that Muslim preachers in mosques of most Islamic unions were sent to them from abroad, from various countries of the Muslim world and paid from there. The sermons of the sent (or invited) imams<sup>2</sup> often diverged fundamentally not only from the legal norms of liberal democracies, but also, due to ignorance of the realities of the host country, from the everyday life of members of diasporas within European societies, especially with regard to the education of children in public schools, the role of women, and clothing. In addition, individuals persecuted in their own countries for Islamic radicalism and living in the EU with the status of political refugees (as in Germany) became imams in mosques of some Islamic unions, and persons under the supervision of security services in relation to jihadism read Friday prayers. It is no coincidence that the concept of "preachers of hate" (Hassprädiger) became widespread in Germany in the 2000s. In its mosques, for example, in Cologne, where the "Cologne caliph" Mufti Kaplan preached in those years, there

were appeals to turn the Muslim children of Germany “into a point of a spear directed against the infidels.”<sup>3</sup>

In this regard, the issue of systematic training of imams within the EU countries has become relevant for domestic policy, i.e. a kind of professionalism of this activity on the basis of certain unified state standards, the mastering of which is backed up by a single certificate of obtaining appropriate qualifications.

However, will such imams be accepted by the communities? Is it possible to oblige diasporas to accept only imams educated in the EU? Do these European standards correspond to those that the Muslim world itself applies to those carrying out this activity (ceremonies of large and small pilgrimages, for example). How can they provide training?

The present short article, after a brief review of the situation in the EU, proposes to consider these issues using the example of Germany, a country that never had an indigenous Muslim population and nevertheless has one of the largest Muslim communities in Europe today.

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The most numerous Muslim diasporas of the EU live in France, Germany, the Netherlands. The peculiarity of France - the idea of primacy of citizenship over other forms of identity, allows to officially ignore ethnic and confessional self-identification, but Macron not so long ago expressed a desire to create structures for “French Islam.” The foundations of the state approach to the education of imams were laid back in 2008, when the Catholic Institute in Paris began to conduct courses for imams, completing their education with knowledge of the functioning of the state order, the values of the republic and its history.

Moreover, Muslim unions (there are about 3,000 mosques in France) had their own structures for training imams. To realize Macron's intentions to create “French Islam,” the legal framework must be reformed, providing for secularization and excluding any form of state support.

In Austria, where the diaspora has been represented by the Islamic Community of Faith in Austria (IGGÖ) since 1979, which involves about 300 communities, the education of imams is the business of the communities themselves, but they are paid for by their parent organization and are considered its employees. Imams are trained both at the theological faculty of the university and in the so-called “imam schools” (“Imam-Hatip-Schule”) at the communities. The government, however, supports public education and is skeptical about private schools. A community wishing to invite an imam from abroad must pre-submit a request to the IGGÖ, in which the imam will pass the test and receive a certificate confirming his qualification. Only after that the community can apply to the state organization for a working visa for him.

In the Netherlands, with a community of about 500 mosques, there has been debate for more than thirty years about how imams should be trained. Since the necessary structures were not available for a long time, the communities invited imams from abroad, who, however, were supposed to finish language courses. Since 2004, the Ministry of Education has supported the education of imams at Dutch universities, in particular at the Faculty of Islamic Theology in Amsterdam, where a specialty of both an imam and a teacher of Islam in the framework of the subject “religion” is available. At the same time, the demand for this specialty is small.

In Belgium over 90 communities have the status of state-recognized religious communities out of 300. Therefore, their imams have the status of employees. The rest of the mosques belong to the Diyanet Foundation, so that the training of the imams and their payment is within its competence. At the same time, systematic state training of imams is planned. In the Flemish region, the authorities made attempts to ban the financing of mosques and the payment of imams from abroad, but the country’s constitutional court in 2023 revoked this resolution.

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Germany is especially interesting for researching the problem, of all EU countries, as a country that historically did not have its own Islam (even colonial), and, at the same time, in a relatively short time in the second half of the 20 century, due to the peculiarities of its economic and domestic political development, it acquired a powerful and diverse Islamic community (to date – more than five million Muslims and more than 2,500 mosques), moreover, until 11.9.2001 Germany practically did not pay attention at it, in terms of the formally “temporary” status of the stay of the majority of Muslims in the country. Disillusionment entailed a radical course changing and the desire to tame the diaspora, encouraging forces capable of integration and cutting off the radical movements as well after the realization that the participants in the terrorist attack on the United States, having studied in Germany, visited the mosque of the radical Islamic Union in Hamburg.

After the message of the federal president in 2010 that “Islam belongs to Germany and is part of it,<sup>4</sup>” the first Islamic Theological Center was founded with financial support from the Ministry of Education (in 2012, at the University of Tübingen)<sup>5</sup>, followed by others, today there are six of them, but university graduates had almost no chance of finding a place in mosques where clergy close to specific communities and sent or invited from countries of the Islamic world worked. The story of the Islamic College of Germany founded in 2021 at the University of Osnabrück and working with state support even made the papers – a modern educational institution created specifically for training of Islamic clerics for all Islamic unions represented in Germany in 2023 faced the problem of employment of its first graduates, which led to a reduction in those wishing to study in it. Mosques called various grounds for that refusal. Somewhere they were afraid to lose their roots and tradition, somewhere they referred to the lack of funds and preferred to accept a “free” imam paid from abroad<sup>6</sup>.

For example, in mosques of the Türkiye-Sunni Union, DITIB<sup>7</sup> exclusively imams who are Türkiye civil servants and sent to foreign mosques by the Türkiye Religious Affairs Department (Diyanet) could preach, usually for a period of five years in rotation. In a number of communities of other Islamic unions, imams from Saudi Arabia or the UAE preached, in Iranian mosques imams are paid from Tehran, in Bosnian ones - imams who learned in Bosnia, etc. Preachers from Arab countries who come by invitation to mosques of radical Islamic unions for a certain period with tourist visas deliver special care to the state.

Graduates of the theological faculties of German universities had a chance to get not so much a job as an imam in mosques of Islamic unions as teachers to teach Islam in the framework of the subject "Religion" in schools. By the way, this was the second important item in the Islamic-related domestic political security agenda - to transfer the acquaintance of Muslim children with their religion from the "Quran schools" at mosques to ordinary schools<sup>8</sup>.

The subject of practical discussions on training of "correct" imams in Germany was during the work of the Islamic Conference of the Federal Republic of Germany at the Ministry of Internal Affairs - a permanent institute of interaction (and in a number of issues and cooperation) of the state and various Islamic unions of Germany, operating since 2006. In 2022, with the change of government, the problem of employment of imams was named among the priority ones - after all, over the past years, it was not possible to reverse the trend and the vast majority of imams currently working in the country are still sent from abroad<sup>9</sup>. German politics requires that those who have been educated in Germany can be allowed to work in mosques on the territory of Germany and must be excluded any foreign funding. How does this desire relate to the legal situation?

On the one hand, Article 140 of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany hands all issues of religious life to the religious communities themselves, so that the issues of education

and employment of clergy are within the responsibility of religious communities, on the other hand, the historical experience of interaction between the state and churches suggests favorable options for churches if they cooperate with the state. In the case of Islam, such cooperation already took place as a result of organizational problems – Islam represented in Germany due to its diversity, specifics, and sometimes rivalry between different directions could not create a single parent organization for the negotiation process with the state and, unlike Christianity and Judaism, it is still not a legally recognized religious community (Religionsgemeinschaft).<sup>10</sup> At the same time, financing the religious life of its communities from the countries of the Muslim world opened up opportunities not only for interference in the internal affairs of Germany, as in the case of the Türkiye Sunnis, but also for the possibility of creating terrorist structures (Taib Mosque in Hamburg<sup>11</sup>). The problem has not been resolved yet.

The Islamic unions themselves consider the complete refusal from communication with the Islamic world counterproductive on the issue of appointing imams, especially when it comes to the “countries of origin” of the community members, for example, Türkiye Sunnis, who still make up the majority of the Muslim diaspora of Germany. For example, the Islamic Council, which unites more than 450 communities, which also includes the radical Milli Gorush, believes that imams educated in Germany need advanced training and practice in Islamic countries (in this case, Türkiye). According to its head, the introducing of a course of Islamic theology in Germany, related to the desire of politics to cut off influence from the Islamic world, is dictated “by no politicians’ concern for the good of Muslims,” since not only the knowledge of theology is expected from the imam, from the leader of the community, but also “help in practical issues, in worship, and this is largely determined by the cultural traditions of the countries of origin.”<sup>12</sup>

The largest and most influential union of Türkiye Sunnis, DITIB, uniting more than 900 communities, also believes that the

formation of imams is primarily Muslims business. Back in 2006, it began its own imam training program for itself, at its own expense sending Türkiye students who grew up in Germany to study as imams in Türkiye in order to take a place in one of the union's mosques on their return. More than 90 per cent of graduates of this program now work in DITIB mosques. Following the wishes of German politics, in 2020 it opened its own college near Cologne, in Eifel, in which it invites graduates of the theological faculties of German universities to the course of "Islamic theology" to complete two-year practical training preparing for work with the community.<sup>13</sup> As for the imams still sent from Türkiye, before arriving in Germany, they are now obliged to complete a five-month preparatory course, the program of which is agreed with the German Goethe Institute and involves learning not only the language, but also the country. The union would prefer to maintain this order further so as not to "lose its roots"<sup>14</sup>

The Central Council of Muslims in Germany (about 30 communities), rival to DITIB, uniting mainly Arab and multi-ethnic Muslims and some time ago it was under suspicion of associations with Islamic radicalism<sup>15</sup>, welcomes the training of imams in Germany because it will "break DITIB from Türkiye." At the same time, it objects to the ban on foreign funding, seeing this as an impairment of the rights of Muslims: after all, Christian and Judaist organizations receive such support. It itself mainly prepares imams within its own communities.

The Union of Islamic Cultural Centers (VIKZ), which celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2023 and unites more than 300 communities of conservative Türkiye Sunnis, believes that the imam is not a profession, but a mission. Therefore, it's been training imams in its educational center in Cologne for 40 years. A solid study continues for three years and includes not only theological, but also practical preparation for work in the community around the mosque, so that the head of the community meets not only the religious, but also the social and cultural needs

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of its members. The abolition of foreign funding for training and maintenance of imams will not affect it in any way.

Thus, it's seen that traditional Islamic unions, representing the absolute majority of the diaspora, do not openly express skepticism towards the training of imams within the faculty of theology of German universities, at the same time prefer (as long as the decision to ban the invitation of imams from the outside is made) to prepare them in their educational centers within the framework of their own programs, and, as soon as a graduate of a German university has to be hired, offer him to enhance his theoretical education with a practice that includes knowledge of the social and cultural needs of this community. Liberal Islam offers significantly more chances for this, but its share, despite strong support from German politics, intellectuals, the public and the media, is small, and the possibilities of influencing the conservative, tending to tradition mass of the Muslim community are even smaller.

It can be concluded that the task of training imams within the EU states arose not so much as the quantitative growth of communities, as after the events of 11.9.2001, which attracted the attention of European politicians to the radicalization of Islam within their countries. Currently, EU states with strong Islamic diasporas are trying, if possible, to reduce the ties of these diasporas with the Islamic world, offering Muslims, as federal President Steinmeier did in 2023 at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Union of Islamic Cultural Centers, "to take a place in the middle of our society.<sup>16</sup>" The desire to turn the faith historically and culturally alien to these countries into "their" Islam will inevitably lead to a decrease in the influx of foreign Islamic preachers and an increase in the share of "their" imams. In this regard, the states and the Islamic unions represented in it will have to solve the problem of how to correlate the training of imams in Europe with the requirements for this profession adopted in the Islamic world.

## Notes

1. It refers to the so-called immigrant Islam in states that did not previously have their own Muslim diasporas or, like France, whose Muslim population lived in the colonies, unlike, for example, such new EU members as Bosnia, where Islam adheres to the part of the indigenous population.
2. "Imam" in this case implies an Islamic cleric: the head of the community and the head of worship in the mosque.
3. Pogorelskaya S.V. Islamic terrorism. Case Germany. – Current problems of Europe, № 4 2021, P. 80.
4. "Islam gehört zu Deutschland": Wulff bekräftigt seine Aussage. – <https://www.rnd.de/politik/islam-gehört-zu-deutschland-wulff-bekräftigt-seine-aussage-4YAYIOB3NHEKKREGL4B3M6HMA.html#:~:text=Als%20Bundespr%C3%A4sident%20hatte%20Wulff%20in%20seiner%20Rede%20zu%20m,erhitzte%20Debatte%20um%20Integration%20und%20Identit%C3%A4t%20in%20Deutschland.>
5. Universität Tübingen: Erstes Zentrum für Islamische Theologie eingeweiht – <https://www.zeit.de/studium/hochschule/2012-01/zentrum-islamische-theologie-2>
6. Schönherr H-P. Imame in Deutschland: Deutsche Ausbildung nicht gefragt – <https://taz.de/Imame-in-Deutschland/!5804331/#:~:text=Vielf%C3%A4ltige%20Gr%C3%BCnde,von%20orientalischen%20Kulturwerten%20und%20Traditionen>
7. Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB), a German branch founded in 1984 in Cologne, subordinate to official Türkiye structures (religious affairs departments, Diyanet İçleri Başkanlığı), the most powerful organization of Türkiye Sunnis in Germany to date, one of the four co-founders of the Coordination Council of Muslims in Germany and the most important partner in cooperation with the state within the framework of the Islamic Conference at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany.
8. In German schools, as part of the subject "Religion," students can learn the basics of the religion to which they belong. The decision on these classes is within the competence of the federal states, and religious communities are responsible for them. The introduction of the subject "Islam" was difficult by the fact that, from a formal point of view, Islam in Germany is not a recognized religious community yet, like other confessions.
9. Islamkonferenz: Faeser will weniger Imame aus dem Ausland – <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/islamkonferenz-faeser-101.html>

10. Therefore, the negotiation process went with individual Islamic unions, at local (land) levels. Thus, the status of a “religious community” was received by the Ahmadites.
11. The mosque, visited by future participants in the terrorist attacks of 11.9.2001, including Mohamed Ata, when he was a student. The imam of the mosque was a recognized jihadist, nevertheless, it took the state ten years to close it. Refer to: Hamburger Taiba-Moschee geschlossen: Hassprediger ohne Heimat – <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/hamburger-taiba-moschee-geschlossen-hassprediger-ohne-heimat-a-710898.html>
12. Wie bilden islamische Religionsgemeinschaften ihre Imane aus? – <https://www.islamiq.de/2019/01/15/wie-bilden-islamische-religionsgemeinschaften-ihre-imame-aus/>
13. Ausbildung zur/zum islamischen Religionsbeauftragten | DITIB-Akademie. – <https://www.ditib-akademie.de/imamausbildung/>
14. Ibid.
15. To avoid further accusations, in 2022 it had to expel one of its strongest organizations – the German Community of Muslims (DMG), which was under suspicion of associations with the Muslim Brothers.
16. Steinmeier in Köln: “Der Islam hat Wurzeln geschlagen” | <https://www.express.de/koeln/steinmeier-in-koeln-der-islam-hat-wurzeln-geschlagen-647737>

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## ALEKSANDR FILONIK, VERA BATURINA. EGYPT: THE FIRST STEPS OF FEMINISM

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