NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Rethinking Citizenship Education in European Migration Societies

Political Strategies - Social Changes - Educational Concepts

Report

Workshop 4:
Religious Identities and Citizenship

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Session 1: Scientific Inputs – Research Results – European Discourses
Number of participants: 20

Introduction and Moderation: Johannes Kandel
Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, Berlin

Mr. J. Kandel welcomed the participants, who introduced themselves briefly. Mr. Kandel then introduced the topic of the workshop. The very three notions in the topic – Religion, Identity and Citizenship – are words that sparkle controversial political discourse by themselves, let alone all taken together. On top of that, in recent days the relationship between religion and citizenship has become ever more complex and problematic. As food for thought, Mr. Kandel introduced a few questions:
- Are religious identities at all relevant to citizenship?
- What common values and structures enable people to live together in a society that upholds democracy and their own identity?
- Do we not have to distinguish between religions, because not all religions and "religious identities" are compatible with human rights and democracy?
- Do we maybe need religious identities to give color and motivation to citizenship and democratic engagement?

He then presented some statistical data on religion in the EU. According to surveys, religion was still an important subject in European societies, with an average of 52% of the population considering religion to be important in their lives. Bearing this in mind, Mr. Kandel raised the issue "integration" – integration as a political concept and an open, dynamic and ongoing process, aimed at establishing a relationship between a host society and migrants "which not only permits the equal participation of all in all subsets of

the social system, but where a shared political culture has taken shape within the democratic rule of law" (quoting Thomas Meyer). Next, he referred to the visibility of Islam, which had increased in recent years. Religion seemed to have become more important to third generation migrants. Mr. Kandel also raised the question of what Islam actually was, and put forward some answers: he stated Islam was a construct, represented by 50 million people in Europe, that there was no *one* Islam, that the Islamic community was as diverse as any other, that there were different "Islams". Mr. Kandel then reminded the audience of the legitimacy of asking fundamental questions, as well as of the importance not to polarize between good and evil. With this, he gave the floor to the first contributor, Ms. Nahed Selim.

Nahed Selim
Author / Journalist, Amsterdam

PRESENTATION: **Shall others talk about their guilt? I'm talking about mine**

Ms. Selim told the audience she had grown up in Egypt and discovered in Europe that discrimination against women was culture-bound and not natural. Due to this, she tried to get rid of her religious identity for some time. She stated now to be aware of the influence that Islam had on her and that she did not renounce Islam, but criticized the aspects she considered negative.
She continuied by stating that people were more than their religion, they had genders, interests, professions and humanity. Still, many considered religion to be the main part of their lives, and this was particularly true for Muslims. Ms. Selim then mentioned the segregation of men and women typical for Islamic cultures and explained she would focus her presentation on the role of women in Islam. According to her, these still lacked behind in many fields, and their situation was characterized by low employment, a high birth rate and a high mortality rate. She continued by saying that many argued that this was due to male misinterpretation of Islam and the Qur'an, which might be true in some cases, like the segregation of men and women that barred women from education and public life (still practiced in some countries). But Ms. Selim reinforced that not all of women's problems were due to misinterpretation. She went on to divide these problems into three main levels: 1 – the personal, 2 – the financial / practical, and 3 – the religious level. Level 1 included arranged marriage and the lack of women's freedom over sex and their body. Level 2 would focus on aspects like freedom to work, law equality and heritage equality, whereas level 3 embraced the place of women in mosques and the fact that no women are allowed to be part of the clergy. Ms. Selim then advanced the direct example of domestic violence, which she said happened everywhere, but its situation in Islam was specific, because it had religious legitimacy, it was seen as a god given right to solve problems, was not socially frowned upon and its victims did not receive support. By this example, she concluded that religious identities could be an obstacle to good practice of citizenship, for religion was not just words, it was practiced and taken literally by many people. Ms. Selim proceeded to ask whether, in Europe – where religious freedom was practically taken for granted – we wanted to give orthodox Muslims the space to indoctrinate their children by practicing their religion radically. She finished her presentation by asking how those children could ever feel like a part of Europe that way.

Yildiz Akdogan
Network of Democratic Muslims, Copenhagen

PRESENTATION: **The Organization "Network of Democratic Muslims"**

The floor was then given to Ms. Yildiz Akdogan, who opened her speech by stating that Islam, after 9/11, had become the new "Evil Empire", different from the former communist evil empire, because Islam could not really be located. Ms. Akdogan came to present the organization "Network of Democratic Muslims", Denmark, which had appeared following the heated debate spawned by the so-called "cartoon crisis". She affirmed that this debate, for a long time, had been a very black-and-white bashing between people defending freedom of speech (lead by the right wing DF party, who also insisted on uttering that

Islam was essentially evil) and imams, who said that the cartoons did not represent freedom of speech but blasphemy, and that they were an expression of lack of tolerance. This debate was very confusing for the general public, including Muslims, and luckily the media, after a while, tried to moderate the discourse more, having been little more than "microphone-holders" before.

According to Ms. Akdogan, this moderation was also one of the aims of the Network of Democratic Muslims. She remarked that the group included no experts on Islam, but it wanted to contribute to good debate concerning Islam and democracy – all of its members had to sign a membership agreement quite in line with the Danish constitution. The group's activities included conferences / debates, job-fairs and the yearly award of the "Democracy Prize" to someone who had tried to contribute to democracy in Islam. Ms. Akdogan explained that the organization defended Muslims as active citizens and tried to increase their participation in public life. She was happy to announce that, in terms of public discourse, the integration "problem" in Denmark was slowly changing into integration "challenge". She concluded her speech by stating that the position of migrants in their host societies was changing: migrants used to be labeled as "guest workers" or "2nd generation immigrants" and did not really oppose to it – now, people were hopefully becoming more aware of their individuality and thus more committed to issues and practice of citizenship.

Discussion

In the ensuing debate, a few remarks were made on Islam: it was pointed out that violence was violence, and that it could not all be justified or explained by religion. It was also stated that almost all societies were still male-dominated – there was maybe a biological precondition for this, which was reinforced and justified by politics and religion. To this, Ms. Selim responded that violence against women was of course not exclusive to Islam, but reinforced that there it found religious legitimacy. She said that fighting against religious principles was extremely difficult, and for this reason, it was difficult for Islamic cultures to fight against this violence. She also remarked that she did not want Islam to be compared against other cultures and their flaws and faults – she wanted to point out the faults as they were, to name them instead of avoiding them, and to fight against them. For this, she argued, one had to be aware of the space Europe was giving to religion – according to her in most mosques, orthodox religion was practiced, which would make it hard for the people attending those mosques to feel any kind of loyalty to Europe.

Next, it was asked if the fact that the "Democratic Muslims" Group considered themselves as a non-religious group, but wanted to contribute to religious debate wasn't contradictory. To this, Ms. Akdogan replied that the discourse in Denmark had been "literally ugly" to follow, people being categorized, turned into Muslims. She did not consider the mentioned fact as contradictory, for she thought that a Muslim and a citizen with a Muslim background were not the same. The group aimed at stimulating discussion on topics that appear in public discourse, but were not entirely clear for a majority of people.

A few more issues were raised. First, on behalf of the fact that one line of the agreement potential members of "Democratic Muslims" had to sign was that "religion is a private matter", it was argued that this was empirically not really true. This would also mean that religion and citizenship were not related. One participant claimed that the preaching of orthodoxy in mosques was legitimate, that they were the appropriate place for this, since there were other religions taught in schools. Another statement on the separation between public and private space was made: it was uttered that secularism was actually defended by believers. It was added that the idea of a neutral public space was fictional, but that this fiction was important and attempts to protect it from being colonized were necessary, the state playing an important role here.

Ms. Selim declared that, regardless of contrary notions, she wanted to defend and uphold secularism. She considered herself as an involved citizen who wants to transform Islam, to improve it – that is why she considered that orthodoxy in Islam had to be questioned and space for it should not be given without questioning.

Ms. Akdogan argued that religion could well be brought into public space, but that then it should not take first place in identity – she put emphasis on the idea that one should not bring religion into the public sphere in a way that would interfere with interaction on an equal level.

Mr. Kandel then added that there could be different levels of religion in public affairs. He affirmed that it was possible to go into politics with religious intentions and visions. However, one should not demand that their own view would be held in higher consideration than others or even as the only one – public

space was precisely room for compromise and dialogue of different ideas to reach compromise.

The concluding remarks of this session included the idea that the language we use to express our beliefs was important – if we wanted to bring religion into the public sphere, we should refrain from using the language of religion. Next, it was remarked that Islam had become more visible in Europe because it had become more radical, politicized and segregated. Consequently, it was argued that Islam had to be made public, to be brought into the public eye before it could be enlightened, as it had happened with other beliefs. The session ended with the reminder that religious criticism was well necessary but had to be done cautiously, for it could be very hurtful.

Session 2: Didactic Approaches – Practical Experience – Educational Projects
Number of participants: 15

Introduction and Moderation: Lisette Dekker
Dutch Centre for Political Participation, Amsterdam

After welcoming the participants, Ms. Lisette Dekker opened the session by remarking that, after about 40 years of migration inside and into Europe, it had become clear that the so-called "guest-workers" had come to stay, particularly in the last 25 years, when family reunions in the host societies began. Given this situation, new challenges for both the host societies and the migrant groups themselves arose, particularly concerning Islamic immigrants, due to their religion. To begin with, they needed mosques – but who would be responsible for the construction of these mosques? And would one mosque be enough to cater for every Islamic ethnic group? The very existence of different Islamic ethnic groups had not been so obvious at first. What groups were these, and what was their relation with western culture? Ms. Dekker continued by adding that these groups also needed schools, their own slaughterhouses and burial grounds. This implied negotiation between the referred Islamic groups and the host cultures – but who would represent each side? Since this negotiation took (and takes) place mostly at a political level (concerning local as well as national authorities), the political representation of migrant groups became an issue, too. Ms. Dekker proceeded to enumerate some positive and negative aspects concerning Islamic migrant groups that were clear today. As for problems, she mentioned that in some places we were witnessing the creation of separate societies (*Parallelgesellschaft*) and that discrimination on both the host and the migrant sides was visible. Housing conditions and high unemployment were also serious issues, as were the frequent school dropouts of the Islamic youth. This youth was also becoming more radical, leading to separation from society. However, on the positive side, Ms. Dekker referred that more and more Muslim immigrants received higher education – in the case of the Netherlands, 25% of Turkish and Moroccan youth – forming a new migrant elite. The political participation of Muslim immigrants was increasing as well, with the Netherlands' government including two Muslim migrants for the first time.

With these points, Ms. Dekker gave the floor to Mr. Haci Karacaer, the first contributor of the session.

Haci Karacaer
Marhaba Foundation, Amsterdam

PRESENTATION: **The Situation of Islam in the Netherland and the Marhaba Foundation**

Mr. Karacaer, quoting Jack Goody, referred to Islam as the new "specter haunting Europe". He said that the Muslim community was finding its place in Europe, settling and becoming socially and politically engaged, more visible, with its celebrations turning into a "place to be". Focusing his speech on the situation in the Netherlands, he referred that crime statistics of Muslim immigrants were not higher than those of earlier migrant communities, and that their overrepresentation was a result of current Dutch political populism. This populism meant that Muslims were still seen as outsiders, as "the others" and even as a threat by the public, which had little understanding of its actual teaching and practices. Mr. Karacaer argued that a fostering of a better understanding of Islam was a task of all Dutch citizens, since

Islam could no longer be considered a non-western religion. The bad image of Islam was a result of bad practices on all sides (populism and parallel societies, for example). Mr. Karacaer's opinion was that the Muslim community in the Netherlands needed new leaders, daring to find new ways that might diverge from the Islamic establishment, that could lead the Muslim community in a way that allowed them to simultaneously practice their religion and become part of the Dutch mainstream. Addressing a part of his speech to a Muslim audience, he emphasized that they must build up trust in society by an open doors policy, by criticizing other Muslims when necessary even if that meant reprimands, by thinking as individuals instead of trying to answer their current questions with what was written in the Qur'an. Mr. Karacaer then explained that, given the fact that in big Dutch cities, more than half of the school population had a migrant background, and given that there were so many other disadvantaged groups to be considered (not only ethnic), the real question was not just how to integrate Islamic migrants into institutions, but all those communities. To work on these issues, the Marhaba Foundation had been established in Amsterdam. Mr. Karacaer pointed out that, on the local level, its aims included getting people to work together to a common purpose, across communities. On a broader level, studies of proceedings in the rest of Europe and in the migrants' countries of origin would be made. Mr. Karacaer concluded by reminding that Islam had played a significant role in Europe since the eighth century, and that to fight conflict, it was important to know about this religion's history and its agenda. Once again referring to Jack Goody, he said that Muslims had to be treated as Peoples of the Book as well as Peoples of Europe.

Eva Grabherr
Staff member of okay. zusammen leben/ Information and Advice Centre for Immigration and Integration Issues in Vorarlberg, Austria

PRESENTATION: **A Burial Site for Muslims in Vorarlberg**

The floor was then given to Ms. Eva Grabherr, who presented her project of a Muslim burial site for an entire province in Vorarlberg, Austria, comprising 96 municipalities and all Muslim communities accommodated there, including different ethnic groups. She described this essentially as a participation and involvement project and explained that it was very particular as it was the first time that Muslims spoke out publicly about a need they were feeling regarding their religious difference – especially considering that Vorarlberg had been a generally homogeneous Catholic region. The region had to learn that the former guest workers were actually immigrants who had come to stay. It also became evident that, like in many other regions, Muslims were poorly represented in political committees – the project would act as an integration and learning opportunity for political participation of this group. Ms. Grabherr then focused on the process of this project: it started in 2002 with exploratory discussions on setting up "okay. zusammen leben" as an information and advice center for immigration and integration issues in Vorarlberg. In these discussions, several Muslim representatives independently mentioned the establishment of an Islamic burial site as an important issue, becoming a project idea, involving a process of gaining knowledge and experience from experts and the people most affected, and of then communicating this knowledge to decision-makers and to the public. Three milestones of this process were defined by Ms. Grabherr: „okay. zusammen leben" commissioned an expert to carry out a study on the organization of Islam in the region, and on the general knowledge needed for an Islamic cemetery, with the Muslim community acting as an advisory capacity. This was not without conflict – the Muslim community had to adapt to the rules of the knowledge society, while „okay. zusammen leben" had to learn about certain sensibilities in the Muslim communities. The second milestone was a detailed document from the Vorarlberg Districts Association on the establishment of and Islamic cemetery in the region – this document was a result of cooperation between experts, the Muslim communities and the local authorities. In August 2006, one municipality then took the decision to host the Islamic burial site. Ms. Grabherr described the third milestone as a brochure compiling the achievements of this process, aimed at the wider public. She then pointed out the decisive moments of this process: the Muslim communities were persuaded to rely on the process itself and not on the media discourse. They managed to create a joint campaign group, able to overcome intra-religious differences. A second moment was the fact that the Vorarlberg Districts Association accepted responsibility for this issue on a

voluntary basis, without outside pressures. The Catholic church, the largest religious community in the province and highly trusted by a majority of the population, proved to be a committed partner to the project, making this the third decisive factor. Ms. Grabherr then drew some conclusions from the process: it had been important to create a vehicle that defended the involved groups' interests, so these did not need to rely upon third parties. The project also valued detailed quality information, which contributed to an objective debate on the subject. Ms. Grabherr mentioned the participatory approach of the project – including local authorities / communities and Muslim representatives – as the personally most valued aspect. The whole process cast questions about the scarce public representation of minority groups in our societies. She concluded by stating that integration policies must not fail by viewing migrants as passive target groups, but that it was important to work on the representative value of our democratic institutions, addressing the reality of our societies as countries of immigration.

Discussion
In the following debate, Mr. Karacaer clarified some details concerning the Marhaba Foundation, explaining that it was mainly focusing on the education of young Muslims aged around 9 to 16, as well as on their view of their life in the Netherlands. The groups' activities for youngsters were not Muslim-exclusive, building upon cooperation with city schools, for example. He stated that the Foundation did not necessarily have political aims, but it wanted to facilitate discussion between those groups of Muslims who fought for political instruments and those who defended a highly separate / segregated way of life. He said that Marhaba Foundation, being a city initiative, was a secular association, its board including non-Muslims. He added that it tried to practice plurality, collaborating with numerous Islamic groups and institutions, some orthodox and some more skeptical.
Ms. Grabherr, when asked how one could transfer the lessons learned from her project to other communities, responded that that case could serve as an example of dealing with religious difference. While acknowledging that this was a context-specific case that would most likely not work in the same way in a city like Berlin, she reminded the audience of the considerable difficulties faced. The fact that the Muslim communities formed a society was an essential helping factor, as was cooperation between municipalities on the problem at hand. The media discourse too, constantly hunting for negative criticism, was an issue to be dealt with at all times. In Ms. Grabherr's opinion, the ways the project managed to deal with all these factors could serve as an example in other contexts.

Clémence Delmas
Initiator of the website Muslimische Stimmen, Berlin (www.muslimische-stimmen.de)

Presentation: **The Website „Muslimische Stimmen" (Muslim Voices)**

Next, the floor was given to Ms. Clémence Delmas, who proceeded to present the website www.muslimische-stimmen.de. According to her, the motivation leading to the creation of the site was the almost non-existing participation of Muslims in public debate. Other impulses came from the negative image of Muslims presented by the media, the high number of Muslims not represented by organizations and the lack of information on Islam in general. Ms. Delmas then stated that she chose the Internet for her project because it was inexpensive, reached a broad public, offered the possibility to use varied media, was interactive, offered the possibility to archive material, and because she hoped that the anonymity might foster discussion going beyond the politically correct. She explained that she preferred the term "Muslim" over "Islamic", because Muslim referred to people, whereas Islamic referred to a religious credo. She described www.muslimische-stimmen.de as an independent, pluralistic website where only words of hate were banished. Other characteristics she pointed out were that the site was non-religious and civic, promoting tolerance and engagement. She divided its goals into goals for Muslims and for non-Muslims. For Muslims, she wished to provide a basis for pluralistic discussion of different perspectives, to encourage social participation and to find solutions for existing problems. For non-Muslims, it aimed at showing the diversity of Muslim communities, at offering a platform for underrepresented voices and at providing answers to questions and fears. Ms. Delmas portrayed the contributors to the website as immensely varied, comprising unknown and well-known individuals from

different backgrounds, mainly between 20 and 40 years old. Their contributions were of all kinds of texts and media, divided into several categories, like Projects, Politics, Society, Religion and Personal Experiences. Ms. Delmas presented a section of the website called "Series", which included some sections with periodic publications – these included "Stimmen Aktuell", which was about personal experiences; "Mit Kummer, Koffer und Kismet", which portrayed the experiences of different generations; and "Außensicht", which focused on Muslims living in countries other than Germany. Ms. Delmas depicted the users of the website as mostly unknown, however, some journalists, politicians and associations had subscribed to its newsletter. According to her, the site had received very positive feedback, with special mention of the prize of the "Bündnis für Demokratie und Toleranz" in 2006. As for future plans, Ms. Delmas referred that she wished to cooperate with other sites and Muslim organizations, and that she aimed at using more video media and less text, for she believed that video were more accessible and more striking at the same time.

Jochen Müller
Ufuq e.V., Berlin

PRESENTATION: **Youth Culture, Religion and Democracy: New educational materials to prevent Islamism and Anti-Semitism among youths of Muslim origin**

Next, Jochen Müller took the floor, presenting the outlines of a project he aimed at starting in July 2007. He explained that the project planned to do extensive research on this topic and to mingle a researcher's and a teacher's approach. Mr. Müller proceeded to elicit the background of the project: as had happened in other countries, Germany only recently discovered that it had become an immigration country and that its guest workers were not leaving. In what concerned the Islamic community, this raised specific questions about their values, attitudes, traditions and religion. In addition, phenomena such as reislamization and the emergence of radical tendencies (i.e. Islamism and anti-Semitism) had recently caught the public eye. The debates around the identity of Islamic communities had been mixed, with Islamism on one site, and the finding of identity in western societies on the other. Mr. Müller argued that integration and the prevention of violence was a challenge to be faced by both "sides", the communities, the politicians, involved youth workers, etc. To face these challenges, he insisted that good information was of the essence, which brought him to explain the main pillars the project was based on: Firstly, intervention needed knowledge. The project aimed at collecting and presenting information on Islamic youth culture, on typical Islamist and Anti-Semitic attitudes among Muslim youths, and on the origins, background and dissemination of radical and antidemocratic ideologies, with special focus on the role of Arab and Turkish media. The second pillar presented was that intervention needed specific target groups and areas – target areas were those with a high percentage of Muslim inhabitants and their local institutions, target groups were marginalized youths and adults, youths from the Islamist milieu, youths with higher education (in an effort to make them role models), mosques willing to collaborate, and multipliers (teachers, educators, Imams, etc.) Thirdly, Mr. Müller mentioned that intervention needed skills and tools: the project meant not only to promote awareness among multipliers, but also to assist them by developing and offering seminars and materials, as well as practical help in class or in the field. For each of these pillars, Mr. Müller presented the intended means of implementation: For number one, it would be the continuous monitoring of tendencies; for number two, mobile teams for consulting and action; and for number three, development and dissemination, including seminars, materials and instruments for educators. Mr. Müller concluded by highlighting that one of the main aims of this project would be to give voice to the moderate and pluralistic voices in the Muslim communities, which he believed to constitute the majority, but which were exceedingly underrepresented.

Discussion
In the ensuing debate, Mr. Müller explained that one problem his project intended to address was the lack of information of the real dimension of radical ideologies. He believed the multipliers to be key figures in the prevention of these ideologies, for they would get access to Muslim youths – however, to achieve this, they must be highly trained. Furthermore, he intended for at least 50% of the team

members to be Muslims, in order to be able to approach the target groups better. One member of the audience remarked that it was difficult to approach the mosques for collaboration, due to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, but Mr. Müller was confident that the project would find cooperative partners.

On the matter of teaching and education, it was then argued that historical events such as the Holocaust had to be taught as everybody's history, and not as "German" history, in order for its lessons to be clear and relatable for everyone. Another example pointed out was the ignorance of history and even current events such as the conflict between Palestine and Israel, which lead to dangerous prejudice, showing that training for teachers in schools was urgently needed.

As a concluding remark, Ms. Grabherr added that, in order to discuss issues like anti-Semitism with the Muslim communities, one first might have to address *their* issues – like the fear of losing their sons to extremists. It would be an idea to let the Muslim community name their issues and then extending the debate