Wolfgang Schäuble, "Muslims in Germany" (September 27, 2006)

Abstract

The first plenary session of the German Conference on Islam, convened by Wolfgang Schäuble, took place on September 27, 2006, at Charlottenburg Palace (Berlin). Wolfgang Schäuble (born 1942) is a member of the CDU and was Federal Minister of the Interior from 1989 to 1991 and from 2005 to 2009. From 2009 to 2017, he held the office of Federal Minister of Finance. In October 2017, Schäuble was elected President of the German Bundestag.

Source

The first Islam Conference will be held this Wednesday at the Charlottenburg Palace. Anyone who casts an eye on this palace's main courtyard will get a foretaste of the topic that will occupy the conference. The relationship between state and religion.

In the courtyard there is an equestrian portrait of the Great Elector Frederick William I (1620 to 1688). The political challenges that Prussia faced in the seventeenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries were different from today's, but the Great Elector made groundbreaking decisions in his time on how the state and religious groups living in it could develop the best possible relationship.

Charlottenburg Palace was built at the end of the seventeenth century, thus, in an epoch marked by the wars of Europe with the Ottoman Empire, but also by religious conflicts in and between the powers of Central Europe. At that early date, Prussia already committed itself to a policy of tolerance unmatched on the continent: Tolerance not only toward all Christian religions but also toward Jews and Muslims. Thus, for example, twenty Turkish soldiers were placed at the disposal of the Prussian King Frederick William I. The king had a hall constructed for them in Potsdam near the new soldiers' church (Garrison Church) to serve as a prayer hall. And when in 1740 a letter of inquiry was submitted to Frederick the Great, asking whether a Catholic living in a Protestant town could obtain citizenship, he wrote, "All religions are equal and good, if only the people who confess to them are honorable people; and if the Turks (and heathens) were to come and wanted to reside in the land, we would build them mosques (and churches)." As *Realpolitiker*, the Great Elector and Frederick the Great knew very exactly what they were granting to whom and why. For political and not perhaps for religious reasons, Prussia allowed tolerance of people who were prepared to participate actively and productively in building the country and to accept its laws. Of course, the contact of Europe with Islam ran an ambivalent course over centuries: On one hand, intellectual, cultural, and social fertilization and inspiration resulted, but on the other, there were also always conflicts, often enough violent ones. The Muslims were on one hand cofounders of the intellectual foundations of Europe's Middle Ages, as they not only saved and spread the sources of Greek thinking, but also provided their own contribution to culture, science, and intellectual life, from natural science and astronomy to medicine, literature, and art. On the other hand, the campaigns of the Moors, the crusades of the Christian Occident, the expansion of the Ottomans to the gates of Vienna, and the disputes in the Balkans are a bloody part of European history.

If today talk is of a "battle of cultures," religion is attributed the role of an impelling, if not causative, force in the events. Especially after September 11, 2001, many people think less of the conflict of Christians among themselves but instead of the dispute between the Christion and the Islamic worlds. However, upon sober examination, an

encompassing battle of cultures or even of religions cannot be observed. Neither are the states on this earth shaped by Islam in a war with the West, nor can we see hostility on a massive scale in the population groups of our western societies. But it is true that many members of the Muslim population groups in Europe and in Germany have relished Islamist messages, and unfortunately it is likewise true that a small number have felt called to commit violent terroristic acts.

Religion was, and is, repeatedly misused, not to mention perverted, to justify violence. Cardinal [Karl] Lehmann recently (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 20) pointed out that all religions are familiar with the temptation to commit or glorify violence in the name of belief. It may be a coincidence that, in the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century, supposedly religiously motivated and religiously based violence is a phenomenon that for the most part is associated with Islam. For the vastly overwhelming number of Muslims living in this world, this is a catastrophic, traumatic experience. Their religion, their culture, and their lifestyle are increasingly, and often also falsely, under general suspicion, which is certainly one of many aspects of the devilish calculus by the architects of terror.

The problem of the conscious sowing of discord between religions and the cultures they create is not only one of foreign policy for Europe, and for Germany itself. The problem is related not just to our relationship with the Islamic world, but we must also solve it domestically. Muslims in Germany must be able to feel that they are German Muslims. As citizens of a religiously neutral, but not religion-free democratic state of laws, they must be able to be invulnerable to the temptations and false paths of terrorist extremists.

Integration, as one of the most important domestic challenges, was, and is, for me one of the reasons why I extended invitations for this conference. At the heart of the matter for me is the question of how we induce the Muslims in Germany to think of themselves even more strongly as German Muslims, induce them to feel at home in this country, to play a more active part in and commit themselves to the country's social concerns. How can all people, regardless of religion, live together successfully in Germany, and how can we at the same time avoid opening up new rifts in the foundations of different religions? To that end, it is first necessary to sit down together at one table and to discuss what connects us to one another in all our variety, and at the same time to honestly articulate what separates us. But only the person who is conscious of his own roots can recognize what separates and strengthen what connects.

Even if most Muslims are often more clearly conscious of their religious and cultural identity than many of the Germans born here, it is still true that Germany is not a godless society, even if many Muslims who live here may at times feel that that is the case. We are not a Christian-dominated state or a "Christians' club," but a state whose traditions, values, and understanding of justice have, and always will have, Christian roots and traditions.

Anyone who wants to be at home in Germany must respect those roots. He can of course hold onto his faith and onto familiar traditions but should at the same time know and accept the rules that apply in this country. Our constitution protects and guarantees basic rights and citizens' rights for all the people who live here, regardless of their origins, skin color, or religion. No one is allowed to suspend those rules, not with regard to cultural or religious convictions, either. This includes, for example, that according to the basic law women have the same rights as men. This includes the right to freedom of opinion and likewise the freedom of religion.

However, just obeying those rules alone still does not lead to successful integration. The Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf, who lives in France, describes this insight with the words, "When I commit myself to my host country, when I consider it mine, when I am of the opinion that it is from now on part of me and I am part of it, and when I behave accordingly, then I have the right to criticize any of its aspects; vice versa, when this country respects me,

when it acknowledges my contribution, when it considers me in my uniqueness a part of it from now on, then it has the right to reject certain aspects of my culture that may be irreconcilable with its way of living or the spirit of its institutions."

If we are not able together, by means of these basic rights and principles, to reach agreement about what connects us to one another, regardless of whether Muslims, Jews, atheists, or Christians, and if all efforts to achieve integration fall short, what is the best course to achieve integration for the person who does not want to find or cannot find anything that connects us? Does a person really want to live here, if he does not learn the language? For that reason, the political or legal institutions alone are not adequate for successful integration. A constitution alone will not be enough in that case, either. Integration requires even further foundations for it to be brought to life by the citizens.

Without the commitment of the individual, no state will come into being: The statement of Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, according to which the liberal secularized state lives on premises that it itself cannot guarantee, is frequently, and often incompletely, quoted regarding the role of religion and the state in Germany. The former constitutional judge continues that the "secularized, worldly state must ultimately live from inner drives and binding forces that are mediated by the religious faith of its citizens." For Christians, this means that they "no longer perceive the state in its worldliness as something foreign, hostile to their faith, but as the opportunity for freedom, which it is also their task to obtain and realize."

This statement applies analogously to the Muslims in Germany. If they take it seriously, they will become German Muslims. The individual, regardless of whether Christian or Muslim, will commit himself for the good of all, namely, only in a community with which he can identify, in which he likes to live. It is no accident that even such an avid proponent of the concept of constitutional patriotism as Jürgen Habermas in his appeal for the "Rebirth of Europe," written in 2003 with Jacques Derrida, states that it is ultimately the "power of feelings" that connects Europe's citizens to one another and can give them a common identity. As a product of reason, constitutional patriotism is just not enough. I cannot explain just on that basis why millions of Germans and Turks, Arabs, and Afghans living here stick German flags to their cars or raise flags on their balconies for the football World Cup. If we want to feel that we belong to a community, there must be something that connects us to one another on a deeper human level, on precisely the level where religion and culture, values and identity also reside. [....]

The specifically German solution in the relationship of state and religion is based on the insight that, given the great plurality, state and society are held together not just by laws, not just by political and legal institutions, but that factors which bring about identity are required. For that reason, Muslims with their faith must not be left out in forming this country. If they are excluded or exclude themselves, a state within a state is created, and rifts within the society come about. Just that was what Prussia already sought to prevent.

By institutional regulation that makes integration possible, religion can even today contribute more to identity formation, to development of common ground for people in their cultural and political life, than by its total ouster from the public arena.

As part of the German Islam Conference we will have to once again become aware of our own roots, which were so defining for the development of the unique German constitutional law regarding religion, with all its opportunities for all religions. The question about separation of religion and state was, in Europe's middle, in Germany, the starting point of a course of development that lasted more than a thousand years and was for a long time a struggle, at times even a very bloody conflict. Explaining and understanding the historical background of our German interpretation of religion and state, its differentiation, too, from other European models, will be an

important task in the discourse with German Muslims. German constitutional law regarding religion provides opportunities for all religions, because it at core contains the idea of religious plurality without which development in a multi-religion Germany would not have been possible.

Of course, this long development was primarily shaped by the debate of the state with the Christian church, and it should therefore not come as a surprise that the concept of state-church law describes the existing legal situation more precisely and narrowly. Nevertheless, our constitution is very well prepared to meet challenges to laws regarding religion that arise from globalization and the floods of immigrants.

Especially in this area, it seems advisable to make the case for a division of labor between church and state in dealing with legal and organizational issues regarding religion. Who, if not the Christian churches, could communicate more credibly to the representatives of Islam the development in past centuries and the constitutional situation regarding religion in Germany that surrounds and defines us? Such a cognitive process, which could take place completely without participation of the state, would be an important stimulus that could emanate from the German Islam Conference and lead to a harmonization of viewpoints.

Both sides, the state and the citizens, are required for the success of integration. This conference is not only to work out proposals for policy or the state, but also to encourage all religious groups to view the opportunity for freedom as a task arising from their faith.

This task emerges within the general framework of our liberal-democratic state of laws. And the latter is to protect from all threats, both inside and out. It is part of our history and European identity that, in addition to the struggle for the correct relationship between religion and the state, many of the freedoms that we enjoy today were fought hard for over centuries: the right to express one's own opinion, freedom of the press, equality of men and women, free, equal, and secret elections—all the things that many people in this country consider self-evident are anything but that in many countries of the world. Europe had to go through the Reformation, Enlightenment and two world wars emanating from German soil to get to where it is today: to a union of currently twenty-five countries that have taken up the cause of striving for freedom, justice, and peace. To protect the precious and fragile possession of freedom, to guarantee the rights of the individual and at the same time to provide for the individual's safety are the most noble and important tasks of our state.

In the process, weighing security against freedom has not gotten easier. Influenced by the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, London and Madrid, Bagdad and Kabul, Djerba and Istanbul, many people feel the fragility of our societies in a completely new manner. Not just a few people are concerned that the coexistence of Christians and Muslims could be strained more than less by fear, suspicions, and prejudices in Germany, too.

To this is added a special situation in Germany that is completely different from that at the time of the Great Elector, or even basically different from forty years ago, when the first guest workers came to the Federal Republic: Today, more than three million Muslims live in the Federal Republic. The majority of them like living here, but to many, Germany is still foreign even in the second or third generation. Some struggle to learn the language, many drop out of school, and the unemployment rate among Muslims in particular is consequently high. They themselves and the state must therefore do everything to have their integration succeed. A completed education and a job are the most certain basis for peaceful coexistence and successful integration, because they result in social participation and recognition through accomplishment. And the non-Muslim social majority must redouble its efforts to abolish its prejudices and fears, and the resulting discrimination and disparagement.

[....] The German Islam Conference wants more than only to initiate a non-committal dialogue, but instead wants

to say where we want to be together in five, ten, or thirty years and how we will get there together.

However, the discussion about religion and values, regardless of whether Christianity or Islam, is not only a private matter, but for many citizens it is a part of their personality and lifestyle, which they carry into forming the state. At the same time, it is also true, and I emphasize that fact just as clearly, that a religious community which considers human dignity disposable or rejects democratic regulations for living together in society cannot claim to protect positive religious freedom if the associated activity is directed against our liberal-democratic constitution.

If we want to describe what we expect, and may expect, from each other in this society, we must first ask ourselves what our demands are on ourselves. In doing so, we will determine that, despite all controversies, Islam has contributed a great deal, for example, about the role of women or the relationship of religion and the state of laws, that threatens to slip away from many in Germany: for example, emphasis on the importance of family; respect for the elderly; consciousness and pride in view of one's own history, culture, religion, and tradition; and the daily life of one's own religious convictions. Especially in this area, Muslims can contribute a great deal in this society.

Aside from all the legal questions, the engagement with Islam is also a discourse about the role of man in the modern world. And that is perhaps the most fruitful and challenging aspect. The globalized world, with its meeting and fusing of cultures, forces localization. The rapid spread of free markets to be observed after 1989 brought with it many changes. The freedom of markets, which initially could operate without borders, has consequences for people throughout the entire world; people were often unaware of the consequences, and they had, and have, no values or measures to fit those consequences. In Germany, we are also recognizing that the globalization wave of the last fifteen years, which is primarily based on economic conformity to law and subject to economic objectives, has allowed something to happen in people's common existence that can be described as an "emotional vacuum." Thus, the German Islam Conference also seeks to confront the hypothesis of many Islamic intellectuals that the West is "a version of society based on an excess of economic rationality and relativism of values, without any worth as a model." It is certainly true that a growing trend to seek collective identities beyond the material can be reported, that longing for slower change has made itself felt, and that the need for connection and reliability is evident. We can be very thankful that this question has also been raised from the perspective of German Muslims.

In addition to guaranteeing internal security, working for a further improved common existence of all the people in this country is perhaps the most important task of domestic policy, and appropriate handling of religion is a central part of successful integration. In the framework of the German Islam Conference, the Federal Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the responsible ministries of the federal and state governments, is concentrating on the task that is very specifically our business, namely, on the connections between the state and the religious communities. Just as we have connections to the Catholic and the Protestant Churches, we in Germany must also try to develop a relationship between the state and the Muslim faithful. [....]

Source of the original German text: Wolfang Schäuble, "Muslime in Deutschland," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 27, 2006.

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Recommended Citation: Wolfgang Schäuble, “Muslims in Germany” (September 27, 2006), published in: German History Intersections, <https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/migration/ghis:document-113> [September 14, 2026].