



PRESS RELEASE

"All Rights for Everyone": the German policy of positive neutrality toward religion has proven successful at fostering integration, but questions remain

The SVR's 2016 Annual Report looks at religious diversity in Germany as an immigration country and the resulting institutional, political and legal challenges. Equal institutional treatment of Islam is on the right track, but there are still open issues. The correlation between religion and integration, however, is generally overestimated. And the Integration Barometer shows: the integration climate "remains stable" in Germany. But an ambivalent picture emerges when it comes to the acceptance of Islam: high level of approval for Islamic religious instruction; but most disagree with the statement that Islam is part of Germany.

Berlin, 26 April 2016. The immigration country of Germany is characterised by increasing religious diversity: Islam has become established as a third major religion alongside Christianity and Judaism. This trend is being further strengthened by the high numbers of refugees arriving mainly from Muslim countries. Two opposing forces are therefore at work in Germany: on the one hand, there is a trend toward secularisation and diminishing religious affiliation and, on the other, an increase in and differentiation of religious opportunities which is also (but not only) the result of immigration. The SVR's 2016 Annual Report focuses on the politically relevant question: how should Germany, as a secular, but not laical country, deal with an increase in religious diversity brought about mainly by immigration?

Upon presentation of the SVR's Annual Report entitled "Many Gods, One State: Religious Diversity and Participation in Germany as an Immigration Country," Prof. Dr. Christine Langenfeld, Chairwoman of the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration (SVR), said: "Germany has become a multi-religious country in demographic terms. In addition, a policy of positive neutrality toward religion, which is embedded in the Basic Law, is rigorously applied to other religions. It is consistent with the German legal tradition of demonstrating tolerance for religions and religious needs. German law is proving to be flexible, and is making solutions possible that prevent unreasonable demands on religious people where possible and that everyone can live with. The prerequisite, however, is that personal religious convictions are not absolute. In this case, the principle applies that the primacy of basic democratic values may not be weakened by recognising religious differences. The Basic Law is and will remain the framework for shared values."

The SVR's Annual Report analyses how the government has been dealing with religious pluralism in Germany in recent decades, particularly the equal institutional treatment of Islamic religious communities. The Report shows that: "The legal and institutional integration of Islam has been much more far-reaching and successful than is often assumed," said Langenfeld. The Annual Report looks at the correlation between integration and religion as well as the handling of conflicting norms between constitutional and religious values (of all religious communities).

The state has shown tolerance and flexibility in the institutional integration of Islam, now it's up to Muslims to do their part

Great progress has been made in the equal institutional treatment of Islam in recent years. This is true both for the introduction of Islamic religious instruction at state schools and the establishment of Islamic theology at universities. Worth mentioning here are also the agreements ("state contracts") concluded by the federal states of Hamburg and Bremen with Islamic organisations which regulate



aspects of the religious practices of Muslim citizens, including religious holidays, religious instruction, the building of places of worship, burial practices but also questions related to shared basic values.

"The government and policy-makers have clearly signalled that they will accommodate Muslims in subsequent steps toward institutional equality on par with, e.g. churches and the Jewish communities. This is to be welcomed because it would not be acceptable to prevent the many believers who live in Germany on a permanent basis from cooperating with the state within the universally applicable legal framework. Now it is up to Muslims to advance the process of equal institutional treatment that is already under way," said Langenfeld. This addresses, e.g. the problem of the continued lack of institutional prerequisites necessary for forming a religious community. This mainly involves issues related to membership in a religious community, clear orientation on fostering religious beliefs, reducing dependence on foreign influences and the legitimacy of the organisations that represent believers. In relation to these points, it must be taken into consideration that Islam is organised differently than Christianity. Apart from this, the institutional hurdles preventing the formation of an Islamic religious community (and, associated with this, for recognising its status as a public law corporation (*Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts*)) have also been lowered by the Federal Administrative Court to accommodate the special institutional structure of Muslim communities. Now that the government has done its part to grant institutional access, it is the SVR's opinion that it is now time for the Muslim stakeholders in particular to do their part in (further) institutionalising Islam in Germany.

The organisational and representational shortcomings described in the Annual Report are also evident in one of the central successful projects of German Islam policy in the last few years: establishing and expanding Islamic theology at German universities. In this context, the SVR emphatically shares the criticism articulated by, among others, various Islamic university teachers, of the organisations' stance on questions related to theological content and personnel when appointing relevant department chairs and of the excessive influence of the organisations. Critical reflection and analysis, also of the content of beliefs, must be accepted by all religious communities as an integral component of theology as a denominational science.

SVR clearly rejects religiously motivated exemptions from class

Limits to religious legal pluralism are rightly set in the area of education. Requests from parents of different religious communities to exempt their children from sports, swimming or biology class must be refused in the SVR's opinion. "Participation in class at school makes an important contribution to encouraging children's personal development, forming a democratic community and strengthening shared values," said Langenfeld. The Expert Council supports the practice of rejecting religiously motivated exemptions in schools. Compulsory school attendance clearly takes precedence.

Discrimination in the name of god? Church labour law in a(n increasingly) secular working environment

Religious pluralism of public life, however, is only one of the two trends occurring in German society. In addition to increasing differentiation of religious convictions and world views, the number of individuals who don't believe in god or who practice their beliefs without any affiliation to a religious community has significantly risen in recent years. Germany has thus become more secular, which gives rise to challenges, especially for the established Christian churches. This can be seen, for example, in the area of ecclesiastical labour law which generally grants precedence to the Church's right to self-determination over the individual civil liberties of its employees. The principle that usually applies to work of "not mixing business with pleasure" doesn't apply to employees who work at church institutions, particularly if they themselves are affiliated with the church. The strong, constitutionally-based position of church institutions as an employer is increasingly in need of explanation and legitimacy given the secularisation of society. The dismissal of a Catholic senior physician by a Catholic clinic because she divorced and remarried is met with just as little understanding as a scenario, which



would not be improbable in the future given the advancing institutionalisation of Islam, of a Muslim nurse who works in a nursing home run by Muslims who takes off her headscarf outside of work only to face labour law consequences depending on her Muslim employer's interpretation of the Islamic headscarf. Against this background, the SVR calls on religious communities, and, above all, the Christian church, to be moderate in the institutional actions they take.

The role of religion in the integration of immigrants is overestimated

What is also noteworthy: the correlation between religion and integration is often 'doubly overestimated' in the public debate. There is no solid scientific evidence that individual religiosity or religion generally makes participation in education and the labour market more difficult. On the other hand, empirical research shows that differences in how successfully individual religious groups are integrated are not primarily due to religious affiliation. Social background is and will remain the key factor to success or failure in the education system and, subsequently, the labour market.

SVR's 2016 Integration Barometer 2016 shows ambivalent attitude toward Islam

While state and religious constitutional law demonstrate openness to the institutional integration of Islam, the survey results of the SVR's 2016 Integration Barometer show a more ambivalent overall picture in terms of the acceptance of Islam: there is approval of equal institutional treatment, e.g. for Islamic religious instruction. 65.0 per cent of respondents without a migration background are in favour of Islamic religion instruction as an optional subject at schools. Most people would also accept a mosque being built in their neighbourhood. An ambivalent picture emerges, however, in response to the abstract question of whether Islam is part of Germany. An ambivalent picture emerges, however, in response to the abstract question of whether Islam is part of Germany. Just over half of respondents without a migration background (53.1%) disagreed "completely" or "mostly" with the statement that "Islam is part of Germany". A strong minority of 46.9 per cent of people surveyed without a migration background, on the other hand, agreed "completely and fully" or "mostly" with the statement. Among respondents with a Turkish migration background, the percentage of those who agreed was highest at 71.4%. In contrast, only 44.6% of (*Spät-*)*Aussiedler*, or repatriated ethnic Germans, believe that Islam is part of Germany. There are thus considerable differences in perceptions between the individual groups of origin (see Fig. 17)

The Integration Barometer shows that the integration climate remains stable

A total of 5,396 people with and without a migration background were interviewed in Germany between March and August 2015 for the SVR's 2016 Integration Barometer. The results are representative for Germany and for the various groups of origin. Based on the extensive sampling of immigrants, it is also possible to determine the perceptions of various groups of origin. The core component of the Integration Barometer is the measurement of the integration climate. It focuses on how the immigration society is 'functioning' in various key areas (community, labour market, social ties and education). The result: the integration climate in Germany continues to be largely viewed as friendly by people with and without a migration background. The result corresponds to a school mark of "good". "This shows that the integration process has a stable foundation," said the SVR Chairwoman. But it was also found that respondents who rate their personal economic situation better were more likely to have a positive perception of the integration climate. It was also evident that: "Frequent social contact between people with and without a migration background positively affects perceptions of the integration climate – in contrast, people who have little contact with immigrants are likely to be more sceptical."

The survey for the Integration Barometer also asked which aspects are seen as important for belonging to society in Germany. The result is surprising: belonging to society is much less commonly associated than could be assumed with exclusive criteria like being born in Germany, having German ancestors or being affiliated with the Christian community (see Fig. 9, 10, 12), but more with German citizenship (see Fig. 14). Across all groups, however, the most important criterion for belonging to



society is a permanent job (see Fig. 16). Perceived integration through work also apparently applies for the immigrant population.

Migration and development: intelligently designed migration management is needed

This year's special section of the SVR's Annual Report addresses how the stronger connection between migration and development strived for by the EU has developed. It was found that the prerequisites for a coherent migration and development policy continue to be lacking at EU level – although this is essential for the frequently invoked fight against the causes of people seeking refuge. Even though it is the SVR's point of view that the potential of labour migration for development policy should not be overestimated, intelligently designed migration management that links foreign, labour market and development policies is still needed more than ever before. Consequently, EU member states should expand the number of mobility partnerships that open up project-specific and legal migration channels so that this promising instrument can play a role in the development of the countries of origin over the long run.

You can download the SVR Annual Report 2016 from <http://www.svr-migration.de/en/publications/>

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About the Expert Council

The Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration is based on an initiative of the Stiftung Mercator and the VolkswagenStiftung and consists of seven member foundations. In addition to the Stiftung Mercator and the VolkswagenStiftung, these are: Bertelsmann Stiftung, Freudenberg Stiftung, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft and the Vodafone Foundation Germany. The Expert Council is an independent and non-profit monitoring, evaluating and advisory council which takes a stand on issues relevant to integration and migration policy and offers practically oriented policy consultation. The results of its work are published in an annual report.

The SVR includes nine researchers from different disciplines and research institutes: Prof. Dr. Christine Langenfeld (Chairwoman), Prof. Dr. Hacı Halil Uslucan (Vice-Chairman) and Prof. Dr. Gianni D'Amato, Prof. Dr. Thomas K. Bauer, Prof. Dr. Petra Bendel (since 2016), Prof. Dr. Wilfried Bos, Prof. Dr. Claudia Diehl, Prof. Dr. Heinz Faßmann, Prof. Dr. Christian Joppke as well as Prof. Dr. Ludger Pries (until 2016).

More information can be found at: www.svr-migration.de