

Muslim NGOs in Austria and Public Awareness Building During Ramadan – An Approach towards Civil Society Dialogue on Behalf of Muslim (Migrant)s

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Abstract

The research project deals with selected Austrian NGOs of Muslim and inter-religious background and their concerns as transmitters of knowledge about Islam and its various cultures in the context of Austrian civil society. Austria can act as model to other European states in regard to how Austria deals with Islam which is legally recognized since 1912. This recognition which was confined to the Hanafite law school was extended to the other Sunni law schools and to Shiite Islam in 1979. Islam is represented in the Austrian school- and education system, too. Since 1983, Islam is taught as a subject at public schools, an Islamic High School has existed since 1999 as well as an Islamic Religious Pedagogic Academy founded in 1998. In the winter semester 2007/08, a Masters Study Program will start at the Faculty for Philosophy and Education Sciences at Vienna University. Due to history as well as to current developments connected with Islam, in particular political Islam, the Austrian public became more sensitive and concerned when focusing on this topic. This attitude increased since the year 2004 and the beginning of negotiations for a future EU-membership of Turkey. Not only interest, but also at the same time concern and skepticism referring to Turkey and Islam in general, grew among the Austrian majority population, and political parties used both topics, Turkey & Islam, for gaining votes during election periods. Because Islam is officially recognized in Austria, its community is well organized and represented by the *Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft (IGGiÖ; Islamic Faith Community in Austria)*, although this covers a quite heterogeneous group with a Turkish majority followed by Muslims from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Arabs mainly from Syria and Egypt. Other Muslims are coming from various parts of the world, e.g. from African or Asian countries. In this research project, a special focus was laid on Ramadan activities of selected Muslim and inter-religious NGOs and their impact on Austrians based on the assumption that religion and identity play important roles in today's civil society.

Academic Résumé

The research was conducted in Austria on behalf of the Austrian Turkish Forum of Sciences (OTW, cf. <http://www.otw.co.at>) for the Austrian Research Association within the framework of the study group *civil society* under the title “*Die Rolle von NGOs mit muslimischem bzw. interreligiösem Hintergrund bei der Imagebildung von Muslimen in der österreichischen Öffentlichkeit während des Fastenmonats Ramadan*”. Nine selected NGOs representing the heterogeneous situation of Islam throughout Austria were given semi-structured in-depth interviews on topics such as their intentions; the target audiences they are addressing in general and especially during Ramadan; what their experiences are; which kind of impact can be resumed due to EU-negotiations with Turkey; etc.

The research was conducted on the basis of 46 interviews, media screening and classical desktop research and provides an inter-disciplinary approach in involving disciplines such as sociology of religion and migration, history, gender studies, imagology studies as well as oriental and migration studies.