

Muslims in Europe – European Muslims

Muslims in Europe – European Muslims: Engaging in Dialogue, Fostering Inclusion

Conference and Workshop

Berlin, March 2007

Contents

Conference programme.....page 3

Conference report.....page 5

Workshop programme.....page 14

Workshop report.....page 16

Final conclusions.....page 22

Links.....page 22

Conference, British Embassy Berlin, 22 March 2007

Programme

09.30-11.00 Opening Session

Welcome: *Hugh Mortimer*, Chargé d'Affaires, British Embassy

ENGAGING MUSLIM COMMUNITIES: LESSONS FROM THE UK, GERMANY AND EUROPE

Moderator: *Asad Ahmad*, Newscaster, BBC Television

Keynote speeches:

- *Mark Carroll*, Department for Communities and Local Government
- *Dr. Markus Kerber*, Federal Ministry of the Interior

Questions & Answers

11.00-11.30 Coffee Break

11.30-13.00 Panel Discussion

MUSLIMS IN PUBLIC LIFE: PROMOTING INCLUSION OR REINFORCING BARRIERS?

Introduction: *Abdul Hadi Christian Hoffman*, Muslim Academy in Germany

Moderator: *Nasreen Suleaman*, BBC

Speakers:

- *Sajjad Karim*, British MEP (Lib Dem)
- *Dr. Hans-Peter Uhl*, Home Affairs Spokesman of the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Party
- *Mounir Azzoui*, Former Press Spokesman, Central Council of Muslims in Germany
- *Ahmed Larouz*, MEX-IT, Intercultural Management, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Discussion

13.00-14.30 Buffet Lunch

14.30-16.00 Panel Discussion

ISLAM & THE MEDIA: FOSTERING UNDERSTANDING OR STRENGTHENING STEREOTYPES?

Introduction: *Michael Bird OBE*, Director, British Council Germany

Moderator: *Sabina Matthay*, Editor, RBB Inforadio

Speakers:

- *Jörg Lau*, Die Zeit
- *Haras Rafiq*, Publisher and Founder of the Sufi Muslim Council
- *Navid Akhtar*, Gazelle Media, UK
- *Dr Nabila Ramdani*, Commentator and Researcher, Paris

Discussion

16.00-16.15 Coffee Break

16.15-17.00 Final Session

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction: *Hugh Mortimer*, Chargé d'Affaires

Speakers:

- *Prof. Dr Havva Engin*, Pädagogische Hochschule Karlsruhe
- *Dr Anas Al-Shaikh Ali*, Association of Muslim Social Scientists (UK)

Closing Remarks

Conference, British Embassy Berlin, 22 March 2007

Report

1. Opening Addresses

Dr Markus Kerber, Federal Ministry of the Interior (Germany)

Dr Kerber said that Germany had approximately 3.3 million Muslims from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and nationalities, ranging from Asia, North Africa and Turkey to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Consequently one could not speak of Islam per se. One of the German government's main domestic policy goals was, therefore, to ensure that people of different cultures and religions were able to live together peacefully and respectfully. He cited Germany's *Islam-Konferenz* as an example of good practice in this area. It comprised regular, open and target-oriented dialogue between the State and representatives from Muslim organisations, as well as Muslims active in public life, such as teachers, scientists and academics. *Islam-Konferenz* discussions focussed on issues such as how Muslims could develop in Germany, how Islam as a religion could be reconciled with German constitutional law, and how the economic and social position of certain groups of Muslims could be improved. The government wanted to approach this challenge by speaking *with* Muslims instead of *about* them. The goal was to create trust on both sides, and this had worked so far. Though it was still too early to present concrete results, clear progress had been made towards reaching an agreement about what form this cooperation should take.

The Federal German government had made the topic of intercultural dialogue one of the focuses of its European Council Presidency. Dr Kerber hoped that the EU integration ministers' informal meeting in Potsdam in May 2007 would offer the chance to deepen the integration and inclusion of Muslims in Germany through a comprehensive exchange of experiences with other EU countries. Germany and the UK had similar opportunities and problems and were looking for similar answers. Dr Kerber hoped that this dialogue would not just provide solutions, but also develop mutual understanding and trust in each other.

Quote:

"We should make sure that beliefs cannot become a political weapon. We do not want a religion that influences policies...we need a constructive intercultural dialogue that identifies and tackles problems." (Dr Markus Kerber, Federal Ministry of the Interior)

Mark Carroll, Department for Communities and Local Government (UK)

Mr Carroll looked back to the disturbances in 2001 in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham and stated that much work had since been done. He described the British Government's vision as "a society with a common sense of belonging, similar life opportunities and positive relationships between people of different backgrounds". The UK's Muslims made up around 3% of the population, and 52% were under 25, with a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, levels of education and employment, and experience. Consequently, no organisation could represent the Muslim community as a whole and the UK had taken a much broader approach than Germany: one that looked to consolidate extensive alliances, including those with Muslim communities in other Member States.

Britain's Muslim communities were certainly *not* a problem – they generated huge opportunities for Britain, helping it to connect with other countries and generating wealth as well as role models. He rejected the long-established notion of the 'melting pot' society in favour of his own 'Lancashire hotpot' metaphor – a kind of stew where the ingredients remain distinct but are still slightly transformed in the process. He saw Britain as a cohesive society in which people could still uphold the things that made them different.

One current dilemma, however, was the fact that British Muslims felt that hostility towards their communities was increasing. Recent strategies to tackle this had included the creation of the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2006, which endeavoured to ensure that mainstream public services adapted to accommodate ethnic and religious minority groups. The government was committed to its promise to "challenge robustly the ideas of those extremists who seek to undermine our way of life". Further new measures included the Racial and Religious Hatred Act and the provision of guidance for higher education institutions and prisons to combat radicalisation.

Quotes:

"The government's vision is of a society with a common sense of belonging, similar life opportunities and positive relationships between people of different backgrounds."

"Fundamentally, we are a country that is at ease with itself - we are not a society in crisis."

(Mark Carroll, Department for Communities and Local Government)

2. Key Themes Discussed during the Conference

The opening addresses by Dr Kerber and Mr Carroll led into a discussion on German and UK integration policy. In this, and the subsequent sessions (*Muslims in Public Life* and *Islam and the Media*), several key themes emerged:

Integration

Since there was no textbook definition of integration, nor any reliable, empirical data on the subject, it was difficult to measure its success. Did it simply mean shared values? Did it mean not expressing one's own culture? Integration measures were denounced by some as one-sided, since the host community was not necessarily encouraged to integrate with or accept migrants. This was evident from the fact that many people who had been born in Europe and grown up as Europeans were still being labelled 'immigrants'. It was acknowledged that there were difficult issues involved in creating cohesive societies. A government could not intervene in citizens' private space to make sure that they interacted with people from different ethnic and religious groups, neither could it tell people how to dress or behave unless it interfered with the country's laws.

Germany was criticised for having waited too long before addressing the issue of integration, and for having neglected to establish a proper integration strategy for migrants. This was partly to do with the fact that integration was a relatively new phenomenon for Germany, since many immigrants had originally come to Germany as 'guest workers' and had not been expected to stay. For many years Germany had refused to acknowledge itself as an immigration country. However, the fact that the debate had become more heated was a good sign that Germany was finally learning to live with this new identity and no longer regarded its lack of integration as a temporary problem. Germany's recent dialogue with representatives of Islam had been long overdue and the country had for too long expected people to integrate themselves. One speaker warned that immigration could be a burden as well as an enhancement and believed that German law should be amended, not just to promote integration, but to introduce sanctions for those who refused to integrate. This led to a lively debate in which several delegates criticised these views as outdated and ill-informed. For example, the commonly-held belief that integration was a problem in schools was greatly exaggerated according to research by *Die Zeit*. The German media tended to focus on a few extreme cases.

It was suggested that the UK was further ahead than other European countries concerning integration policy. There were many examples in the UK of people of Muslim background making an important contribution to business, sport and the media. However, many UK representatives felt that only an approach had been found rather than an actual solution. While metaphors such as the 'melting-pot' may sound

appealing, they were of little use when societies were faced with difficult questions, such as whether to allow female teachers to wear the veil at school.

Potential solutions discussed included making sure that a country's public services reflected its diversity. There was also the suggestion that we should not be aiming to integrate at all – host societies themselves were made up of very different groups based on shared interests or beliefs that did not integrate with each other. Maybe tolerance was needed rather than integration.

The two final speakers brought up the topic of integration during the conference's concluding presentation. Prof. Dr. Havva Engin from the Pädagogische Hochschule Karlsruhe saw certain symmetry between Germany and the UK: Germany was proud of its *Islam-Konferenz*, and the UK of the quality of its cooperation with the Muslim community. She believed more focus should be given to intercultural teaching. All children should be taught about Muslim customs and those who wanted Islamic teaching should receive it from university-educated teachers; employing staff from abroad was just a short-term solution. The second speaker, Dr Anas Al-Shaikh Ali of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists, agreed that education was key, suggesting that critical thinking and awareness should be made part of all national curricula. His other main point was that governments needed to follow through on their initiatives.

Quotes:

"We must avoid knee-jerk, short-term cosmetic reactions to show that governments are doing their best. We need more flexible, longer-term strategies."

(Dr Anas Al-Shaikh Ali, Association of Muslim Social Scientists)

"Metaphors are appealing but not useful for tough questions, such as in the case of a teacher who wants to wear the veil."

(Sarfraz Manzoor, The Guardian)

"Integration is not a one-way process, it's not about changing newcomers – culture doesn't work that way."

(Mark Carroll, Department for Communities and Local Government)

Identity

A topic that recurred throughout the day's discussions was the question of how Muslims defined themselves and how others referred to them. Although there were now positive examples of strong national Muslim role models in public life, it was agreed that there was still a long way to go. Since 9/11, in particular, different Muslim organisations had

begun to work better with each other and Muslims had realised they needed to participate more in political life.

Some delegates and speakers expressed dismay at hearing Muslims in prominent positions continually referred to in religious terms when this was unconnected to their achievement. Why could a Muslim athlete not be called 'British' instead of a 'British Muslim'? The emphasis on the person's religion was seen as unnecessary and unhelpful labelling, since it might affect the way others treated them. Moreover, experience, education, employment and success were not necessarily a result of one's religion. One speaker pointed out that a Catholic or Protestant personality would not be referred to in religious terms, so why do so with Muslims? Some people thought this was indicative of the fact that Islam was still viewed as an alien culture within Europe.

Other contributors, however, believed that it was important to make this distinction, and indeed that there was a growing trend for European Muslims to define themselves first and foremost in terms of religion rather than nationality.

A third idea was that the term 'Muslim' could act as a bridge between national identities, since a person of immigrant background may want to take their heritage into account and call themselves a 'German Muslim' rather than simply 'German'. This confusion surrounding issues of identity could even be viewed positively, since it showed that an intense process of identity-forming and thus integration was taking place.

Islam and Extremism

A highly topical issue was how to decouple the concept of Islam from that of violent terrorism. Those terrorists who claimed to be acting on behalf of Islam were providing fodder for right-wing groups to turn people against Muslims. This divisive talk was achieving for the terrorists what they could never achieve through their own actions. Recent surveys had shown that Muslims felt hostility to their community was increasing. An exaggerated reaction to the security threat had led to general suspicion and some Muslims were worried that they no longer had a place in mainstream society.

It was clear that the idea of "Islam as evil" must be eradicated. The problem was that Islamist violence and Islam had to some extent become linked in the public consciousness, despite the fact that the vast majority of Muslims were peaceful believers. One example cited was a Muslim organisation in Germany that was criticised by some Muslims for cooperating with the security authorities because they thought this suggested that all followers of Islam were automatically terrorists. A possible solution was for Muslims to defend themselves against extremism by tackling extremist Islam-based ideology (e.g. mosques should make sure not to offer a platform for violence and should encourage scholars to engage with young people), but a critical debate on this would be needed. There was a challenge in UK mosques, since imams were coming

from overseas with little experience of the country. While this was not a threat in itself, it was causing problems for young Muslims. The UK government was developing strategies to deal with extremism in key institutions such as universities and prisons and had already invested heavily in the latter in order to provide support to Muslim prisoners. Germany, meanwhile, had started an initiative in Baden-Württemberg whereby police visited mosques to talk to the people there and Muslims, in turn, visited the police.

There was disagreement among the speakers concerning which Muslim organisations governments should engage with. Some thought that talking to extremist groups would give them legitimacy and should be avoided. The UK believed it was important to engage with those at the cusp of extremism in order to know their views, but it was not the government's place to encourage them. It preferred a dialogue with the middle ground and tried to challenge extremists by isolating them and building alliances with other groups.

Others were of the opinion that that we should not ignore the very people whose views we wished to change. How could we otherwise ensure that the dialogue would reach the places where it really mattered? Dealing only with liberal groups while marginalising others would not work. We needed to deal with the community as a whole, which included reaching out to extremists. The German government also refrained from talking to extremist organisations. It was suggested that solving social inequalities in Muslim communities would automatically dampen down the problem of extremism, but it was pointed out that extremists were not necessarily economically deprived, so providing housing etc. would not necessarily help.

Quotes:

"There seems to be a lot of dialogue with the people you want to talk to, but not necessarily with the people you don't."
(Asad Ahmad, BBC Television)

"It's important to engage with those at the cusp of extremism to know their views, but it is not the government's place to encourage them and give them legitimacy.. we should encourage those who lead their communities in the way we want them to go."
(Mark Carroll, Department for Communities and Local Government)

"How can you challenge robustly the ideas of extremists if they're precisely the people you won't talk to?"
(Asad Ahmad, BBC Television)

“Dealing only with liberal groups while marginalising others will not work – we need to deal with the Muslim community as a whole.”

(Dr Anas Al-Shaikh Ali, Association of Muslim Social Scientists)

“Islam doesn’t have the monopoly on extremism...through this divisive talk we are achieving for the terrorists what they can never achieve through their actions.”

(Sajjad Karim, Liberal Democrats)

Muslims and the Media

It was agreed that Muslim communities in both Germany and the UK were receiving far too much negative press, especially since 9/11, the terrorist attacks in London and Madrid, the attempted suitcase bombing in Germany and the Danish caricature controversy. Normal, everyday Muslim life was being ignored in favour of incendiary headlines, which, it was argued in Germany's case, were preventing the country from accepting its identity as a country of immigration. In the UK exaggerated political correctness meant that someone was always anticipating offence and thus providing fodder for sensationalist headlines, such as absurd and untrue reports about Muslims being offended by Christmas decorations. The US and UK media coverage of the French suburban riots of autumn 2005 was also examined - here, the media wrongly claimed that the riots were driven by radical Islam, ignoring their social causes. This glut of negative reporting had given rise to concerns that some Muslims were increasingly shunning mainstream media outlets in favour of Islamic media channels because they perceived the latter to be more truthful. Fears were expressed that this could lead to “digital ghettoisation”.

There was certain disagreement over whether the media had a responsibility to promote understanding. Some participants did not think that the media should be prescriptive: journalists were not preachers and they should report what was happening and reflect the negative aspects of society without sugar-coating them. One journalist believed that sensationalism in the media was a good thing, since it made more people read the news – the problem was not too much negative reporting, but rather not enough focus on achievement and success.

It was generally agreed that the only way to combat the press's tendency to focus on negative, cliché-based stories about Muslims was to try and attract more positive coverage, whilst taking into account the fact that interesting/controversial stories were the ones that sell. There was further consensus that uninformed journalists writing about Muslim issues were not helping to promote acceptance. More Muslims needed to be encouraged to work in the mainstream media, but not necessarily to act as ‘Islam experts’ and only write about Muslim issues: they should be allowed to be journalists in their own right.

In addition, it was suggested that there should be more focus on the Internet as a medium, since the Muslim populations of both Germany and Britain were generally very young and likely to prefer online sources to television or newspapers.

Quotes:

“We’re sensationalists, and we’re focusing on terrorism and extremism, and it’s a good thing, too.”
(Jörg Lau, Die Zeit)

“There is not too much negative reporting, but rather not enough focus on achievement and success.”
(Jörg Lau, Die Zeit)

“I focus on what’s good, and on showing what’s positive... showing another side of what our culture is about.”
(Navid Akhtar, Gazelle Media)

“We live in a society that wants entertainment, and negative stories sell. Let’s get stuck in and get involved if we want positive stories, rather than blaming the media.”
(Haras Rafiq, Sufi Muslim Council)

3. Case Study

Muslimische Akademie in Deutschland

The *Muslimische Akademie in Deutschland*, founded in 2004, is an organisation for political education based in Berlin. It works together with a network of educational centres in order to offer a range of local programmes to Muslims across Germany. The *Muslimische Akademie in Deutschland* is supported by an association, which is made up of independent Muslims who would like to comprehend, reflect on and represent the pluralism of Islam as a religion, culture and civilisation. A board of trustees advises the association and the *Akademie’s* managing board, helping it to fulfil the *Akademie’s* duties and guarantee that the *Akademie* remains independent and transparent and produces high-quality work. The *Muslimische Akademie* aims to promote exchange, dialogue and cooperation between Muslims and other institutions and agencies from society as a whole.

Objectives and Profile of Duties

The *Muslimische Akademie in Deutschland* aims to contribute to creating a more open society by providing information about Islam and Muslims and by promoting mutual

understanding. Together with party-related political foundations and Christian academies of various denominations, the *Akademie* fills a gap in the German political education system. Its work is primarily focused on organising dialogue within society, thus promoting societal and political participation. The range of programmes, which includes one-off seminars, seminar series, specialist conferences, scientific colloquia and discussions, is largely open to everybody, but it is primarily aimed at Muslims. Due to its unique expertise and its understanding of the situation experienced by Muslims in Germany, the *Akademie* is able to support Muslims of different backgrounds, giving them a cultural and political voice and representing their interests.

Since 2004 the *Muslimische Akademie in Deutschland* has organised a range of events, including:

- 'The contribution made by Muslims to the debate on values in Germany' – symposium series with the *Körper-Stiftung*
- 'Green meets Green' – series of discussions with the *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung* (Berlin)
- 'Berlin Islam Forum' – series of events with the Regional Commissioner for Integration (Berlin)
- 'Women's Forum for Dialogue' – series of talks with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

The *Muslimische Akademie* cooperates with various public and private-sector organisations including the federal and regional centres for political education, ministries at federal and regional level, the federal and regional commissioners for integration, independent agencies, foundations, universities, Protestant and Catholic academies, party-linked foundations, the British Council and the European Union.

Projects

The *Muslimische Akademie in Deutschland* aims to increase participation in public life by specific Muslim target groups. These projects include empowering Muslim women, equipping young Muslims with knowledge about democracy and the media and encouraging Muslims to participate in politics.

Workshop, British Council, Berlin 23 March 2007

Programme

A smaller closed workshop the day after the conference brought together invited experts from Germany, the UK, France and the Netherlands to

- explore the role the media could / should play in facilitating dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim communities,
- share lessons learnt from the British Council's publication "British Muslims: Media Guide",
- look at current similar projects and
- explore options for developing a guide on Muslims in Germany or Europe.

09.30-10.30

First Session

THE MEDIA GUIDE EXPERIENCE: DEVELOPING A REFERENCE TOOL TO THE UK'S MUSLIM LIFE, COMMUNITIES & INSTITUTIONS

Introduction: *Dr Ali Fisher*, Counterpoint, British Council London

Presentation of "British Muslims: Media Guide", sharing of lessons learnt during and after the production of this publication

Speakers:

- *Ehsan Masood*, author of "British Muslims: Media Guide"
- *Dr Anas Al-Shaikh Ali*, project partner at the Association of Muslim Social Scientists UK

Questions and Answers

10.30-11.00

Coffee Break

11.30-13.00

Second Session

MEDIA GUIDES: THE JOURNALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

Moderator: *Erkan Arikan*, editor, Turkish desk, WDR

Included a presentation on **ISLAM/MUSLIMS AND THE MEDIA IN GERMANY** by *Dr Sabine Schiffer*, Institute for Media Responsibility

13.00-14.00

Lunch

14.00-15.30

Third Session

MEDIA GUIDES: THE STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

Moderator: *Riem Spielhaus*, Muslim Academy in Germany

Included two presentations:

The ODIHR's **EUROPEAN MUSLIMS HANDBOOKS PROJECT** by *Wendy Kristianasen*, Le Monde Diplomatique

The Federal Agency for Civic Education's **MUSLIMS IN EUROPE ONLINE SURVEYS** by *Meike Sundermann*, BPB

15.30-16.00

Coffee Break

16.00-17.00

Fourth Session

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Discussion leaders: *Ehsan Masood*, *Erkan Arikan* and *Riem Spielhaus*

Is there a demand in Germany / Europe for a Muslims Media Guide or a similar reference tool? If so, are there options for international collaboration?

Closing Remarks

Workshop, British Council, Berlin 23 March 2007

Report

Rapporteur: Oguzhan Celik, Cologne

1. Background and Link to the Conference

The conference held jointly by the British Embassy, the Muslim Academy in Germany and the British Council the previous day aimed to examine the role of Muslims in German and UK societies, as well as to highlight Muslim contributions to society, politics and culture in Europe.

The conference helped to identify mutual problems and offered opportunities to discuss methods for encouraging dialogue between communities.

A further objective was to explore how individual governments have taken action in involving resident Muslims to actively participate in their respective societies. It was agreed that strategic relations and competent exchange of ideas should be developed and encouraged. Although some of the largest Muslim communities of Europe live in Germany, Great Britain, France and the Netherlands, the diversity of Islamic life in Europe and the various contributions of Muslims to society are not widely acknowledged. More often the public image of Islamic culture is dominated by discussions about headscarves, fear of Islamic radicalism and concern about the development of non-integrated, parallel societies.

Consequently, two questions of key importance to all European countries are:

- How can various cultures co-exist peacefully in the same society?
- How can we learn to respect differences and simultaneously encourage togetherness and mutual objectives?

2. Executive Summary of the Workshop

The Expert Workshop at the British Council which followed the conference on 23 March 2007 dealt with these particular issues and looked at the potential of the media to provide a differentiated view on Islamic life in Europe. The production of the "British Muslims: Media Guide", a joint publication by the British Council, the Association of Muslim Social Scientists and partners, was a major theme of the workshop. Sessions dealt with feedback on the publication from target groups and stakeholders as well as determining demand for a similar publication in Europe, specifically Germany, and examining existing or planned projects at European and German levels.

Participants were encouraged to identify potential overlaps and to draft options for “joining forces”. The desired outcomes were a network of potential collaborators, the commitment of suitable institutions to cooperation and the identification of mutual benefits. Additionally, the exploitation of existing expertise, the interlinking of planned projects and possible action points were pointed out.

In addition, a range of papers and presentations inspired the workshop’s discussions:

Ehsan Masood presented the British Muslims Media Guide, Wendy Kristianasen outlined a project of the ODIHR on a series of reference books about Muslims in Europe, Meike Sundermann introduced the “Muslims in Europe” online dossiers produced by Germany’s Federal Agency for Civic Education, and Dr Sabine Schiffer from the Media Responsibility Institute added a comprehensive overview of “Islam and the Media in Germany”.

3. First Workshop Session – The Media Guide Experience

Introduced by Dr Ali Fisher from the British Council London, the “British Muslims: Media Guide” as well as shared lessons learnt during and after its production were presented by Ehsan Masood, the author, and Dr Anas Al-Shaik Ali, chair of the project’s Muslim partner organisation Association of Muslim Social Scientists in the UK.

They spoke at length on the conception of the guide, the working relationship between the AMSS and the British Council as well as the role of the editorial board, stressing that the production of the Guide was a collective effort and that indeed every sentence and paragraph were read and discussed to ensure that the text met the requirements of both partners. Dr Anas pointed to the relationship between two credible organisations, one Muslim the other non-Muslim, as an extremely positive example that should be emulated.

The presentation was followed by a discussion in which certain concerns became obvious, e.g. why some communities are not mentioned in the guide and why we speak of “Muslim communities” and not one “Muslim community”. Journalists working for the daily press criticized the Media Guide for offering too much detail and too few facts.

It was highlighted that these journalists, however, do not constitute the only target group of this publication. They as well as other users could benefit from accurate definitions of Islamic terms, especially as mainstream interpretation of some terms is different or even misleading, as the examples “Sharia”, “Jihad” and “Fatwa” demonstrate.

Furthermore, according to feedback the Guide proved to be valuable for use in schools and by students as well as to many UK politicians.

The initial comment from the German side was: *“Great guide about Muslims in the UK, but we need a Media Guide for Germany as well!”*

4. Second Workshop Session – The Journalist’s Perspective

The second session, moderated by Erkan Arikan from the Turkish Desk of the German broadcaster WDR, dealt with journalist issues: UK perspectives gathered from professional community feedback, the reaction of German journalists and general demands of journalists in terms of contents and format.

It came out that there is a big demand for a similar publication in Germany and the involvement of important institutions such as the government, Muslim non-governmental organisations and so-called “Mittlerorganisationen” (mediators, QUANGOs) was suggested.

The UK approach of a joint effort by Muslim/ non-Muslim stakeholders, as described by Dr Anas in the previous session, seemed very appropriate to German professionals. However, in contrast to the overall opinion on the UK side, governmental involvement in the project is neither regarded as an obstacle to its production in Germany, nor would it reduce the publication’s credibility.

The requirements of German journalists in terms of the format and content of the publication were identified as a small sized format (perhaps a ring book with free pages to add own notes) which contains more facts and figures. Visual information as well as tables and statistics should be provided.

Feedback from UK professionals on the Media Guide was diverse: there were calls for more information about behaviour and etiquette and also answers to technical questions about Islam. The Media Guide was praised for countering the idea that Islam equals violence and terror, an idea which polarization in the media often has encouraged.

Some scepticism remains, however, in that although the Media Guide satisfies a need, raises awareness and sets an agenda, it doesn’t cover all dimensions of Muslim life in the UK. A supplementary Internet presence would be desirable because “journalists do not read”; they need summaries and easy- to- process information.

Dr Sabine Schiffer, who was subsequently to present on “Islam in German Media”, offered perspectives on present-day Islamophobia. She reported that the media have contributed to making the fear of Islam more explicit and more official.

Dr Schiffer classifies “framing” as a mechanism of influencing and changing perceptions subconsciously. She claims that there is a long tradition in framing Islam as, for example, being oppressive to women and if any fact suggests contradictory roles of

women it is called an exception. This particular mechanism explains to her why stereotypes are so hard to overcome.

The abuse of symbols by one side causes abuse by the other side as has occurred between the western and Muslim media. Dr Schiffer started with a presentation comparing Muhammad cartoons with anti-Jewish cartoons; as a result it became clear that both use the same iconography of combining ideas and religious symbols.

A main point in her presentation was “image distortion” - the association of Islamic symbols with war and terror or the association of head scarves with the subject of migration.

A key element of her theory is that the conglomeration of negative facts – for example on the covers of Spiegel and Focus – actually represent a complete take-over of the Islamophobe’s perspective. The German media adopt the Islamophobe’s point of view and focus merely on negative features. For example, a headscarf was chosen to symbolize the failure of a multicultural society.

Another example of “image distortion” is combining separate statements, as well as texts, music and pictures, to create a subliminal message. On the basis of Dr Schiffer’s examples it became clear that by using symbols of Islam to represent terror and war, eg the mosque, prayer or headscarf, these particular symbols lead to an association with a spectrum of negative ideas and fears. These mechanisms of associative misinterpretation can not only be seen with regard to religious groups but also with nationalities and gender.

In addition, Dr Schiffer elaborated on the history of such “labelling”, particularly in the 19th century. In the wake of an economic crisis the involved persons were harshly criticised - while non-Jews were criticised without being labelled as “Christians” the Jews were. This practice led to the impression that only Jews were responsible. It was important for Dr. Schiffer to emphasize that there is no such thing as “the Muslims” as a homogenous group as there is no group of “the Germans” or “the Jews”. Her conclusion was that today’s image of Islam is the result of a tradition of marking and labelling. She claimed that acts of violence committed by non- Muslim offenders gain less attention than those committed by Muslims.

Dr Schiffer remained optimistic in her outlook, however, and offered a strategy for winning back the symbols of Islam by combining them with other subjects and facts and by verifying whether “Islamic” interpretations are relevant to treated topics or not; even the Muslim groups are demanded to do the same. She also called for more diversity in film programmes, for (positive?) coverage to be more visible and for more sensitivity in dealing with Muslims as well as with established perceptions. In conclusion, much work remains to be done.

5. Third Workshop Session – The Stakeholder Perspective

At the third session stakeholders addressed points such as UK stakeholders' opinion of the pilot Media Guide, the reaction of German stakeholders to the concept and finally how far the concept reflected the needs of Muslim communities and organisations.

From the stakeholder perspective, the Media Guide appears to be a useful tool to counter ignorance. Apparently non-Muslim citizens lack accurate knowledge about Islam. For example, they do not know the difference between “Iman” and “Imam”. The shifting of the debate involves three types of stakeholders: Muslim and non-Muslim academics, journalists and government cultural departments. Differences as well as consensus should be acknowledged. The stakeholders should work countrywide rather than focus only on communities in certain geographical regions. Cooperation between Muslims and state institutions should be exemplary. Diversity (the inclusion of minorities within the Muslim population) needs to be reflected as an important issue. The remaining problem is mistrust on either side.

Meike Sundermann proceeded with a presentation on the Federal Agency for Civic Education's “Muslims in Europe Online Dossiers”.

She started off with general information about the Agency (BPB) which offers a large number of publications and online dossiers about Islamism and Muslims in Europe, responding to the increasing demand for background information for use at the numerous public debates about headscarves, segregation and immigration tests. The target groups are the general public and special audiences.

The aim of the online dossiers is to provide access to relevant information which should be structured in several levels to ensure that it is easy-to-use, accurate and up-to-date. The workshop participants agreed that it would be highly desirable to share the data generated for the online dossiers with other projects such as the ODIHR handbooks described below, or a potential German Muslims Media Guide.

6. Fourth and Concluding Workshop Session

The fourth session, lead by Ehsan Masood, Erkan Arikan and Riem Spielhaus, dealt with conclusions, recommendations and next steps.

Wendy Kristianasen presented the ODIHR's “Muslim Handbooks Series Project” which will develop a range of publications on Muslim communities as a part of its educational and awareness-raising activities. The handbooks are customised to four OSCE-participating states (France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands) and intended to be a reference resource for policy makers, public officials, educators and working journalists. They will contain short essays on different aspects of Islam and Muslim life and culture.

Statistics and relevant links will be provided as well as a comprehensive directory of contacts.

Rounding up the workshop, the following conclusions were drawn at the end of the fourth session:

- There is a need for briefings for non-Muslim journalists to provide them with background knowledge about Islam and Muslim life in their respective countries
- In addition, further conferences and workshops should be organised in the public domain to help create understanding for the Muslim community
- The managers of the projects presented at this event should stay in constant touch with each other about progress in their activities
- The knowledge and the contents generated in the individual projects should be exchanged in order not to reinvent the wheel
- Options for international cooperation were identified and should be realised in order to maximise reach and impact

All things considered, the presentations provided the participants with a great amount of information and many ideas about possible concepts for living in a multinational society. They confirmed, though, that there is much work to be done to guarantee peaceful cooperation between communities.

Nevertheless, the workshop's main message is an optimistic one, being confident that with the suggestions made by the presenters, moderators and participants and with a joint effort across the countries involved, it will be possible to make a significant step towards overcoming the ignorance that lies at the heart of Islamophobia and xenophobia.

Final Conclusions Drawn from the Conference

The main messages to be drawn from the conference and workshop were that Germany and the UK had made some useful first steps towards establishing a peaceful and rewarding coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims, but flexible, long-term strategies were needed rather than well-meant but knee-jerk, cosmetic reactions.

What was clear was that in these areas Britain and Germany, as well as other European countries, had much to gain from exchanging experiences and best practice and working together.

Participants agreed that the events had made a useful contribution to taking forward this debate and to establishing contacts for the future between the UK and Germany.

Links

British Embassy Berlin
www.britischebotschaft.de

British Council
www.britishcouncil.de

Muslimische Akademie in Deutschland
www.muslimische-akademie.de

Bundesministerium des Innern
www.bmi.bund.de

Department for Communities and Local Government
www.communities.gov.uk

Home Office
www.homeoffice.gov.uk

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation: The Rules of The Game
www.jrft.org.uk/Terrorism_final.pdf

Conservative Policy Review
www.conservatives.com/pdf/unitingthecountry.pdf

Policy Exchange: Living Apart Together
www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/libimages/246.pdf

DEMOS: Bringing it home
www.demos.co.uk/publications/bringingithome