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The article entitled 'Is Islam soluble in Germany?' published in the last *ISIM Newsletter* (page 30) concentrated primarily on Muslims originating in Turkey, as if they are a unique phenomenon and not a lively part of the community as a whole. While it is true that Turkish Muslims account for almost 80% of the German Muslim population, there are also smaller groups whose members originate from other Islamic societies globally. The smallest segment of the German Muslim population is formed by Germans who are often characterized by terms such as 'converts' and thus overlooked. A few of these German Muslims have been engaged in issues concerning the Muslim community in Germany since the 1960s and have been engaged in social work as well as in discussion of fundamental questions relating to Muslims within German society. It is therefore appropriate to briefly describe the history of involvement of indigenous German Muslims.

In the early 1960s, a handful of German Muslims gathered around what later became the Islamic Archives of Germany. Through the efforts of this group, the first rules of a local Islamic association were written and registered under German law. At the same time, Germans met in Hamburg, Munich, Cologne and Aachen and began to organize facilities for daily worship.

During the 1970s, these individuals utilized their membership in different societal organizations – political parties, unions, and the like – to discuss the developing situation *vis-à-vis*

Muslim communities in Germany. Discussions were initiated with the education ministry over the question of religious education in accordance with federal and land constitutions. Such discussions led to a series of seminars, encounters and unofficial meetings in which the partners attempted to find intersections between Muslim communities and the Christo-secular German system, which had been molded by the thousand-year relationship of the churches and different political forces. In other words, where were the crossroads of a church-molded legal system and a churchless Abrahamic community living in such a society? These public and semi-private encounters took place in a changing society that marginalized religious life and its public symbols and thus, such questions were at the heart of important debates within German society as a whole.

At the same time, official Turkish representatives often intervened in order to hinder access to greater freedom for their fellow countrymen and women. An example was the rent of a local hall for a meeting. A Turkish diplomat protested at the municipal hall against permission being granted for use of the hall. German Muslims followed and insisted on the proper application of German law. The meeting was held. In this way, Muslims originating in Turkey learned to enjoy the benefits of secular freedom.

The 1980s saw the birth of two umbrella organizations for Muslims in Germany. One, established in 1986, was called the Islamic Council for the Federal Republic of Germany. The other, established a year later, became the Central Council of Muslims in Germany. Through the years, a number of local Islamic associations have joined these coalitions, and today, the Islamic Council includes 38 member associations, while the Central Council has 28. Members of these coalitions include associations with diverse national, cultural, social and theological backgrounds.

Meanwhile, the Turkish side reacted by creating the so-called DITIB at Cologne. This is an association under German law, but the head and most of the personnel are Turkish civil servants who are, ostensibly, 'on leave' and normally stay up to six years in Germany without learning any German. Last year, some younger men who grew up in Germany became involved in DITIB as secretaries.

German Muslims have attempted to cooperate with DITIB but the contrast between Turko-French *laïcité* and German secularism is so deep that one might say that each principle almost destroys the other. For example, German society expects that the churches and religious organizations comment publicly on political, ethical, social and

educational developments. On the other hand, DITIB can rarely publish anything without approval from Ankara. Certainly, after its foundation, the board of the Islamic Council had to adapt to this German norm; while German Muslims had little difficulty in offering their opinion, those of other backgrounds had to adjust to this.

Today, the differences are not significant. The two councils mentioned above (The Central Council of Muslims and the Islamic Council) are committed to organizing the future of Muslim communities in Germany within the framework of German societal and legal contexts. An important step in this direction has been the foundation of a committee on religious education (founded last autumn). ♦

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