gbs))))
giordano bruno *stiftung*

"Self–Determination, not Peer Pressure"

Against Islamism
and Xenophobia

In the debate on Islam and integration, the fronts have hardened: While some reject any criticism of the patriarchal domination culture of orthodox Islam, others kindle a dangerous hostility towards Muslims that unacceptably ignores the considerable differences within the 'Muslim spectrum'.

The **Critical Islam Conference** opposes such false perceptions and the resulting enemy stereotypes that they engender: On the one hand, it counters propagandists and defenders of political Islam by arguing that **freedom of religion is not a license to disregard the fundamental values of the secular constitutional state**; on the other hand, it distances itself from those who abuse the **necessary criticism of anti-freedom developments within the "Muslim communities" to fuel xenophobic resentments**.

The core problem of the German debate on Islam and integration is – and this is where Islamists and anti-Muslim right-wing populists work hand in hand! – that individuals are all too often reduced to **religious or ethnic group identities**, which hinders the emancipation of the individual and promotes the development of parallel societies. In contrast to such stereotyping, the Critical Islam Conference focuses on the model of the "**transcultural society**", in which each individual is given the chance to shape their life independently within the framework of a **social order based on human rights**, and in which cultural diversity can be experienced as enrichment instead of a threat.

Despite all the differences in their respective objectives, **Islamists and anti-Muslim groups have a lot in common in their underlying thought patterns**: Both compulsively cling to the "floating island" of their respective tradition and defend their ancestral cultural ghetto in a knee-jerk reaction against the alleged enemy of the "foreign" ("the non-believers" here – "the Muslims" there). Transculturalists, on the other hand, accept that cultures are subject to constant change, which is why it would be absurd to lock people into a certain cultural norm that they should not transgress. Therefore, the political debate should not be focused on mediating between the supposedly homogeneous cultures of "locals" and "immigrants". Instead, we should consider it a **joint cultural task of all people living here to develop this society in the spirit of the universal human rights**.

The **Critical Islam Conference** regards the following aspects and demands as essential:

Lifting taboos on criticism

Freedom of expression, of art, and of science are the indispensable foundation of a modern, open society and must not be restricted in order to accommodate religious prohibitions of certain ideas. Nor should factually justified criticism of Islam/Islamism be defamed as "racist", "xenophobic", or "Islamophobic". There are fundamental differences between the **humanistic criticism of Islam**, which advocates the strengthening of human rights, and **chauvinistic anti-Muslimism**, which undermines people's rights, and it is essential to recognize these differences.

Combating xenophobia

Xenophobia is a fundamental social malady that must be combated decisively. Contrary to the concept of a **hermetically sealed culture that is fostered by Islamists and anti-Muslim groups**, we should promote the transcultural mindset and the insight that we are all "cultural hybrids" who profit from the experience of "the others". In this context, representatives of the "Christian Occident" have no grounds for arrogance. After all, "democracy" and "human rights" are not the exclusive achievements of the West, but elements of a universal "world cultural heritage of humankind" in which people of all ages and of the most diverse origin have participated.

Integration implies emancipation

Today, "integration policy" should primarily be understood as "emancipation policy". Ultimately, the aim is not to integrate "foreign cultures" into some kind of "German culture", but to enable each individual to **participate in society**. To achieve this, it is necessary to strengthen language skills and education of those affected, to teach them about their rights and obligations in a modern constitutional state, and to eliminate all forms of discrimination still existing in Germany. It is fundamentally wrong to strengthen "cultural identities" that hinder rather than promote individual emancipation and harmonious coexistence.

Recognition of differences

According to traditional interpretation, a "Muslim" is someone who is descended from a Muslim father or has converted to Islam. It cannot be deduced from this definition how "Muslims" think or act. In fact, there is a wide range of different attitudes: While some Muslims follow the instructions of their religion uncritically and in a socially problematic way, others are completely non-religious or reconcile their faith with the principles of the constitutional state just as well as the average German Catholic or Protestant. **More attention must be paid to these differences**. Above all, politics and the media should not uncritically allow Islamic associations with backward-looking political agendas to speak and act on behalf of people who do not even want to be represented by them.

No false tolerance

An open society thrives on the ability of its members to tolerate disturbingly different lifestyles. However, **human rights violations must not be tolerated under any circumstances – not even if they are based on "sacred values"**. In this respect, cultural relativism must be firmly rejected: Honour killings and forced marriages, for example, are not the expression of a "different" culture, but crimes that must be labelled and prevented as such. Homophobic, misogynistic, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic ideas and behaviour must be suppressed, irrespective of the community in which they occur.

Resistance to Islamist ambitions

The "holy texts" of Islam, like the basic texts of Christianity, originate from an earlier stage of human civilization and must be interpreted today in a way that avoids conflict with modern constitutional values. The constitutional state must not cooperate with persons or groups who refuse such a reinterpretation, but must seek ways to contain their impact. Any concession to them (such as an acceptance of Sharia courts) would be a **betrayal of the ideals of the Enlightenment, the basis of the modern constitutional state**.

Separation of state and religion

Germany is a secular country. According to our Basic Law, the state must be ideologically neutral. The outdated privileges of the two Christian churches, which were strengthened after 1949, are not only an anachronism: these privileges also hinder attempts to bring together the various worldview and religious communities on an equal footing. For this reason, **a new, extended, and equal separation of the state from all worldview- and religious communities** is necessary, and is a precondition for internal cohesion in our country.

Commitment to human rights at the international level

We call on the representatives of the German state to work for the introduction of, and compliance with, human rights at the international level and to take effective action against honour killings, genital mutilation, stonings, executions, torture, and other inhuman practices. **Political and economic agreements must explicitly require compliance with human rights regulations**. Instead of supporting organizations and regimes that adhere to Sharia law, contribute to Islamic terrorism, or seek the destruction of Israel, contacts with the democratic opposition in the "Muslim countries" should be established and expanded.

Protection for Islam-critical opposition

Very few "Islamic countries" guarantee freedom of belief. People who abandon their faith or interpret it in ways other than those prescribed are exposed to multiple repressions and threats. Therefore, **political asylum** must be granted to opposition activists, persons who have been harmed by Islam, and apostates who are threatened with severe punishment, torture, and execution in their countries of origin (such as Iran) in the event of their return.

Photos: 2nd Critical Islam Conference from May 11 to 12, 2013 in Berlin

Protection of children's rights

Children have a right to be introduced to the world without prejudice and to learn about different perspectives that help them to develop their own view of matters without being pushed in a certain ideological direction from the outset. While parents have the right to educate their children on the basis of their respective values and worldviews, **the ideologically neutral state must not additionally support such narrowing of perspectives**. For instance, it cannot allow children to opt out of their biology class, sex education, or sports lessons for religious reasons, or to organize schools according to the guidelines of religious communities. Overall, politicians should increase their efforts to strengthen the rights of children and young people – also in relation to the demands of their own parents. This applies equally to protecting their physical integrity: The legitimization of the non-medically-indicated circumcision of boys was a step in the wrong direction that should be corrected as soon as possible.

Promotion of transcultural education

A sustainable politics should not seek to mediate between "cultures" (as inter- and multicultural approaches do), but to free individuals from the corset of rigid norms. This transcultural competence should be promoted particularly in schools. Pupils should be enabled to critically question their respective ideas of a good life, ethics, and morals. In order to establish such a transcultural perspective, it would be desirable to introduce **mandatory lessons for all pupils on religion and worldview**, in which the students are no longer divided according to their respective families of origin, but can collectively search for fair solutions to conflicts of interest.

We are convinced that the acquisition of a transcultural perspective is particularly important in a world in which change has become a permanent state. Those who have not learned to overcome their own traditional constraints will quickly feel overwhelmed by the huge range of alternative lifestyles. **The hatred towards the "foreign" resulting from this excessive demand is one of the major problems of our time. With the help of the transcultural model, it would be possible to counteract the "clash of civilizations" fueled by right–wing extremists of various kinds (Islamists and anti–Muslim groups) at the very beginning.**

*The text of this brochure follows the **"Resolution of the 2nd Critical Islam Conference"**, which was drafted by gbs spokesman Michael Schmidt-Salomon and was discussed, revised, and adopted by a large majority of the conference participants – including Hamed Abdel-Samad, Lale Akgün, Necla Kelek, Rolf Schwanitz, and Wolfgang Welsch – on 12 May 2013.*

■ **Information on the Critical Islam Conference:**

www.kritische-islamkonferenz.de
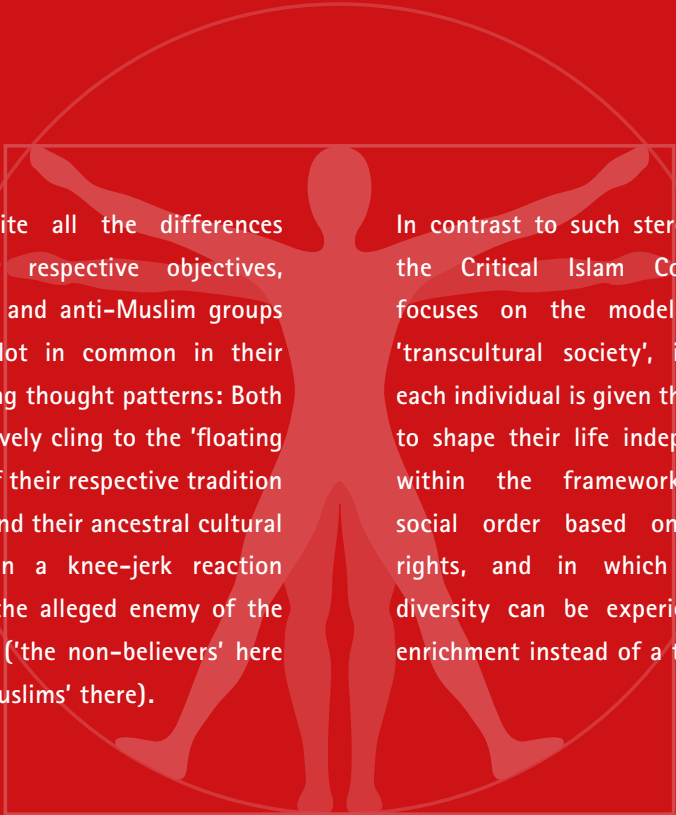
■ **Publisher: Giordano Bruno Foundation**

www.giordano-bruno-stiftung.de/en

» Despite all the differences in their respective objectives, Islamists and anti-Muslim groups have a lot in common in their underlying thought patterns: Both compulsively cling to the 'floating island' of their respective tradition and defend their ancestral cultural ghetto in a knee-jerk reaction against the alleged enemy of the 'foreign' ('the non-believers' here – 'the Muslims' there).

In contrast to such stereotyping, the Critical Islam Conference focuses on the model of the 'transcultural society', in which each individual is given the chance to shape their life independently within the framework of a social order based on human rights, and in which cultural diversity can be experienced as enrichment instead of a threat. «

gbs»»» giordano bruno *stiftung*

www.kritische-islamkonferenz.de
www.giordano-bruno-stiftung.de/en