

## Muslims in Switzerland

So which Muslims were they talking about during the first day of the colloquium? A good question, given the different views some participants had. One thing was nonetheless apparent. The majority preferred to talk vaguely, if at all, about the colloquium's subject matter, i.e. Muslims in Switzerland!

One participant, Dr. Joanna Pfaff Czarnecka, raised eye-brows when she calmly started her presentation «Muslime in der deutschen Schweiz» with the statement «there are no Muslims in Switzerland»! That, of course, could hardly be possible, especially when a previous speaker, Marcel Heiniger from the Federal Bureau of Statistics, had just mentioned that more than 310,000 Muslims are living in Switzerland. But obviously her statement was deliberate. Its intent was to provoke and inspire. Eloquently she explained that there are no Muslims in Switzerland because:

a. they are not a homogenous community, rather they come from diverse countries and cultures (a notion that was discussed in details and numbers by Mr. Heiniger);

b. there is a tendency not to see their problems nor to address them systematically (exemplified by the hurdles facing every attempt to build a mosque or secure a cemetery for their community);

c. they are equal citizens living among other Swiss citizens.

The last of the three reasons drew heartfelt applause from the audience, maybe because of its idealistic, if not wishful, connotations. Inspiring as it was, the presentation and what followed in the first day of the colloquium never resolved that question: which Muslims are we talking about? The importance of the query lays in the fact that the

*On May 24 and 23, 2002, our Society, together with the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, organized a colloquium in Fribourg entitled «Muslims in Switzerland». The editor of the Bulletin asked two persons who were present on different days to give their reactions. The results, as can be seen below, provide a thought-provoking contrast. H.F.*

colloquium itself was designed, as Dr. Hartmut Fähndrich mentioned, to address this very issue. And it certainly deserves to be tackled. Put simply, when we ask that question we try to determine whether the discussion deals with «Muslims in Switzerland» or «Swiss

Muslims» or (if we choose to go further and borrow Tariq Ramdan's term) «European Muslims».

The term «Muslims in Switzerland» reflects what Dr. Pfaff Czarnecka had mentioned earlier: diverse communities with different backgrounds and sometimes competing agendas. Perhaps the term mirrors the legal and demographic situation of these communities. But it has a serious drawback: it strips them of their minority status. They are not one group; rather they are many tiny groups. So why should we bother to address their needs if they are so scattered?

On the other hand, the term «Swiss Muslims» or «European Muslims» addresses this issue on a different level, regardless whether these Muslims are Swiss citizens or not. It goes to the very core of their responsibilities and rights (and, yes, they do have rights), involving their integration as opposed to their assimilation. Furthermore, it touches on the fear (let's not call it hysteria) that the 11 September terrorist attacks unleashed. That fear was reflected in the legal question posed by Mr. Erwin Tanner in his presentation «Aktuelle Rechtsfragen in Zusammenhang mit dem Islam in der Schweiz»: Can or should Islam be allowed to establish itself in a secular and democratic state as Switzerland? In other words, Mr. Tanner was asking if Islam is compatible with secular and democratic values? The problem with this question, as any person with some knowledge of the Isla-

mic world will know, is that it deals with Islam as a single unit, as one religion with one interpretation; which is hardly the case.

But the question, if modified, is still legitimate: Can Swiss Muslims live in a secular and democratic state? It is legitimate because the Muslims living in this country have a responsibility to adapt and accept the laws and democratic values which govern the society. They cannot choose to live in a society while shunning its values – women rights are part of these values by the way (a theme that was amazingly NOT discussed during the workshop «Gleichstellung der Geschlechter»).

By the same token, as Swiss Muslims adapt to their new home, their Swiss counterparts also share a responsibility: to accept them as they are. And, using the words of Tariq Ramadan in an article published in the Time magazine in December 2001: «They need to accept that Europe's population has changed, that it no longer has a single history and that the future calls for mutual understandings and respect.»

Now if this materializes in reality, there will be no need to ask our question again.

**Elham Manea-Knecht**

The second day of the colloquium, Saturday 25 May, was very well attended until the final discussion. The papers and discussions were focussed on – Living between different cultures – Future Perspectives. In the afternoon conclusions of the colloquium were presented from the viewpoint of – Scientific research – the Federal Administration – interested parties.

Matteo Gianni (Département de Science politique de l'Université de Genève) explained the new kind of multiculturalism that the Swiss multicultural society faces. This new multiculturalism is reflected in the presence of the foreigners in Switzerland who have different religious and cultural backgrounds. The political system as well as governmental institutions face a challenge from the conflict between freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. Some religious

groups tend to distinguish themselves from the society and seek to be acknowledged as a whole group, whereas the Swiss political system is only prepared to integrate individuals, not groups. Apparently, the Federal institutions and the democratic system in Switzerland, which have so far coped with traditional Swiss multiculturalism quite well, are not adequately adapted to this new type of multiculturalism.

Mondher Kilani (Professeur d'anthropologie culturelle et sociale à l'Université de Lausanne) discussed the relationship between Islam and the West in the light of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Kilani drew a complex picture of the term «Islam» (political, ethnic, economic, historical level) and called for an open and critical universalism that opposes authoritarian and extreme tendencies on both sides: in the Muslim as well as the western world. Stéphane Lathion (Enseignant à Genève et collaborateur au CERMAM) compared the legal situation of Muslims living in Switzerland with the situation of Muslims living in France, Germany and Belgium.

This panel was open to young people professing Islam who discussed the situation and the future for young Muslims in Switzerland. Saïda Keller-Messahli chaired the panel and guided the discussion asking the participants the following questions: What does faith mean to you? (Related to one member of the panel: Why did you convert to Islam?) – How would you define cultural integration? – As a Muslim you are not allowed to change your religious faith. How does this affect your attitude to life? – How do you experience the restrictions of Islam in an open society like the Swiss one? – How do you see your future as a Muslim in Switzerland? – The young people's replies and comments were remarkable for their frankness and independence.

Richard Friedli (Département für Gesellschaftswissenschaft der Universität Freiburg i. Ü.) outlined the different areas of research that still have to be undertaken in the field of Muslims in Switzerland. Further he pointed out that scholarly research has to accept its social responsabi-

lity towards a multicultural society in search of a consensus in values and norms. The new generation of researchers could serve as cultural go-betweens. Michele Galizia (Leiter des Sekretariats der Eidg. Kommission gegen Rassismus) represented the point of view of the Swiss Federal Administration who counted 310 000 Muslims living in Switzerland. The recent vote about ritual slaughter set off a heated debate between animal rights activists and Jewish and Muslim communities claiming their right to practise their religion freely.

Apparently, the Swiss Federal institutions have sought a dialogue with the religious communities concerned. Abdelhak Elghezouani (psychologue à l'Association «Appartenances» à Lausanne) pointed out that there are different generations of Muslims living in Switzerland. He is convinced that the 2nd generation of Muslims who was born in Switzerland will develop a different attitude to Islam than their parents. Young Muslims are not discussing their religious background in their parents' language, but in German, French or Italian. This generation may break up the geo-political differences among Muslims (Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Persians, Indians etc.) and arrive at a European version of Islam.

Daniela Meier

## WWW

Aktuelle Informationen finden Sie auch auf unserer Homepage:

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Besuchen Sie uns und helfen Sie mit Ihren Vorschlägen, diese Website aktuell zu gestalten.

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## Agenda

21./22. Oktober in Bern/ 23. Oktober in Zürich/ 24. Oktober St. Gallen:

Einfältig – dreifältig – vielfältig. Identitätspolitik in Israel. Veranstaltungsreihe des Christlichen Friedensdienstes cfd und kirchlichen Stellen (Detailprogramm beim cfd: Tel. 031 / 300 50 60, [info@cfd-ch.org](mailto:info@cfd-ch.org), [www.cfd-ch.org](http://www.cfd-ch.org))

### 1 novembre 2002:

Mercan Dede, Groove alla Turca, Ateliers d'Ethnomusicologie, l'Usine, Place des Volontaires, Genève, 21h30 (Réservations: Tél. 022 919 04 90)

### 6. November / 6 novembre 2002:

Beginn des Ramadan /début du ramadan

### 8. November / 13. Dezember / 10. Januar:

Mahnwachen für einen gerechten Frieden in Israel/Palästina, 12.30 bis 13 Uhr, Heiliggeist-Kirche Bern, Paradeplatz Zürich.

### 15 novembre 2002

Burhan Öçal (Turquie), dans le cadre de Répercussions – Festival interculturel de percussions, Genève, Bâtiment des Forces Motrices, 20 h (Rés: Tél. 022 919 04 90)

### 16 novembre 2002

Trio Chemirani (Iran), Genève, Bâtiment des Forces Motrices, 20h

### 29./30. November 2002

«Palästina/Israel». Seminar, organisiert von GsoA, Neuer PdA, Nord-Süd-Koordination (Infos Tel. 061 / 373 92 59, [basel@gsoa.ch](mailto:basel@gsoa.ch))

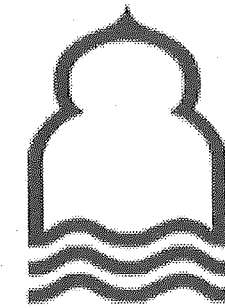
# Centre d'Etudes et de Recherche sur le Monde Arabe et Méditerranéen

Le CERMAM, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherche sur le Monde Arabe et Méditerranéen, est une association dirigée par un comité de direction. Ce dernier est composé de personnalités venant des milieux universitaire, politique et économique. Les membres forment l'Assemblée générale, qui décide collégalement de son avenir. Mme Victoria Curzon-Price, Professeur à l'Université de Genève est la présidente du CERMAM.

Le bassin méditerranéen est le point de rencontre de trois continents, où trois religions cohabitent et où de multiples civilisations se font face. C'est donc un lieu de frictions entre différentes réalités et imaginaires, un lieu de luttes d'influences et une région stratégique de la planète, notamment pour ses ressources énergétiques. Les enjeux présents dans l'espace méditerranéen sont nombreux, avec des conséquences directes sur la Suisse. Celle-ci ne peut pas rester en marge du processus lancé par l'Union européenne qui vise à former une zone de libre échange euro-méditerranéen d'ici à 2010.

Le CERMAM entend jouer un rôle de catalyseur et de promoteur en matière d'études et de recherche concernant l'espace euro-méditerranéen en réunissant diverses personnes, chercheurs intéressés par l'étude de cet espace afin d'établir des liens privilégiés entre le monde académique, les autorités politiques et le monde associatif actif sur le terrain.

Par son activité locale ainsi que par ses collaborations avec des centres similaires en Europe comme en Méditerranée, le CERMAM souhaite ainsi offrir un espace d'échange et de réflexion susceptible d'atténuer les malentendus et d'améliorer une connaissance réciproque respectueuse des différences. Le CERMAM désire mettre en place



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des unités de recherche qui auront pour mission principale la réalisation d'analyses, d'études et de propositions sur le monde arabe et méditerranéen dans les domaines économiques, politiques, juridiques, sociaux et écologiques. Sous la direction de Monsieur Hasni Abidi, les questions des droits de l'homme dans le monde arabe, la crise en Algérie, la question de l'eau au Proche-Orient, le processus de paix au Proche-Orient, le dialogue des civilisations sont des thèmes importants qui ont déjà été abordés à travers des

colloques et rencontres organisés en collaboration avec l'UNESCO, l'ISESCO, l'Institut européen de Genève, la Fondation Belle Rive ou encore le Centre d'Etudes Euro-Arabe. Un projet en collaboration avec d'autres Instituts universitaires est en cours autour de la problématique des processus de démocratisation dans le Maghreb qui fera l'objet (entre 2002-2003) d'une série de colloques et séminaires.

Depuis l'été 2002, un projet intitulé « Islam : réalités suisse et européenne » a été initié grâce à l'impulsion de Monsieur Stéphane Lathion (auteur de « De Cordoue à Vaulx-en-Velin, les musulmans en Europe et les défis de la coexistence », Georg, 1999 et « Musulmans d'Europe : entre références et contexte, l'émergence d'une identité islamique européenne », L'Harmattan, à paraître automne 2002). Ce projet aura pour objectif, en collaboration avec des chercheurs de l'Université de Genève et de Fribourg notamment, d'analyser la situation des musulmans en Suisse et en Europe.

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