

# COOPERATION WITH RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AS A EUROPEAN POLICY TOOL

Warsaw, 12 November 2018

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The workshop brought together 20 experts on religious affairs, migration and European as well as Middle East policy from Europe and the Middle East. One of the papers presented (Chapter 2. “The role of Muslim religious institutions in migration and integration policies: the German case study” by Yasemin El-Menouar) was already a complete chapter introduced in the workshop as a PP presentation. Two of the papers were less advanced, yet already based on substantial research (Chapter 1. “Points of tangency between state and religious institutions in European policy formulation” by Patrycja Sasnal and Chapter 4. “Religious institutions in the Maghreb: popularity, outreach and political roles” by Sergio Altuna) – one of them was also introduced in a PP presentation. The fourth paper is still in an initial phase of research (Chapter 3.



“Cooperation between Al-Azhar and the Vatican in preventing violent extremism: opportunities and limits?” by Georges Fahmi).

The workshop participants came to the conclusion that chapter 1 was going in the right direction and with certain alterations it can successfully show a map of formalization models of cooperation between the state and religious institutions in Europe. Chapter 2 will benefit from expanding and making policy recommendations more concrete. From the way chapter 3 was presented it would be gathered that it may need either clearer focus on cooperation in “preventing violent extremism” or a slight change of title. Chapter 4 needs narrowing down: a focus on Algeria and Morocco was most commonly suggested.

## DETAILS OF THE FOUR SESSIONS

**Points of tangency between state and religious institutions in European policy formulation** by Patrycja Sasnal

### *Initial findings of the author*

The author is looking to group EU member states into three or four categories depending on the kind of the “point of tangency” between state and religion. Based on the research already undertaken she has found that (1) unlike in Muslim countries, in EU Member states there is no ministry responsible for issues pertaining to religion, save countries with state religions (Denmark, United Kingdom). “Points of tangency” between state and religious institutions in policy formulation are dispersed in different places in the European governments: From the MFA and the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Culture. There is a logical differentiation between posts for international contact with religions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the post for contact with domestic religious actors at the Ministry of Interior. (2) State institutions responsible for religious freedom are qualitatively different from units responsible for cooperation with religious institutions in

advancing policy goals. It is not uncommon for EU Member States to locate the office covering religious freedom at the Ministry of Justice (i.e. Spain). (3) Fragmentation of the Muslim communities is problematic but may be of value in certain policy domains – to be determined in which in further research. (4) An aspect that problematizes cooperation with religious institutions in Europe is their linkage to third countries, outside of the EU, that may have different systems (undemocratic) or their policies are not in line with EU Member States and EU policies. (5) Establishing an office of the national advisor on religious affairs facilitates contact with religious institutions both domestically and abroad creates an institution for direct contact with religious actors that is often lacking in secular systems. The advisor serves as a natural counterpart to ministries of religious endowments in Muslim countries. The very fact of having a high level official responsible for religious affairs can generate trust in Muslim communities, well acquainted with such functions. It is however important that the adviser does not limit the office's operation to Islam, which may be a primary temptation given the communities fragmentation. The adviser should closely cooperate with other religions to avoid a clear focus on Islam.

#### *Feedback from other researchers and stakeholders*

The reviewer of the Joint Policy Study encouraged the author to be more ambitious and not only map the points of tangency but also assess their effectivity. Only then should conclusions be drawn. There was also a suggestion that a table with data of the countries compared could be valuable and included in the chapter. Another participant pointed out that points of tangency also have a negative aspect – they are used to control and surveil. He found it problematic that individuals are considered “institutions” but agreed that if such categorization is confined to influential religious leaders then it is relevant for the paper.

Two participants found it problematic that the non-institutionalized part of the interaction between the state and religion is missing from the research, while often policies are conducted in this non-official realm. It is the specificity of Islam in particular that creating an organization, formalizing one's existence

discredits it. In many countries the Muslim organizational scene is very diverse (representatives of the Catholic church pointed to the same in their denomination). There often is a domestic conflict between the indigenous Muslim population and the migrants. That complexity should be taken into account in the paper. Another participant noted that Belgium, with its particular institutional setting should be one of the countries analysed.

**The role of Muslim religious institutions in migration and integration policies: the German case study by Yasemin El-Menouar**

*Initial findings of the author*

The author found that policy on refugees and integration that focuses on individuals must also address their culture, religion and ideology. Cooperation with religious communities at eye level can make a decisive contribution to the successful arrival and integration of refugees. The example of Germany shows that successful refugee policy in cooperation with Muslim institutions is possible but there are several difficulties that may arise. Many of these difficulties in Germany are unique and have grown historically. Behind this, however, it becomes apparent that cooperation with religious organisations in general has some specific features. Islam political discourses exert considerable pressure on Muslim associations and communities in Germany to justify themselves. This puts a heavy strain on their already limited capacities and considerably slows down the development of structures. Sustainable structures are, however, the prerequisite for the self-positioning of Muslim institutions in civil society, for the professionalisation of their services, but also for their ability to deal with and cope with crises on their own.

For this reason, more religious literacy is needed in politics as well as more culturally sensitive cooperation with Islamic representatives. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ) implemented a strategy “Religions as partners in development cooperation” in 2016 and applies it in various projects. A major focus is the integration of diaspora communities in Germany. There are studies available on a number of

religious and secular diaspora communities and their respective potentials, e.g. on Moroccan, Tunisian, Senegalese and Egyptian and Afghan migrant organisations in Germany. Furthermore, Islamic institutions in EU countries can build bridges to the countries of origin, especially from a transnational perspective. At this level, religion can act as social capital, building trust and networks. In this respect, cooperation with Muslim organisations also offers significant potential for EU migration and integration policy. Eventually, for the realisation of this potential at EU level, the author makes several policy recommendations.

#### *Feedback from other researchers and stakeholders*

The participants found this chapter very interesting, well developed and based on original research. The reviewer of the JPS thought that there was greater focus needed on the changes in German attitudes since the migration crisis in 2015. Also, the chapter could benefit from changing the order of the chapters. One major problem of the chapter, the participants found, was a lack of recommendations that could be adaptable in other EU countries – for the time being they are general and hard to replicate outside of Germany. One participant noted that a geographical map of the origin of Muslims in Germany would be useful for the study to know the basics.

#### **Cooperation between Al-Azhar and the Vatican in preventing violent extremism: opportunities and limits?** by Georges Fahmi

##### *Initial findings of the author*

The author presented the methodology (content analysis and semi-structured interviews) and basic contents of his findings and questions. He pictured the history of Vatican-Al-Azhar relations and noted that they were interrupted by Benedict XVI's speech in Regensburg. Since Pope Francis took over and in Egypt Ahmad at-Tayyeb became the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar they got back on track. The author mentioned two main reasons for this improvement: the rise of ISIS and the personalities of Pope Francis and Ahmad at-Tayyeb. He also spoke of high level meetings between the two and their staff, asking his main research

question if the improvement in relations was a permanent phenomenon or rather a transient one. He acknowledged that in his research he would also want to look for the politics behind the cooperation between the Vatican and Al-Azhar.

#### *Feedback from other researchers and stakeholders*

In the comment section some advised to zoom out in the analysis and look for political motives of the two sides for cooperation. It was suggested that part of the rationale for the increased cooperation may be a broader Catholic agenda to unite the two branches of Copts in Egypt. Another theory had it that the Vatican is trying to broaden cooperation with the Orthodox church to increase its leverage in the Middle East. The Orthodox church will have greater room for maneuver with Russian increased influence so it may be beneficial for the Vatican to use its collaboration with the Orthodox. One participant concluded that the research failed to mention the Common Word Letter Between Us and You: a letter from Muslim to Christian leaders about common values – an important backbone for the Vatican - Al-Azhar cooperation. The reviewer thought that the Egyptian side (on Al-Azhar) of the topic should be expanded. Also, it was said that Al-Azhar was losing its influence in the Arab world hence the dialogue with the Vatican has lesser significance. But those views were contested by other participants. Overall it was noted that the title of the chapter suggested cooperation in fighting extremism but there was very little about it in the presentation – therefore, either amending the title or adjusting the contents of the paper would be in order.

#### **Religious institutions in the Maghreb: popularity, outreach and political roles by Sergio Altuna Galan**

##### *Initial findings of the author*

The author based his initial findings on a preliminary research. He found that Islamic revivalism in the Maghreb fostered the individualization of religion since the 1990s, which contributed to the de-legitimization of traditional religious

institutions. Prior to 2011 they used to serve as a moral backing in the political regimes' fight against Islamism. Diversification within the religious sphere has increasingly challenged the authority of official religious voices and sets the stage for a new faith-based market that eludes the control of traditional and official religious authorities.

According to the author, three main factors are determining the evolution of relations between religion and politics in the Maghreb today: social change and the pluralization of religiosities; the transformation of the Islamist landscape; and geopolitical dynamics unfolding in the region since September 11. Since the religious sphere exhibits great diversity of ideas, actors and organizations, the regimes' efforts to enforce strict and monolithic policies through official institutions are unlikely to succeed from now on. Such authoritarian attempts will most probably foster the creation of an informal and uncontrolled religious sphere, thereby opening the floor for radical ideologies to expand. This is a trend that can already be noticed.

#### *Feedback from other researchers and stakeholders*

The reviewer advised that the scope of the research be reduced – instead of working on the four countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya) it was suggested to limit the research to the two: Morocco and Algeria. The Algerian part of the research should also be expanded beyond the zawiya of Sufi orders. Morocco was found to be of particular interest because it has rich experience and traditions in bureaucracy of Islam. One participant advised the author to show Moroccan institutions on a map and focus on three of them in particular: the ministry of religious endowments, the religious council and the High Committee of Religion. The rest – it was said – were either unorganized Sufis or umbrella organisations. A Moroccan scholar suggested focusing very narrowly on these institutions: looking into their work and structure, meeting with their representatives and conducting interviews. Another voice suggested looking at the Maghreb as a particularly important region for the whole Muslim world in terms of religious following – many of the most popular Muslim leaders today are of Maghrebi origin. Foreign influence from the Gulf is at times at play there.



The literature in the paper was found to be insufficient as well as the causal connection between the main content of the paper and the conclusions. Among general conclusions was one about the Internet decreasing the influence of the state - people can find a leader on the internet and follow his teachings without being aware of who the mufti or the minister of religion of their country is. Thanks to the internet dead and forgotten leaders come alive and their ideas find followers in surprising corners of the world.



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