

Contribution of the Official Islamic Community in Austria to the
OSCE Tolerance Implementation Meeting- Almaty 12-13 June, 2006
by DI. Mouddar KHOUJA

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, esteemed distinguished participants of this conference, let me first of all thank the Republic of Kazakhstan for its great hospitality. I think it is very important to inform you of the successful Austrian model in dealing with religious minorities and especially with Muslims.

Regarding this morning's statement by Ambassador Strohal concerning tolerance versus respect and appreciation I would like to put my statement into the context of this scale: From tolerance to acceptance (acknowledgment) and further to respect and appreciation:

For the treatment of minorities, I can say we in Austria are not talking about tolerance or about acceptance (acknowledgment) anymore, because Islam is acknowledged and recognised since 1912. We are moving to respect and appreciation. Through the acknowledgment of the official Islamic Community in Austria as a part of the public law we have the possibility to define what is inside and what is outside of Islam. We also have the possibility to discuss issues with Austrian official institutions on an equal footing. Both are very crucial.

Let me give you some information about the announced conference of Imams and spiritual advisors in Europe: This conference has taken place in April 2006 as a follow-up of the first conference of 2003 under the support and sponsorship of the Austrian Government, especially the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. In the opening ceremony, Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel, who is also currently the President of the European Council has held a statement supporting this conference. For the European Union, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner delivered a message of greeting and Foreign Minister Plassnik spoke for the hosts.

The aim of these conferences was to define the relationship between Muslim minorities and/or majorities and their countries.

230 Imams and spiritual Advisor "men and woman" came to the 2006 Conference, to discuss and acknowledge the following issues:

- Rule of Law
- Democracy
- Human Rights
- Pluralism
- Rejection of violence and terror
- Positioning Muslims in European countries as an active part of European societies

Furthermore, as mentioned by Prof. Ibrahim Kalin before, integration was defined as participation in society, politics, science and economics and as very important in the media. Issues like education, politics, gender Issues, youth and ecology were discussed and reflected in the final declaration. Please find at your disposal the declarations of both Imam conferences of 2003 and 2006.

Recommendations:

- a honest dialogue on equal footing has to be undertaken and supported
- this dialogue should take place between:
 - o Religions themselves
 - o Religious representatives with Governmental officials
 - o Religious representatives with the civil society
 - o Religious representatives with the media
- The treatment of Muslims should not be a matter of security politics, but a matter of integration politics with all aspects of participative integration (society, politics, science, economics and media)

Let me close with my thanks and appreciation to Mr. Haraszti who read out the following sentences of the declaration of the Conference of European Imams and spiritual Advisors:

“The freedom of press and expression is an essential right and a common property. It does not stand in contradiction with religious freedom because both are tightly connected”

I would like to read out the following sentence of the declaration which is also very essential- and crucial:

“Freedom of expression should be practiced with responsibility and consideration of mutual respect”.

Thank you.