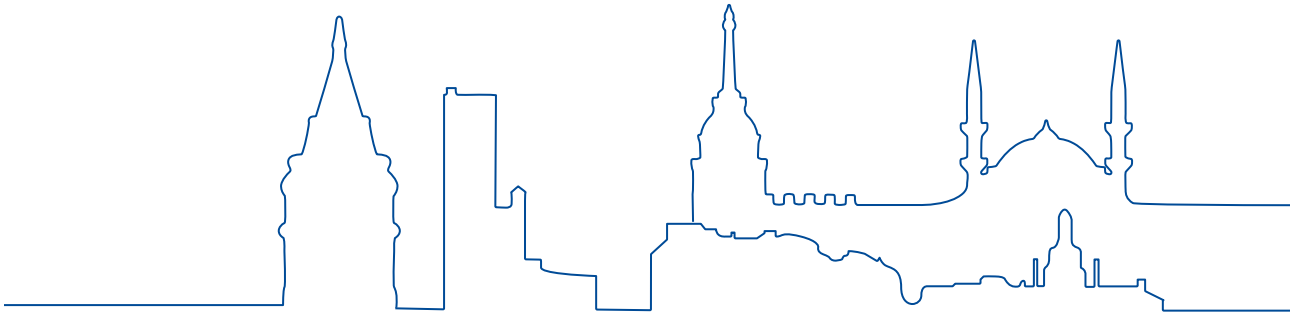


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THE FUTURE OF THE GERMAN ISLAM CONFERENCE: BETWEEN SECURITY AND PARTNERSHIP

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The German Islam Conference (*Deutsche Islam Konferenz*, DIK), established in 2006, represents a historical paradigm shift in the relationship between the German state and its Muslim population. Initiated by former Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, the DIK is the first systematic effort to institutionalize relations between the German state and Muslim actors, signaling official recognition of Islam as a permanent reality in German society.

By stressing that "only those who sit down with us at the same table can be involved in shaping the future," Cornelia Pieper, who served as Minister of State in the German Foreign Office, framed the DIK as both a forum for inclusion and a mechanism through which the state could structure its relationship with Muslim actors.[1]

For the past two decades, the German Federal Government has sought to promote an Islam firmly rooted in Germany: An Islam of German Muslims, shaped in, from, and for Germany.[2] However, today, the DIK's legitimacy is being questioned, and its future remains contested.

While some Muslim actors see the DIK as a necessary catalyst for institutionalization, others view it as a flawed instrument of state control and security policy. A recurring critique among Muslim leaders is that the conference has been shaped primarily through a security perspective.

In my interview with Kemal Ergun, president of the Islamic Community Milli Gorus (IGMG), he argued that the initiative was "buttoned wrong from the start" because it was placed under the mandate of the Interior Ministry, framing Islam primarily through a security lens. In another interview with the author, this perspective was echoed by Zekeriya Altug of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB), who described the early phase of DIK as being dominated by "security and suspicion," where the German state sought to reform Muslim organizations rather than engage in true partnership. It should be noted that, during its third phase (2014–2017), the German Islam Conference shifted its focus away from security concerns and instead prioritized Muslim welfare and Islamic pastoral care.

Other critics argue that the integration of Muslims into German society is more effectively advanced through secular measures such as language acquisition, education, and access to employment, rather than through what they describe as the "state pro-

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motion of Islam." In their view, the growing influence of political Islam poses a threat to freedom and security in Germany. One such critic, the Giordano Bruno Foundation, a German think tank, has called for the German Islam Conference to be dissolved, with its allocated budget redirected toward mainstream integration policies.[3]

Despite these critical views, however, the conference continues to be one of the only platforms inside Germany that encourages direct communication between the German state and Muslim communities. The DIK has helped dissolve political prejudices through organizing face-to-face meetings between German politicians and Muslim representatives. For many organizations, the DIK has provided political prestige, offering them a seat at the same table as top-level politicians (*Spitzenpolitik*) for the first time. The significance of these institutionalized encounters should not be underestimated as they mark an important step in the symbolic and practical recognition of Muslim actors within Germany's political sphere.

Looking ahead, the DIK can remain sustainable only if it avoids becoming a platform that dictates what Muslims ought to do. Its longevity will depend on continuing dialogue with Muslims in Germany without placing security concerns at the center of that engagement. While secular concerns about political Islam, constitutional loyalty, and gender equality cannot be dismissed in a liberal democracy, neither can the persistent sense of exclusion and conditional belonging felt by parts of Germany's Muslim community. The organization's future will depend on its ability to navigate a delicate balance.

For the DIK's work to be productive, it must create a framework in which security considerations do not overshadow dialogue and Muslims are addressed as equal stakeholders in shaping Germany's social and political future, not merely as objects of integration policy.

In this sense, the conference's sustainability lies in its capacity to function as a genuine partnership platform: One that acknowledges secular concerns without instrumentalizing them and that simultaneously recognizes Muslims' claims to belonging as intrinsic to Germany's evolving national identity rather than as concessions granted by the state.

Notes

1 Federal Foreign Office, "Start of the German Islam Conference," Press Release, May 17, 2010, https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/100517-islamkonferenz-234554.

2 Deutsche Islam Konferenz, "Objectives," July 1, 2020, https://www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de/EN/DIK/Ziele/ziele_node.html.

3 The Giordano Bruno Stiftung, "The German Islam Conference Should be Dissolved!" January 31, 2025, https://www.giordano-bruno-stiftung.de/en/news/german-islam-conference-should-be-dissolved.